

Contents (click on heading to view text)

- Afflicted Views
 1. *View of the transitory collection*
 2. *View holding to an extreme*
 3. *Holding wrong views as supreme*
 4. *Holding bad ethics and modes of conduct as supreme*
 - Rituals – a tool to train the mind
 5. *Wrong views*
 - Belief in God
 - Is there a beginning?
 - Are we reborn to learn lessons?
 - Karma is not a system of reward and punishment
 - Existence of the mind
 - Discriminating between conventionally existing self and ultimately existing self
 - Mind as an emergent property of the brain
 - The extremely subtle mind
 - *Is this extremely subtle mind and energy equivalent to the concept of a soul?*
- Other issues (in response to audience questions and comments)
 - *Responding to physical pain during meditation – how not to get worked up*
 - *Dealing with emotional pain*
 - *Addiction - how much of it is physical craving and how much is mental craving?*
 - *The danger of reaction and conception in our emotional experience*
 - *The importance of thought training*

Afflicted Views [*'afflicted' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'deluded'*]

1. View of the transitory collection

We have been talking about the afflicted[^] views. We talked about the view of the transitory collection or jigta. I just want to review this a little bit. The view of the transitory collection looks at the aggregates and conceives an inherently existing 'I' in there. There is an intellectual form of it and an innate form of it.

The innate form is what every living being has, regardless of philosophy or whatever. It is just the basic underlying energy that keeps us grasping at ourselves as concrete personalities. We don't learn it from anywhere. We just carry it with us since beginningless time because we have never realized that we are hallucinating.

Because we don't realize we are hallucinating, we develop all sorts of philosophies to justify this innate feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. All these philosophies that we develop, they are the intellectual forms of it. So we develop philosophies that say, "Yes, there is a permanent soul. It flies up in the sky and goes into the next body." We develop all sorts of philosophies to justify that there is some essence to each individual as a human being. So you get the Christian concept of soul with the philosophy and theology that supports it, or the Hindu concept of *atman* and the philosophy and theology that supports it. The view of the transitory collection (also called view of the perishable aggregates) that exists in our mind due to studying and believing in incorrect philosophies, theologies, or psychological notions is what is called the acquired or intellectual form of this wrong view of the transitory collection.

When we realize emptiness, we use it to cleanse away both the intellectual or the learned form, and also the innate form. That is also why it is very important to develop this discriminating intelligence so that we do not start believing in wrong philosophies when we hear them. It is really easy to start believing in wrong philosophies.

My teacher in Dharamsala said if you had a Samkya (this is one ancient Indian school that the Tibetans have been refuting for centuries) come here and they presented their argument, you would probably believe them. [laughter] So he was saying that it is important to learn the teachings on emptiness and learn how to analyze things. Then when we hear a philosophy (and we hear it all the time, all you do is

pick up a magazine and it is teaching us some kind of philosophy), we have some discriminating wisdom to be able to tell what exists and what doesn't exist.

2. View holding to an extreme

And then, we talked about the view holding to an extreme. Having grasped at an inherently existent *I* and *mine*, we think that such an *I* is eternal and unchanging and goes from life to life. It is like a conveyor belt, an unchanging entity that goes from life to life.

Or we go to the other extreme and think that when we die, there is absolutely no self at all; it completely disintegrates. This is the kind of view that many people who commit suicide have. They think, "When I die, I cease to exist." This is the nihilistic view: grasping at an extreme view, thinking that, "If I kill myself, then all my problems end. Then there is nothing. There is no self. There are no problems. There is zero." This is the kind of wrong philosophical view that can lead people to kill themselves. It is really a tragedy because the problems don't stop when they kill themselves. The *I* doesn't go out of existence just because the body deteriorates.

3. Holding wrong views as supreme

Then there is the wrong view holding the previous two views and bad ethics and bad conduct as correct. The wrong view that holds all the other (wrong) views as the best views to believe in. We have all these wrong views but we think that they are really right on, smart and wise, and we are definitely going to hold on to them.

This is as far as we got last time.

4. Holding bad ethics and modes of conduct as supreme

The fourth of the afflicted[^] views is called holding bad ethics and (wrong) modes of conduct as supreme. This is an afflicted[^] intelligence that believes that the purification of mental defilements is possible by means of ascetic practice and inferior codes of ethics that are inspired by mistaken views. There are two parts: (1) holding the bad ethics and (2) holding the wrong modes of conduct as the right ones that lead to liberation.

This point is usually explained in terms of distinguishing Buddhism from Hinduism because this is the cultural environment which Buddhism was in at that time. Wrong ethics include practices like animal sacrifice, which still goes on today. People in other religions do animal sacrifice too, so it is not just a Hindu practice. In Nepal about this time of the year, they slaughter hundreds and thousands of sheep and goats as an offering to the deities. It is really quite horrific. But many people believe that by sacrificing another living being, you please the gods and in that way you create good karma and you prevent catastrophe. This is an example of believing wrong ethical systems as the best ones, because killing animals is non-virtuous but one believes that it is virtuous. This is mistakenly believing that wrong ethical practices are the path to liberation.

Here is an example in the West, of holding bad ethics as supreme. There was one article in a recent issue of the Tricycle. This man was commenting on the issue of teachers having sexual relationship with their students. He was saying that the guru's function is to tear down all the students' trips and barriers. He said there just shouldn't be any barriers and if the teacher does that by sleeping with their students, it is okay. This is a very good example of holding wrong ethics as supreme. That is not the Dharma teacher's function. If somebody has sexual hang-ups, they work their sexual hang-ups out in the course of psychotherapy and in the course of whoever it is that they are having sexual relationships with. But that is not the Dharma teacher's responsibility. [Laughter] But this is printed in an American Buddhist magazine. So, people believe all sorts of things!

There is another story illustrating this kind of afflicted[^] view. One time before when the Buddha was still practicing on the path, he was following the instructions of one teacher who has many disciples. One day, the guru told his disciples to go out and steal things from the villagers to bring back to him as offerings. All the other students thought, "Well, ...we have great devotion in our teacher. Our teacher told us to steal, so stealing must be virtuous." So they all dutifully trotted out to steal from the villagers, except the Buddha who went to his teacher and said, "I can't do what you say because it is non-virtuous." And the teacher said, "Oh, at least one disciple got the point of the teaching". [Laughter] Just because the teacher says to go and steal, it does not make it virtuous. You do hear incredible stories of Naropa and Tilopa, but that is talking about a whole different category of disciples than ordinary beings.

They can do things that are far beyond our capability because they aren't even seeing things like we are.

So those are two examples of bad ethics.

In terms of holding wrong conduct as supreme, that would be saying things like bathing in the Ganges purifies your negative karma. Again, the examples are usually in terms of Hinduism. I will get into some of our home grown American ones in a minute. [Laughter] The examples you find in the text are like bathing in the Ganges purifies your karma, or self mortification eliminates afflictions [['afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'delusions'](#)]. Even today, if you go to Rishikesh in India, you will find these yogis who have not sat down for years, or who have been standing on one foot year after year, or who have chained themselves to a tree and sit there year after year. People engage in all sorts of ascetic practices thinking that these purify the mind.

We have our Western equivalent of that. If you want to read a good book, it is called 'Through The Narrow Gate'. It is about a woman who became a Catholic nun. This was before Vatican II, and she was describing the process of beating herself. In the monasteries, they used to beat themselves with a small hair whip of some sort. That was seen as a way of taming the mind, of becoming humble, of taming the flesh because the flesh was evil. Or wearing these shirts full of nettles – they are incredibly uncomfortable. Now the Vatican doesn't allow it. But it was only in 1965 that they stopped these kinds of things.

The Buddha did this kind of practice for a while before he attained enlightenment. He stopped it because he saw that it wasn't getting him anywhere except he lost a lot of weight and became very weak.

We also have our own version of it in the West. For example, the born again vegetarians. It is like the way to liberation is just becoming totally fanatic about not eating anything that has chemicals. Everything has to be organic and no this and no that thing are allowed. Just this really fundamentalist attitude, as if totally purifying the body of impurities would make the mind pure. Granted that being a vegetarian is great, but when we become fundamentalist about something or when we think that something is the path to liberation when it is only an adjunct to our healthy body, then we're getting confused. It may be a good practice, but thinking that it brings liberation is a mistaken view.

Another example of wrong conduct is meditation machines. You will find them in New Age shops. When I was on tour a few years ago, I went to one of these New Age shops to give a talk. I walked in and there were many people in a kind of lounge chairs, with their high heels off, ties loosened. I don't know how much money they had to pay for this. They wore a kind of cap and goggles and it was supposed to do something to their brain waves. You hear all these different beeps that are supposed to realign the brain waves. The goggles are flashing lights that are supposed to realign your brain waves. They are supposed to put you into a meditation state. So all you do is hook yourself up to the machine and that leads you to meditation. This is an example of holding wrong conduct as supreme, thinking that to do meditation, all you have to do is hook yourself up to a machine and that will put you in a meditative state. I tried it because they wanted me to. I don't know what it did to the other people, but it didn't do anything at all except make me want to take it off because it was very uncomfortable. [laughter]

There are lots of things like this, not just meditation machines. I went into another office in another city, and there you sit down on one of these things and they play this music and show shapes on the wall, and the shapes grow smaller and bigger, and that's supposed to help you to meditate. [Laughter] All it does is to reduce the size of your pocket book!

Another comparable idea in the West would be the idea of curing afflictions~ by taking a pill. The idea of, 'I am in a bad mood, so I take a pill.' This is holding a wrong mode of conduct as the path to liberation. When you get too much into this reductionist view of the mind, seeing the brain as the mind, then it is very easy to start to think that the way to stop afflictive [['afflictive' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing'](#)] states of mind is just simply to change the brain chemistry. I think that drugs can be very useful when there is a malfunction of the brain chemistry. I am not denying that. But the view that thinks that that's the way to solve mental problems and that it is the only way to solve it without looking at controlling one's anger and trying to be patient, just thinking that the way to control the anger is by taking a pill, that is an example of holding a wrong conduct as supreme.

Rituals – a tool to train the mind

[In response to audience:] Instead of seeing a ritual as a way of training your mind, you think the ritual in and of itself is the important thing. In other words, thinking that sitting there and going blah blah blah is what creates the merit, not your mind transforming through doing that. Or thinking that doing all the fancy things is what creates the merit regardless of what your mind is doing. That is a wrong view, thinking that the ritual in and of itself is the valuable thing.

The ritual is a tool to train the mind. You hear the Buddha speaking out about this quite a bit in his time, because during the time when he lived, there were all the Brahmins doing all these rituals, and you could only have a Brahmin come and do your ritual because only a Brahmin is qualified, and you make incredible amounts of offerings and it was very much seen that just doing that ritual was the value. And they were incredibly complicated rituals.

Some Buddhists get confused because they see that the Tibetan Buddhists have all these rituals but Buddha spoke out against rituals. Buddha spoke out against seeing a ritual in and of itself as the virtuous thing, as the path. But rituals are definitely a way of training the mind for meditation. In other words, your mind should change by doing the ritual. It is the change in your mind that is the virtue, not the words that you are saying.

5. Wrong views

The fifth of the afflicted^ views is called wrong view. This is another afflicted^ kind of intelligence. You will notice that most of the views are called afflicted^ intelligences, because they are intelligences. They are somehow discriminative but they are afflicted^ and they discriminate in a completely wrong way. You kind of make up your logic and come to the wrong conclusion. Wrong view is an afflicted^ intelligence that denies the existence of something which in fact exists. Or something that doesn't exist, it says it does exist. It is the mind that believes in the exact opposite to what exists or doesn't exist. It functions to act as the basis for obstructing our creation of any kind of virtuous conduct. There are tons of different wrong views and we probably still have many of them very well entrenched in our mind.

Belief in God

One of the chief wrong views is the belief in God. Of course, here it is said in a Hindu context, that Ishvara created the world. A Western version of that is saying God created the world. That is a wrong view. From a Buddhist point of view, you are saying that something exists which doesn't exist. And that is harmful because if you believe that God created the world then you are very likely to negate karma. Or you are very likely to mistake the path of liberation as being you have to please God. God created the world and God sends you to heaven or to hell, so then the path becomes to please God.

We grew up with lots of these wrong views. We have to be very clear that while we call these wrong views, we are not criticizing the people who believe in them. We are not saying that people who believe in God are stupid, that they are wrong, blah blah blah. Lama Yeshe, for example, used to say that it is very good that people believe in God because at least they don't believe in their ego and they might start thinking about compassion and some kind of ethics. Whereas if they didn't believe in God, they would be totally hedonistic.

From a Buddhist point of view, if you say God created the world, it is considered a wrong view because you run into all sorts of logical difficulties. I think this is something that Buddhists need to think about a lot. I have one friend who has been a Buddhist for many years and she said she still has not completely worked out the thing about God because she went to Sunday school for years when she was little and it was really well entrenched. This is why I think a lot of the logical and philosophical teachings are so important because it makes us look at a lot of the concepts we grew up believing. Instead of just believing things because we have been taught that when we were kids, we look at them logically and say, "Is this logically possible? I am an adult now and I can decide clearly what exists and what doesn't exist. I am going to think about it, instead of just believing things."

The difficulty, for example, with believing in God is that if God created the universe, what created God? If you say nothing created God, then that means God was causeless. If God is without a cause, then God must be permanent, because anything that has no cause is a permanent phenomenon. Anything that is a permanent phenomenon, can't change. So if God can't change, how can God create something? Whenever you create, you are involved in change.

Is there a beginning?

[In response to audience:] Buddhism doesn't talk about a beginning. There is a great story related to this. The Buddha was incredibly practical. He said, "If you get shot by an arrow and before you take the arrow out, you want to know who made the arrow, what it is made out of, who shot it, what his name was, what his family background was; you need to know all these before you take the arrow out, you are going to die. Instead, when you have an arrow stuck in your body, you take care of the present problem and don't worry about the origin so much."

That is why when people asked Buddha about the origin of the universe, he didn't answer those questions. There were some questions Buddha didn't answer, but it is not because he didn't know the answer. It is because the way the question was put, you couldn't answer it. For example, the question: 'What is the origin of the universe?' The assumption underlying that question is that there is an origin. You can't answer it. There is no origin. We get kind of stuck because we say, 'But there *has* to be a beginning!'

Why does there have to be a beginning? You see, this is taking out another childhood view. You look, why does there have to be a beginning? You have a number line, the number line has no beginning, absolutely no beginning. It doesn't have to have a beginning. 'Square root of two' doesn't have an end to it. *Pi* doesn't have an end to it. There are a lot of things that just don't have beginnings and ends.

In terms of our particular universe, we could say that all the material things in this universe depended upon the prior existence of other material things. His Holiness always traces it back to space particles. Before that, all those particles existed in other universes. If you want to talk more Western language, you just trace it back to a big bang, and before the big bang, there was an incredibly dense glob of material. Well, that intense glob of material had a cause. There was something that existed prior to it. So, you just have to keep tracing it back and back and back. This universe might come into existence and go out of existence but there are many universes.

So it is just like this glass can come into existence and go out of existence, but there is a whole lot of other things around it. It is the same thing with our universe – it can come and it can go. But there is a whole lot of other material objects there, and things just continuously get transformed. Thinking that there is a creation, thinking that there is a creator – these are wrong views.

Are we reborn to learn lessons?

Another very popular wrong view in the New Age group is that we were reincarnated to learn lessons. We heard this at the conference, remember? One person who was sexually abused was saying, "Maybe I had to go through this because this was the lesson I had to learn."

From the Buddhist view point, this is a total misunderstanding because Buddhism never talks about having lessons to learn, because if you have lessons to learn, then you believe that there is somebody who made up the lessons, which means that you are believing in some kind of God or somebody who is running a puppet show here. Again, from the Buddhist viewpoint, there is nobody running a puppet show. There is nobody teaching us lessons. Whether we learn from our experiences or not is completely up to us. There is no lesson plan that we have to complete. There is no God we have to please. Nothing like this. Things arise because of causes. That's all. So thinking that there are lessons to learn is a wrong view.

Karma is not a system of reward and punishment

Thinking that karma is a system of reward and punishment is also a wrong view. It isn't reward and punishment. We don't get punished when we do things wrong, because from the Buddhist viewpoint, it is not like you did something wrong. If you create that cause, it brings that result. Doesn't mean that you are a bad person. Doesn't mean you are a wrong, evil, sinful person. It is just if you plant that seed, you get that kind of flower. So seeing karma as a system of reward and punishment is a wrong view.

Existence of the mind

One of the most prominent wrong views nowadays is thinking that the mind doesn't even exist. And this is what you find in scientific circles. You find different kinds of wrong view in scientific circles. There are some scientists who are really reductionist and say the mind doesn't exist. There is only the brain. Then you get another kind of scientists that says the mind is a function of the brain. It is a property, an emergent property of the brain.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, both of these are wrong views. To say that the mind is the brain is to say basically that there is no consciousness, that there is only brain matter. It is confusing conscious experience (which is formless because it perceives things, experiences things) with the physical organ that is necessary as a support system for consciousness in our body. From a Buddhist viewpoint, the physical organ of the brain, the nervous system or the sense organs are part of the physical body. But the conscious experience of pleasure and pain, perception, contact, feeling, recognition and discrimination, these are all conscious experiences that are considered mind or consciousness. They depend on the nervous system and the brain when we are talking about gross levels of consciousness, but they are not the brain.

During one of the meetings with the scientists, there was one scientist who was so reductionist about this. So His Holiness said, "If you had the brain of somebody you love on the table, would you look at that brain and say, 'I love you'?" Because if you say that the brain is the mind, then if you love somebody and the person is the mind and the consciousness, then you should be able to look at the brain and love the brain. But that clearly is not our experience.

Discriminating between conventionally existing self and ultimately existing self

[In response to audience:] What we have to do here is to discriminate between a conventionally existing self and an ultimately existing self. An ultimately existing self is what Buddhism is refuting, because an ultimately existing self would be something that you could find independent of other things, something that is findable upon analysis. That kind of self is what is getting refuted. But Buddhism is not refuting the existence of a conventional self.

The conventional self exists by being merely labeled on the basis of the body and mind. So, from the Buddhist viewpoint, you would need both the body and the mind to appropriately say 'self'. In other words, when somebody is dead, we don't say the person is there. We say the person is gone. That's because the mind isn't there. We need both the body and the mind in some gross or subtle form to be able to label 'self'.

The scientists negate the conventional self. But if we say that there is no (conventional) self, then it seems contradictory that linguistically we talk about self. We talk about people. This is where Lama Tsong Khapa was really astute. He said, "I am not disagreeing with worldly convention and worldly use of language." We are not saying that there is no self whatsoever. Because if we say there is absolutely no self at all, then to say 'I am sitting here' would be an invalid statement. Lama Tsong Khapa said, "No, we aren't negating the 'I' that is sitting there, because we have conventional language and we speak, and that language works, and I *am* sitting here."

What we are negating is that there is something findable in things that is an intrinsic essence that is them. That's what we are negating.

Mind as an emergent property of the brain

One other topic that also comes up continually is this belief that the consciousness is just an emergent property of the brain. This is where the scientists get really fuzzy because they don't have a definition for consciousness or mind. Even those of them who say that it is an emergent property of the brain don't really know how to define it. They say that the consciousness comes out of the brain. When there is no brain, there is no consciousness. And when the brain dies, there is no consciousness. So when death happens, it is zilch. Everything is gone. Again from the Buddhist viewpoint, this is making the consciousness a physical phenomenon.

His Holiness explains that when we talk about gross levels of mind, our gross consciousness depends upon the body as a support. In that sense, when the body becomes weak, you can see the change in the consciousness. For example, when you are very sick, it is difficult to concentrate. When somebody starts to die, they lose the ability to hear, see, smell and taste. The gross consciousness needs the gross body.

But from the Buddhist viewpoint, it is possible that when the gross body dies, the extremely subtle consciousness can continue to exist. Therefore from the Buddhist viewpoint, we would say, "No, consciousness is not an emergent property of the brain because the brain can die but the extremely subtle mind doesn't depend on the brain as the organ for its existence. The extremely subtle mind can

exist in the body even when the brain is dead. An example is Ling Rinpoche who meditated for 13 days after he was brain dead.” Or just a couple of months ago, right before I arrived in Dharamsala, Rato Rinpoche died, and he meditated for eight days before he left his body. There was no breathing, no heart beat and no brain waves, but the consciousness was still meditating.

The extremely subtle mind

[In response to audience]: When they talk about the extremely subtle mind, they say that it is one nature with the extremely subtle energy or extremely subtle wind. This extremely subtle wind is seen as the physical aspect of things, but ‘physical’ in this context does not mean material. This extremely subtle wind is not made out of atoms.

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

...in the death process, when the gross body is losing its energy, then the gross mind dissolves as well. It dissolves, dissolves and dissolves until you get to the extremely subtle mind which is one nature with the extremely subtle energy. But this extremely subtle energy isn’t material that is made out of atoms. You can’t find it with a microscope. It is said to be the energy that the mind rides on.

When one becomes a Buddha, the conscious aspect of the unified entity, that thing that we can’t separate, becomes the Buddha’s mind, and the extremely subtle wind gets transformed into the Buddha’s form body, the sambhogakaya. But they are one nature. They are inseparable. You can’t chop them up. It is like you can’t separate the wood of the table from the table – the table and the wood are one nature. You can’t get rid of the wood and have the table. They are the same nature. It is the same also with this extremely subtle energy and the extremely subtle mind. It is basically like looking at a phenomenon from a conscious viewpoint or from an energy viewpoint, but it is the same thing. As to how do they know that this exists? It is meditators’ experience.

In part of the Highest Yoga Tantric practice, when you work on the completion stage, what you are trying to do is to access the extremely subtle level of consciousness without dying. So, there are meditators who, while they are alive in their body, have such control over the energy and over their mind that they can access that extremely subtle consciousness in their meditation, use it to realize emptiness, come out of their meditation session and say, “Ah! This is what I experienced.”

Is this extremely subtle mind and energy equivalent to the concept of a soul?

[In response to audience]: We all have the extremely subtle level of mind and wind. It becomes manifest when we die and then it goes into another rebirth. But it is not a soul. Here we have to be very clear what we mean by the words we use. When I say there is no soul, I am using the definition of ‘soul’ as a concrete, findable, personal entity, something that is that person. Unchangeable. Eternal. Somebody else might use the same word and give it a different definition.

The extremely subtle level of mind and wind is not a soul because it is something that changes moment by moment. People who are doing very deep meditation, through their practice of the winds on the completion stage of highest yoga tantra, can access that extremely subtle mind without dying. They do it in their meditation.

In general, it is very important, when we discuss with people, to find out what they mean by the words they are using. Often when people ask me whether Buddhists believe in God, I can’t even answer that question until I ask them what their definition of God is. Because if you ask five people what God is, you are probably going to get ten answers. Everybody has their own definition.

Part of people’s definition of God are things that Buddhism might agree with. Like some people say God is the principle of love. Do Buddhists believe in love? Yes. So if you say God is love, yes, Buddhists believe in love, no problem. If you say God is love and God created the universe, then we are going to get into some difficulties. [Laughter] There are some logical problems here. Whenever you have dialogue with somebody of another belief system, it is important to keep asking them for their definitions of the words that they are using.

Responding to physical pain during meditation – how not to get worked up

[In response to audience:] We get disturbed because we experience a painful physical sensation, and then our mind reacts and produces more experience. Even just a simple thing – our knee hurts – there is the sensation of what the knee feels like, then there is the unpleasantness of that sensation, and then there is our mind saying, “I don’t want this to happen! How come this always happens?!” Our mind gets tight because the knee is hurting. Because the mind gets tight, then the stomach gets tight. And then your stomach hurts, and your mind reacts to the stomach hurting and say, “How come I have this body where my stomach and knee are always hurting and now I am freaking out! It shouldn’t happen like this! Life should be different!”

So we get all tangled up in how life should be different and there is so much suffering in the world and how come I have to bear all this suffering and I just can’t stand it anymore. And if only I had some chocolate, it might all go away! [laughter] You see how we start with just one small thing but we don’t just let it be. We jump in and we make all these incredible interpretation of it. Some of it is our emotional interpretation, then we add our philosophical interpretation, and pretty soon, we have created our whole experience.

It is our conceptualization, doing all this thinking about I want this to happen and I don’t want that to happen and how this is feeling and how it shouldn’t feel like this. “There is something wrong with me because I am feeling this, or maybe something is right with me, I might be getting somewhere; oh, this is great! I am getting somewhere, isn’t this wonderful? I have to go tell somebody.” We just watch. All it is, is changing experience. It is consciousness changing, never being the same, one moment to the next moment. The body, sensations, never being the same, one moment to the next moment. But you see, our problem is we believe everything we think and we get completely wrapped up and identify all these experiences so strongly as *I* and *mine*.

Advanced meditators probably notice there is some sensation in the body and they might even notice it is a painful sensation, but then they will stop there. It will be, “Oh, there is that sensation, that sensation is unpleasant”. But there wouldn’t be all this thing of, “Oh, I am having an unpleasant sensation and my knees are hurting. I don’t want it to hurt. How come it always hurts when I sit and meditate. I will never get enlightened like this. Maybe if I sit here too long, it is going to do permanent damage to my knees but my meditation teacher said that I should sit here and learn to endure the pain. But if I do that, it is going to permanently damage my knees. But if I move my leg, then everybody in the room is going to know I am moving it, then I am going to look like an idiot again and I am always looking like an idiot!” [Laughter]

When you are sitting in meditation and your knees get sore, start with the small things. Try to differentiate between the physical sensation, the painful sensation, and the mind’s reaction to all of that. And try and just observe your own experience and determine which component of this is just physical sensation, which makes it unpleasant, and what is all the other stuff that your mind is telling you about. In this way you discriminate all these different experiences that you are having.

The thing is they all seem to be one experience. What we need to do is to slow down and observe that there is a whole lot of very different experiences there. If we can isolate them, then we can see that it would be possible, at a more advanced stage than we are at now, to feel the sensation of the leg hurting, to even recognize that that is an unpleasant sensation, but not to go any further than that, but just to accept that that is what exists at that moment.

We can also be completely aware that it is existing at that moment but it is not going to continue forever. When our knee is hurting, we feel like it is going to continue forever. We feel like it is a permanent feeling. It is never going to end. But I think when you get into the process of cultivating wisdom, then you realize that the experience you are having is going to change. And then you can even bring the compassion practice in. When you are feeling an unpleasant feeling, say, “I am experiencing this and may it suffice for all the pain and misery of others.” And then, all of a sudden, you don’t feel the pain very much because now you are thinking about compassion.

Dealing with emotional pain

[In response to audience:] To control the pain, you have to stop wanting to control the pain. As soon as

we start fighting against something that does exist, trying to make it not exist, we make it bigger. It is very interesting to watch what happens when we experience emotional pain, which in some way is much more prevalent in our culture. When you start having a painful mind, try to just experience that emotional pain, and then watch the tendency of the mind to react to that emotional pain and build the whole story.

Let's say somebody criticizes us. We feel a little hurt. We don't just feel that hurt feeling but we then say, "This person is criticizing me. Oh look at me, I am always making mistakes. Isn't this terrible? I am really a disaster! Who does this person think they are anyway, criticizing me blah blah blah." And we go through a whole conceptual process. This is what we do during meditation – we watch how we tell ourselves stories. We are so creative and our mind will just build these incredible stories based on one small sensation.

So the thing to do is to be able to observe this whole process of how it happens. What we usually do is we jump in and we join in. We don't even recognize we are telling ourselves stories. We are believing everything we think. So what we do in meditation is just to watch this incredible process without jumping in it. Then you can start differentiating all the different components and seeing how so much of our unhappiness is self-created, completely unnecessary. And if we can't see it in ourselves, we can very often start by seeing it in other people.

We can definitely see it better in other people, can't we? When your friend comes to you and starts telling you their problem, saying, "Oh, I was just with my boyfriend and he said this. This jerk! How come he is always doing that..." When somebody starts telling you their problem, can you see how part of it is due to their way of thinking? [Laughter] If they only shifted their way of thinking by half a degree, the whole problem would cease to exist. We can see it so clearly in other people. So the thing is, start seeing it in other people but then recognize that you are doing the exact same thing.

Addiction - how much of it is physical craving and how much is mental craving?

[In response to audience:] It is very, very tangled up. For example, coke does create a definite chemical imbalance and it makes you crave the coke to rebalance it. But in rebalancing it, you get further out of whack. It creates a physical response. But the mental experience, the conscious element of that, is consciousness.

There might be a physical trigger to it, but it is a conscious experience and then our mind, like I was saying before, might take that initial sensation and add on a whole lot of philosophy to it. Like saying, "I am going to feel good if I have this and besides, this is a physical addiction, I had better have it." "This is too uncomfortable and all my friends are doing it and blah blah blah." This is what is really interesting when you do breathing meditation – observe your distractions. Because you will notice all the stories we tell ourselves.

At a conference that His Holiness had with some scientists, one scientist was talking about physical craving and addiction. His Holiness said, "Have you ever noticed, in the recovery process, what is the difference between two people who are equally addicted, but one has a very strong motivation to stop the addiction and the other person doesn't?" I thought, "Wow!" because the scientist who was talking was really reductionist and saying that whatever was happening was just physical, and there His Holiness was putting in motivation and will. Where do you put that in? I think there is a difference between somebody who tries to break an addiction when they have strong will and motivation and somebody who doesn't. The whole interplay of body and mind affect each other a lot.

The danger of reaction and conception in our emotional experience

[In response to audience:] We have so much experience but because we have never stopped and observed our experience, we are just simply in the process of reacting all the time. We have an experience and we react, and then we react to our reaction, instead of stopping, looking, and experiencing it, thereby stopping the whole reactive process. Because we haven't been able to stop and look at it, it is this whole big jumble. Which is why when we sit down to watch our breath, it is so difficult.

Basically, affliction~ is affliction~. But what we get attached about and what we get angry about can be different in different cultures. We tend to just jump in and react so much to our emotions. I really notice this when I came back to America because more than any other culture I have lived in, people here say they feel emotionally repressed. But more than any other place I have lived in, people talk about their emotions non-stop. If you go and live in Singapore or India, people don't just say, "Hi. Oh, I am in the

middle of an identity crisis and blah blah blah. I am feeling this and I am feeling that.” [Laughter]

I think it is very good to be aware of and be sensitive to our emotions. But what we have done is not just being aware and sensitive, but we have started reacting to them. It is good to be aware and we need to know; acknowledge our emotions and know what they are. But what we have gotten into is a whole different reaction-response, build-the-emotions-up process, because we have not been able to sit there and look and say, “Anger is going through my mind right now.”

I remember one meditation, it was so incredible. I shouldn't be telling you this, because I was leading a meditation at that time when it happened. [Laughter] When you are sitting on the Dharma seat, people think that you are a great meditator. [Laughter] I was sitting there and I started getting very angry, though I can't even remember what it was now. I just watched this incredible anger come out of, I don't know, probably some small thing. Incredible anger coming in the mind! And I just sat there and watched it, and then it just faded out of the mind. And the whole time the body was just sitting there, of course feeling all these different physical responses, because when anger comes, your body reacts. It was like a big wave and then it left. And then when it left, I could ring the bell. [Laughter] Couldn't do it until it went away. But it was incredible to just sit there and watch the anger come and watch it change and go away.

Once you start doing purification retreat, you will see it. Oh, incredible! You start doing purification retreat. You are trying to do some mantra. You are trying to bow to the Buddha, and then you start remembering all these things that happened before, and you start getting really angry, really sad or really jealous. And then, all of a sudden, you realize that the person you are so mad at, isn't there in the room. “What am I mad at? The person isn't here. The situation isn't even happening. I am here alone in this room. What in the world am I mad at?” It is like my mind just created this concept and gotten mad at its own creation.

Just amazing. You start seeing the power of conception.

The importance of thought training

[In response to audience:] You will see that we keep running the same video again and again. You begin to run the same video and then you begin to realize this is a video. You may say, “I am sick of this. Let's turn the station”, but you can't turn the station because part of your mind believes that the video is true. This is where I think that the Mahayana thought training is so spot-on. This is where you have to pull out all these thought training techniques.

I will give you a very good example. One of my videos is rejection. I get rejected. Nobody likes me. Nobody wants to be with me. I am getting rejected. When I was in Dharamsala, one of my Dharma teachers whom I wanted very badly to visit, was extremely busy. I couldn't see him very much. When I went to say goodbye to him, I was so sad and after I left the room, this video starts playing, “Genla is too busy. I am always rejected!” [Laughter] And I said, “Oh, yes, here is this one again.”

And then I said, and this is where thought training comes in, “This is a result of my own negative karma. I don't know what I did in a previous life. I have probably interfered with somebody else's relationship with their teacher or I probably was very cruel and very rejecting of other people. Whatever I did, I have created the karma to repeatedly experience this kind of situation. I could see very clearly that Genla was not rejecting me. There was no rejection involved in this at all! But my mind was interpreting it that way. My mind was re-running that video and there was no reason for it.

So, when I finally said this is the result of my own negative karma, then I said “Oh, okay.” I said, “Ok, I am experiencing the result of my own negative karma. It is painful. There it is. I had better watch how I relate to people in future or I will continue to create this kind of karma.” It was incredible that within five minutes, my mood was totally different.

This is an example of just changing the way you look at a situation. You change the way of interpreting the situation. This is what thought transformation, thought training is about. Instead of re-running the old video, the old interpretation, you look at it from a different angle.

We have to start taking responsibility for our experiences. We often blame our parents when we are re-running the twelve-year-old-video or the eight-year-old-video. We can't create a different worldview. That is why it is so important to practice, on your meditation cushion, thinking about the people you are going

to meet and your buttons that are likely to get pushed by being in that situation, and then thinking, “How else could I look at this thing so that I don’t start re-running the same video, so that I don’t push my button basically?” That is when Dharma practice takes hold and you start to change. Because it is a thing of taking responsibility.

Let’s sit quietly for a few moments.

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.’

^‘Afflicted’ is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of ‘deluded.’

~‘Afflictions’ is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of ‘delusions.’