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We have been discussing the various afflictions [['afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'](#)] that are the causes of our unsatisfactory experience. We are looking at the second of the Four Noble Truths in depth. We finished talking about the six root afflictions*. Last week we started going over the twenty secondary or auxiliary afflictions*. And if you don't remember that, the affliction* that made you forget is coming up in this teaching [laughter].

I think it is very helpful to try and recognize the afflictions* in our daily life. If you just come to teachings, hear a list and you say: "Oh, yes, that sounds familiar", but you don't look over your notes – they get thrown in the back seat of the car or the top of your bookshelf until the next session – then nothing really sinks in, and nothing really gets transformed.

If you take whatever we have gone over and try and recognize these different mental factors in your life, then you get a whole new way of understanding yourself. For those of you who feel that you are out of touch with yourself, who don't know who you are, this is the way to get in touch with who you are: through the practice of being mindful, of being aware of what is going on in your mind.

So, we are going to talk about the rest of the secondary afflictions*.

Lack of self-respect

The next affliction* is called lack of self-respect. It is sometimes translated as "shamelessness," but I don't like that translation at all. To understand what lack of self-respect is, we have to understand what self-respect is. Self-respect is a mental factor which, because of personal conscience, or for the sake of our own Dharma practice, we abstain from acting negatively.

Let's say you have taken a precept not to drink. You go for a Christmas dinner where everybody is drinking, but you say to yourself: "Oh, I have a precept not to drink. This is an issue of my own personal integrity. I am not going to break my word and go against what I have already decided to be." This is an instance of doing something out of a sense of personal conscience, out of self-respect for our own ethical integrity.

When it is translated as "shame", it means a sense of shame in that you are not going to act negatively because of care for yourself. But the word "shame" in English is so loaded and it has so many different meanings that I think it can be easily misunderstood. Therefore, I prefer to use "self-respect". It has to do with your own personal dignity; it is about how you want to act and how you don't want to act. You abandon acting negatively when situations present themselves.

"Lack of self-respect" is the mental factor that does not avoid negativities out of a sense of personal conscience or care for your own practice. For instance, suppose you've taken the eight precepts for the day and one of the precepts is not to eat after lunch. Your friend says: "Ah, you took the eight precepts, but look, there is pizza here for dinner. You've got to eat the pizza!" And you just go right ahead and eat

the pizza, not at all caring about your own dignity for having taken precepts.

This is a very interesting mental factor. The next mental factor that we are going to talk about is very interesting too. You know how sometimes we check up at the end of the day, or sometimes we look at what we have done in the past and we go: "Wow, at the time I was doing that, I knew I was doing something crazy, but I just didn't do anything about it." Has that happened to you? [laughter] That was the "lack of self-respect" functioning. If the opposite, that is, the sense of self-respect was functioning, we would not have gotten involved. We would have somehow been able to not go with the negative flow.

Inconsideration for others

The next secondary affliction* is called inconsideration for others. Here again, to understand "inconsideration for others," we have to understand "consideration for others". Consideration for others is similar to self-respect in that we abandon negative actions. The difference is in the case of self-respect, we abandon negative actions out of a feeling for our own integrity and our own Dharma practice, while in the case of consideration for others, we abandon negative actions because of how it is going to affect others.

"Inconsideration for others" is not caring at all about how your behavior affects others, not abandoning negative actions even though they might be harmful to others. This is the one that is operating when you get so angry that you tell somebody off and you don't really care that you are hurting their feelings. This is also the one that is operating when you are with people who don't have a lot of faith in the Dharma, they are kind of getting to know the Dharma through looking at you, and you just "go bananas" and act in a way that makes them lose faith in Buddhism.

I think this is probably even more pronounced once you take ordination, because then people will know you are a Buddhist. They kind of look to you as an example. When you act in a negative way, then because of your personal behavior, many people lose faith in the Dharma. Of course, we can say that people should not lose faith based upon one person's behavior. It would be better if they look deeper into the teachings. But the fact is, it happens.

So, "inconsideration for others" is not caring about how our actions affect other people, or even acting dishonestly at work and not caring whether it affects your students, your colleagues, your employers, your employees or whoever else; not caring at all about how our own unwholesomeness influences other people – either harming them directly or making them lose faith in humanity.

Negative qualities that masquerade as positive qualities

You can see that "lack of self-respect" and "inconsideration for others" go hand in hand, in the sense that they both involve a lack of self-restraint. Their opposites – self-respect and consideration for others – are positive qualities that we should cultivate. However, we have to make sure that we don't confuse them with some other qualities that are very similar, but which are negative.

For example, self-respect can sometimes be confused with the sense of pride. "I wouldn't act like that!" "I am not going to lie because I wouldn't act like that." "I am not going to take drugs because I wouldn't..." You know, this kind of haughtiness, being ethical not because you value your ethics, but because you are haughty.

Haughtiness and self-respect are two different attitudes. When you abandon negativities out of a sense of pride and haughtiness, you might have a good [immediate] outcome, but your mind is caught up in an affliction*. When you abandon the negativity out of genuine self-respect and not wanting to denigrate your own sense of ethics, then that is a positive quality.

The same is true with "consideration for others". It is a positive quality, and it is very different from having attachment to reputation. Attachment to reputation is a negative quality. Sometimes we won't act negatively, but it is not because we care about others. We actually don't care beans at all about the other people. We abandon negativity because we are very attached to our reputation. We act ethically or we are kind to other people, not because we care about them, but because we want other people to think well of us. That is a negative attitude. It may be slightly better than dumping our garbage on somebody, but it is very deceptive and the mind is quite attached to reputation. With "consideration for

others", we are genuinely caring about them.

Whenever we act negatively, one of these two afflictions* is involved – the "lack of self-respect" or the "inconsideration for others."

Dullness

The next one is called dullness, or sometimes translated as "foggy-mindedness". This is a mental factor which, having caused the mind to lapse into darkness and thereby become insensitive, does not comprehend the object clearly as it is.

This is the mental factor that starts operating as soon as you sit down and relax in class. "I am so tired, why doesn't she shut up?" Or when you are sitting down to meditate and your mind starts getting thick, like lima bean soup. "Dullness" makes the body and the mind heavy; it makes it difficult to understand things; then, if it goes uncontrolled, you start snoring very soon.

This one comes in regular life. It also comes when we sit down and meditate. It is not the same as "laxity" that happens in meditation. Laxity is a lot more subtle. Laxity is a lack of clarity of mind, a lack of intensity of the clarity of the mind. Foggy-mindedness is much grosser. It is the mind that is really thick, insensitive, not taking things in.

[Audience:] Is there a difference between ignorance and dullness?

Ignorance is just an unawareness of the nature of the object. Whereas dullness is much grosser, I think, than ignorance. Definitely related, but much grosser. With ignorance, you can be perfectly wide-awake and alert but you are still grasping at inherent existence, which is ignorance. In fact, you can be very excited and grasping at inherent existence. But this foggy-mindedness – there is a certain heaviness, dullness, thickness, obscuration of the mind so that things just do not go in and you're almost nodding off.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, this is very interesting. You might be completely wide-awake, but as soon as you sit down to listen to a teaching, you just cannot keep your eyes open. And this often happens when you are sitting in the front row in front of a high lama! I have seen it so many times. I have experienced it myself. You may have drunk 2 cups of coffee, you may have been wide-awake before, but you just cannot keep awake during teachings. It comes up, I think, because of very heavy negative karma. You will see it sometimes at the public teachings, people will be falling asleep, nodding off. [laughter]

Agitation

The next secondary affliction* is called agitation, sometimes translated as excitement. This is kind of the opposite of dullness. It is a mental factor which, through the force of attachment, does not allow the mind to rest solely upon a virtuous object, that scatters it here and there to many other objects that are much nicer than whatever the virtuous object is that you are trying to concentrate on. This is the "pizza mind." [laughter] You are sitting there trying to meditate. You don't have the foggy-mindedness. Your mind isn't thick. Your mind is awake, and you are trying to watch the breath or you are trying to visualize the Buddha. But you get pizza, you get chocolate, you get your boy-friend and girl-friend, you get your pay check, you get the beach, you get some other object of attachment.

This one comes very often during the day, doesn't it? Very often it comes when we are trying to meditate. It is not just distraction or wandering. (That is another affliction*; we are going to get to that in a few minutes.) It makes you leave the virtuous object to go after an object of attachment. It happens when you are listening to teachings and you start thinking about how nice it will be to go home, have a cup of tea and go to bed. That is an object of attachment – your bed, your cup of chamomile, or your cup of hot chocolate, miso if you are being healthy [laughter]. Instead of listening to teachings, the mind is thinking about something else which seems much more pleasurable. Or you are sitting and trying to meditate and the mind wanders to something more pleasurable. This is agitation or excitement.

This is why we have to spend a lot of time contemplating the disadvantages of objects of attachment and trying to see their nature. Otherwise, it will just run rampant in the mind. You could be at work and it strikes. Actually at work, you are not necessarily concentrating on a virtuous object. You may be just looking at your computer screen or whatever. Agitation takes you away from a virtuous object, as well as a neutral object like your computer screen. It is the one that makes you think about lunch time, makes you think about what you should do during the weekend.

Laziness

Now the next one – nobody here has it. It is called laziness. [laughter] This is a mental factor which, having firmly grasped an object offering temporary happiness, either does not wish to do anything virtuous, or, though wishing to, is weak-minded. This is the mind that grabs onto something which seems infinitely more interesting than meditating, or listening to teachings, or taking the eight precepts at five o'clock in the morning, or doing Nyung Nay, or going on retreat, or whatever it is. It just doesn't want to get engaged in doing what is virtuous. Part of your mind may even say: "Well actually, I should. . . I do have a perfect human rebirth, I should use it." [laughter] But it just doesn't carry anything out.

The three kinds of laziness

There are different kinds of laziness. There is a kind of laziness where we are just attached to hanging out, lying around and going to sleep. The mind that wants to sleep in. Here, the object offering temporary happiness is sleep. The bed. [laughter]

Then there is the laziness of being very busy. In Buddhism, being very busy running after objects of attachment is a form of laziness. This is because your mind is very busy following things that offer you temporary happiness. You work to get your paycheck. You go out to eat, then you go drinking, or you smoke some dope. Then you go do this, then go do that, and life is extremely busy. No time left on your calendar. That is a form of laziness, because there are lots of time on the calendar to do anything but Dharma.

The third kind of laziness is a very interesting one. It is called discouragement or putting yourself down, feeling inadequate. Isn't that interesting? Low self-esteem, a feeling of inadequacy, is a kind of laziness. I think this is a very interesting way to look at it, because what does low self-esteem do? We sit there and we recite the mantra: "I can't do this. This is too difficult. I just don't have what it takes. I can't concentrate anyway. I am so bad. I tried it before but it doesn't work..." The self-pity mind. We don't make any effort to do anything wholesome or virtuous because we are so busy convincing ourselves that we can't. Therefore it is a form of laziness.

I think that is quite interesting, because in psychology nowadays, there is all this talk about self-esteem. We go into it and analyze it, and all this stuff. I think it is interesting to just look at it as a form of laziness. It gives us a whole different perspective. Then we don't need to go in and analyze our past: "My first grade teacher told me that my "Bs" looked like "Ds", and I have been feeling incompetent ever since." Instead of painstakingly analyzing everything, just look and recognize that this attitude of putting myself down is just plain laziness. It is keeping me from doing something wholesome that will make me happy. If it keeps me from doing something that is going to make me happy, who needs it? It is a different way of approaching it. I think it could be interesting.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. All of this bad self-image commentary that we keep telling ourselves acts as an obstacle to doing virtuous things that are the cause of happiness. If something is an obstacle to the creation of happiness in our lives, then who needs to believe it, who needs to follow it, who needs to dive in after it?!

When somebody comes to rob your house, if they knock at your door and say: "I have come here to rob your house", you say: "Who needs you!" You don't sit there and analyze where it came from. You kick the guy out. "I know what your trick is. Get out of here!" I think another way of dealing with issues of self-esteem is to recognize that they create big blocks for our own happiness, and to be very pragmatic, like we Americans always try to be. We just need to say: "Well, this doesn't serve any good purpose, so let's leave it behind. I don't need to keep thinking like that."

I am not saying that analyzing is bad. I think that can be quite useful. But I think it is interesting to have another approach which is, "This attitude is totally impractical!" It is completely impractical to keep telling ourselves how lousy we are.

Non-faith or non-confidence

The next secondary affliction* is called non-faith or non-confidence. This mental factor causes one to have no belief in or no respect for what is worthy of confidence. It is the complete opposite of confidence or faith. Something that is worthy of confidence, that is worthy of respect, that is worthy of appreciation: when this mental factor is in our mind, we don't appreciate or acknowledge or have faith and confidence in any of those things.

This affliction* refers specifically to, for example, non-confidence in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, in past and future rebirth, or in the functioning of cause and effect. It is a lack of confidence that these things even exist. Or it is a lack of appreciation for the qualities of the Buddha; a lack of appreciation for the Dharma path and its ability to lead us out of all of our confusion and pain; a lack of confidence in the Buddha, or in our Dharma teachers – that they know what they are talking about; or a lack of confidence in the path; a disbelief in cause and effect.

This is some kind of dark, heavy mind that I think we've all had a considerable amount of. At least I know in my past, this one had been very active. It blocks out anything that is worthy of confidence, or puts it down, or criticizes it. It is the mental factor that makes you cynical and skeptical in a negative way. There is a kind of skepticism that is curiosity, which is quite good. But non-faith is the kind of skepticism that is just: "I am not going to believe anything in any way." It is this cynicism or the unwillingness to listen to new ideas.

This mental factor makes a big block in our practice, because when we don't have any faith or confidence, we have no inspiration. What makes you want to practice is maybe you meet somebody who is practicing and they seem like such a nice person. You think: "Wow, that is incredible. Look at this person. I can become like that." So your mind gets light-hearted, kind of light and buoyant and you want to practice.

Or you hear about the qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and you think: "Wow, that is incredible. I would like to be like that." You appreciate that. Or you hear about cause and effect and your mind gets concerned, and you think: "Well, I can take some control and responsibility in my life if I follow cause and effect." When you have this kind of faith or confidence, the mind has energy. It has inspiration. It wants to do something positive.

But with the lack of faith or the non-faith, the mind has no life to it. You don't believe in anything. We can see that this is so prevalent all over the society. It makes people feel that their life is meaningless and there is no sense to anything. There is nothing to trust. There is no direction to go to. Of course, when you have that attitude, you can't do anything because even if there is a whole lot of incredible things around you that you can do, your mind is so convinced that none of that exists that you can't see it.

Un-conscientiousness

The next secondary affliction* is called un-conscientiousness. It is a mental factor that, when one is affected by laziness, wishes to act freely in an unrestrained manner without cultivating virtue or guarding the mind against contaminated phenomena.

In other words, you want to just do whatever you feel like doing, whatever pops into your mind. Nowadays, it is sometimes called acting spontaneously. [laughter] There are different kinds of spontaneity. One kind is quite positive. Another kind is quite negative. We have to be clear on this.

This mental factor of un-conscientiousness is the mind that just wants to follow any impulse that comes into it. This is the mind that, when you go to a party, says: "Oh, it's too difficult to be mindful here. I am just going to go with the flow." So, when people are drinking, smoking dope, and doing this and that, you

just go with it. The mind loses the capability to distinguish between constructive and destructive actions. This is the mind that just doesn't care! It just wants to act in any old way.

We have to be clear here because like I said, there is a kind of spontaneity which is quite good. When you act spontaneously from an attitude of love and compassion, that is good. When you act spontaneously from an attitude of anger, belligerence, prejudice or attachment, that is a different case altogether.

The word 'spontaneous' in our culture is a little bit of a sticky word. Likewise with 'control'. There is a kind of control that is quite good and a kind of control that is very harmful. We need to discriminate between the kind of control to cultivate and the kind to abandon, and the kind of spontaneity to cultivate and the kind to abandon. There is a kind of control that is the opposite to the negative spontaneity. It says: "I am going to be mindful. I am going to be aware. I am going to take responsibility for what is going on in my life and what I am doing and how I am affecting people." That kind of control is good.

The other kind of control happens when we get really heavy-handed with ourselves: "I got to do this!" "You sit down on that meditation cushion!" When you are talking to yourself with such a heavy-handed, authoritarian kind of self-control, that is not so good. When we are trying to get rid of the un-conscientiousness, let us not replace it with the authoritarian self-control. We need to replace it instead with a sense of respect for our own ethics, a sense of compassion for ourselves, wanting ourselves to be happy and so thereby caring about what we do and how it affects others.

[Audience:] What is the difference between un-conscientiousness and lack of self-respect?

'Un-conscientiousness' means you are not mindful at all; you just want to do anything that pops in your mind, completely unrestrained. It is the one that makes you laugh crazy.

In the case of a lack of self-respect, an example is not abandoning a negative action because of a lack of respect for yourself. In lack of self-respect, then, there is the opportunity right there to act negatively. Your mind is really toying with the idea, and there is no feeling of your own integrity as a practitioner or your own ethical integrity.

With lack of self-respect, you can sometimes go through a dialog with yourself and come to the wrong conclusion. Sometimes you don't even bother to dialog, you just jump to the conclusion. Whereas this mental factor of un-conscientiousness is much more a kind of free-floating recklessness. It is like, when you are un-conscientious, you are going to wind up facing a situation in which you can act negatively, and then your lack of self-respect is going to not hold you back from doing it.

[In response to audience:] Un-conscientiousness is not even registering with you that there is alcohol at this party. It is like not even caring that there is alcohol, or not even caring that you have a real strong taste for it. It is just the mind that...whatever pops in your mind, that is what you want to do. You don't care what it is. It is like a lack of watchfulness. There is not a good English word for it.

[Audience: inaudible]

If you want to get rid of this one, then you need the kind of control that is more a sense of: "Ok, I am going to this Christmas party with all my relatives. I know Aunt Betsy is going to be there and she is going to harp on the way I look, but I am going to be very aware when she starts to do that and not tell her off. At every Christmas in the past, I had told her off, and I just don't feel good about it. She is probably going to do the same thing again this year, but I am not going to follow whatever ideas come in my mind when she starts doing it."

It is a wariness of the situation, caring about how you act, so that you want to control your actions. But it is not this heavy-handed: "You keep your mouth close in front of Aunt Betsy. Don't you dare talk back to her. You've got to control your mind!" Talking to yourself like that is really bullying yourself. It is a very harmful kind of control.

Helpful control is recognizing that we do have a choice, and wanting to take that choice about how we act, or even how we feel. We do have a choice as to what we feel. So often it seems like our feelings just come and we have no choice. But as we start understanding our feelings better, we can begin to

understand that at a certain point, if we catch it, we actually have a choice about what we feel. We actually have a choice. For example, somebody says something nasty and for a split second, there is this choice of: "Am I going to get mad at him or am I just going to let it go, because it doesn't matter?" So, a helpful kind of self-control is one where you are on to that. You care about your own happiness.

[Audience: inaudible]

And we start saying all those things that we vowed as kids we would never say. You start talking like your mother or your father, and you go: "Who is this talking?" I think a lot of our practice is becoming aware of the kind of situations in which that attitude comes up.

I think there are different ways to deal with it, perhaps to try and handle the situation before it gets to that critical point. I know one of my friends says to her daughter: "I am trying to get out of the house on time to go to work. Can you help me do it?" Then the kid thinks: "Oh, I can help mama." There are different ways of putting it.

Sometimes it is just a matter of us calming down. I am not saying that you can do this every time, because I know with kids, it can be hard. But sometimes you can try telling the child: "Well, you have a choice of how to act. If you act this way, this is what is going to happen. If you act that way, that is what is going to happen. You have a choice of whether you are going to wear your coat to school or not; but please be aware that if you don't wear it and you get sick, then you will have to please take the responsibility for getting sick." Somehow helping the kids to see the choice in it.

Sometimes we may need to just admit to the kids that we lose it sometimes.

[Audience: inaudible]

I don't think you have to use Buddhist indoctrination to teach kids about this. It's this thing of: "Okay, here we have a situation. What are the different ways we can act?" And there might not just be two ways to act. There might be three, or four, or ten. "Now, let's just check it out together and see what happens if you do this and what's likely to happen if you do that; and let's think about something before we do it." Teaching kids to think a little bit of the possible effects of their actions and then deciding what they want. And giving them more than two choices. In other words, the choice is not: "Do what I say," or "Do it your own way." The choice is: "There are lots of various activities we can do here. What are the results going to be for self and others with each of these activities?"

[Audience: inaudible]

I notice that often, with kids, it is very tempting to get involved in a power struggle. We get into power struggles with them, so that the issue is not so much eating the peanut butter and jelly sandwich or not eating it; the issue is who has the power in this situation. Sometimes the kids will try and turn it into a power thing. In such cases, I think it is good to completely avoid it. Don't buy in and start making it a power struggle.

Also, from our own side, try not to make it a power struggle. In other words, the fact that you are not doing what I would like you to do, isn't a power struggle between you and me and you are winning. You have a choice: there is this, this, this you can do. But if you do this particular action, it is going to affect me in a certain way. If you do that action, it is going to affect me in another way. Instead of just: "Who is going to win here?"

It can be so sneaky. I have taught in school before, so I have dealt with kids or watched parents deal with their kids. It is so sneaky – the way the power struggle jumps in, so that it is no longer a simple thing; it is power. This happens not only with kids; it happens very much with people we are close to. People are ostensibly fighting over some issue, but they are really fighting over who has power. Or they are fighting over self-respect. Somehow the issue is different from what we think it is.

This is where I think breathing meditation is very helpful. When you breathe, you watch all these stuff come up in your mind. You will remember past situations. Try to isolate the mental factor that is coming up at that time, and think about it for a little while. Try and resolve the situation, not necessarily when you are doing the breathing meditation. You could do this in a different meditation.

Forgetfulness

And then here is the one I talked about before, that you have probably forgotten. It is called forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is a mental factor which, having caused the apprehension of a virtuous object to be lost, induces memory of and distraction towards an object of affliction~.

For example, you are sitting there trying to watch the breath or visualize the Buddha, and you lose the object. In addition, you are thinking about going skiing or you are getting angry at somebody else. The mind is going towards an object of affliction~ and it has completely forgotten about what you have sat down to meditate on.

This mental factor is the opposite of mindfulness. We always talk about mindfulness being an important mental factor that recognizes the object of meditation and keeps the mind on it in such a way that it doesn't forget. Forgetfulness, on the other hand, is the lack of mindfulness, so that the mind just forgets your meditation object and something else comes in. When you have forgetfulness, agitation or excitement is going to pop in right away and fill the void. Or sometimes laxity will pop in and fill the void and the mind will start getting very heavy.

[Audience: inaudible]

Laxity becomes more evident when you start having some ability to concentrate. With laxity, you might even have some stability on the object. In other words, you have the object in your meditation and you might even have some clarity. The intensity or the clarity is gone, however. It is like you are sitting and you are on the breath, you have the stability, you see the breath going in and out; but your mind is not completely there, it is not bright and sparkling. Dullness comes in when the mind gets quite thick and you forget the breath because you are more into your obscuration at that point.

Non-introspection

The next secondary affliction* is called non-introspection. Forgetfulness and non-introspection are the opposites of the two important qualities that we need when we meditate – mindfulness and introspective alertness. Forgetfulness is the opposite of mindfulness, and non-introspective alertness is the opposite of introspective alertness.

Introspective alertness is the one that is like a little spy that pops up and sees if you are concentrating, sees if you are awake, checks up what is going on. Non-introspection is a mental factor that is an afflicted [['afflicted' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'deluded'](#)] intelligence; it has made no analysis (or only a rough analysis) of what is going on in the mind. It is not fully alert to the conduct of your body, speech and mind. You are not on top of the situation, and this causes you to get into un-conscientiousness and start being careless, indifferent and reckless.

[In response to audience:] Non-introspection is an afflicted^ intelligence which has made no analysis, or only a rough analysis, of what you are saying, thinking and doing. It is not fully alert to what you are saying, doing, thinking or feeling. It is not alert. For example, you drive home from some place and somebody asks: "What did you think about on the ride home?" You couldn't tell them. Non-introspection is the mental factor that makes you unable to tell that person what you thought about in the car, because you don't know.

You were sitting there thinking the whole time. Many thoughts and images are going on in your mind the whole time you are in the car, but you are not aware of them. The mind could be sitting there getting angry. The mind could be sitting there thinking what you are going to do when you are home. You could be day dreaming about something else, but you are not even aware of what is going on. This is how we are a good portion of the day; for example, with mindless eating, you are not even aware that you are eating. You are just sitting and eating.

[Audience:] What is the difference between mindfulness and introspective alertness?

Mindfulness knows what the object of meditation is, remembers it in such a way that it doesn't forget it; and by remembering it, it prevents other objects from coming in and distracting you. Mindfulness is what puts the focus of your mind on the object of meditation. Now once you have done that, you have to check up if it is still working or if something else has snuck in.

Introspective alertness, then, is the one that checks up: "What am I concentrating on? What am I thinking about? Am I on the breath? Am I on the Buddha? Am I over in Neverland? Am I worrying about something? Am I anxious about something?" It is the one that is able to look and recognize what is going on in your mind.

Mindfulness is the thing that sticks your mind to a virtuous object. Introspective alertness is saying: "Are you stuck to the virtuous object? What is going on?"

To have sustained mindfulness, you need introspective alertness. If you don't have it, your mindfulness will start going to something else and you won't catch it until the bell rings. And then it's like: "Oh, how long was that meditation? Where was I?" [Laughter]

Distraction

The last secondary affliction* is called distraction or wandering. This is a mental factor which, arising from any of the three poisons and being unable to direct the mind towards a virtuous object, disperses it to a variety of other objects.

This is a mental factor which, arising from any of the three poisons—so you could either have attachment, anger or close-mindedness functioning in your mind—is unable to direct the mind towards a virtuous object. Because it is unable to do that, it disperses your mental energy to daydreaming, to distraction, to wondering, to anxiety, and worry, frustration and belligerence, and everything else.

For example, I say there are twenty secondary afflictions*, and you count up but you only have seventeen, and you wonder what happened to the other three? That is the mental factor of distraction operating. [laughter] The mind was thinking about something else.

[Audience: inaudible]

Many of the afflictions* have to do with meditation, but they have to do with practicing in daily life, too. Distraction is what makes your mind go all over the place when you are driving the car, and non-introspective alertness is what makes you not even remember that it went all over the place.

For example, when you are driving, you could be using this time to cultivate your mind by saying mantra or doing something else. But distraction makes the mind go all over the place; un-conscientiousness makes you not care that it is all over the place; forgetfulness kind of jumps in there and makes it easy to go all over the place; and lack of introspective alertness causes you to not even know what is going on, because you are so much in all those other places that who wants be aware of what is happening in your own mind.

There are actually much more secondary afflictions [['afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'delusions'](#)] than the twenty. The Buddha said there are 84,000. It is very interesting to start watching your own mind and identify these, and how they inter-relate—how this one will lead to that one, then another one jumps in. In other words, all these attitudes are not unrelated things. It is not like belligerence comes up at five minutes past eight, and then there are no afflictions* in the mind until a quarter past eight when you get a little bit of distraction.

It is not like that. For example, when you start watching, you might get some grudge-holding and vengefulness. Then that causes you to have the spite that makes you want to go tell somebody else off. Then that makes you leave your object of meditation. Then you don't have your introspective alertness to recognize that you've done that. Then you get really into planning how to harm the other person, so all faith in cause and effect is completely gone out of the window. It is like one thing follows another and

they kind of inter-play and jump around, kind of dancing together. It is very interesting to start watching in the mind, how it does that.

[Audience:] When you are with somebody who is really intent on harming somebody else, how do we help them pull themselves out of it?

It depends a lot on your relationship with that person. In some situations, if you try and say anything, it is going to make it worse. Then doing the taking and giving meditation is very good, taking their suffering on yourself, because you can't say anything to them. In other situations, you can say something to somebody, like: "Wow, it must be very painful to be carrying around that kind of resentment," or "What do you think will happen if you act like that? Do you think you will feel good afterwards?" In some situations, you can ask a question or just make a comment.

The worst thing to do is to say: "Don't do that," unless you have an incredibly straightforward relationship with somebody. Sometimes when we are very close to somebody, we can do that. But that kind of relationship does not happen very often. Sometimes, then, it is a matter of focusing on helping the person understand that if they do that, they are going to feel more miserable afterwards; or to help them understand that they are doing that basically because they are hurting inside. Sometimes if they feel listened to, they can actually acknowledge what it is they are feeling, and they lose the interest in retaliation.

Sometimes we can't do anything, so we do the taking and giving. Then say to yourself: "This is what I am like when I get very vengeful; that is exactly how I am".

[Audience:] What are the antidotes to laziness?

Let's go through the three kinds of laziness. What would be an antidote to the first kind of laziness, where you are attached to sleeping and just hanging out doing nothing?

[Audience: Inaudible]

This is why you have to think about death at other times. Don't leave it until the alarm clock goes off to think about death. [laughter] You have to think about it at other times, so when the alarm clock goes off, you will remember the intensity of the feeling.

What else would work?

[Audience:] Contemplating the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

That can give you some kind of oomph.

[Audience: Inaudible]

If you think: "Here I am in this situation where I get born, get sick, get old and die without any control. I have this life in which I can counteract it; but I am not doing anything, so I am going to experience this again and again." Then that can give you some juice. This is very much relating to a perfect human rebirth, where we have our senses intact, our body intact, etc.

What about the second kind of laziness? Busy-ness, running around and involvement in worldly activities. What is a good antidote to that one?

[Audience: Inaudible]

Yes, remembering that you can't take any of them with you when you die. Remembering there is no end to the activities of cyclic existence.

What is the antidote for the third kind of laziness?

[Audience: Inaudible]

Instead of sitting around feeling more and more discouraged, get up and do something for somebody else. That automatically helps. It is not a way of avoiding our own stuff, but a way of recognizing that self-pity is an affliction* and we don't need to sit and feed that into our mindstream. We can do something else. When we have self-pity, we usually tell ourselves that we can't do anything. When we get up and do something for others, we get instant realization that we can do something, because we are doing it.

[Audience: inaudible]

You get discouraged when you think that you haven't gotten anywhere despite having put in a lot of effort into your meditation. Or you haven't gotten where you would like to get. It is quite interesting. We spend ½ hour a day meditating and 23½ hours not meditating and then we wonder why our meditation doesn't progress! [laughter]

What we do in our break time is very important, because if you are completely bananas in your break time—the 23½ hours, it is going to be hard to refocus your mind for that ½ hour of meditation. Whereas if your other 23½ hours are a little bit reasonable, it is going to be easier when you sit down to meditate.

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, can you think of a positive value to discouragement? [Audience speaks.] So you could feel discouraged because what you are doing isn't fulfilling, and that discouragement can motivate you to find something that is more worthwhile. [Audience speaks.] I think there are two things. There is the discouragement or dissatisfaction with what you are doing and then there is how you relate to that discouragement or dissatisfaction. You might feel dissatisfied with what you are doing and relate to it by getting angry at yourself. Or you might feel discouraged and that increases your laziness. Or you might feel discouraged and then recognize: "Oh, this is a problem and I can do something about it."

It is not like the dissatisfaction or the discouragement is good and it is something to be cultivated. If it is there, then the thing to do is: "OK, it is there, but how am I going to react to it? How am going to be influenced by it?"

Also, consider what you are discouraged about. If you are discouraged about samsara, that is very good. [Laughter] But see, being discouraged because we can't make enough money is different from being discouraged about samsara. Being discouraged because you can't make enough money is just a function of attachment. That is being very much stuck in cyclic existence, because that mind is just seeing the antidote as making more money. Whereas feeling discouraged about cyclic existence is recognizing that this situation of banging my head against the wall trying to find happiness externally is a hassle, and I have much more inner potential to use than to keep on doing that.

[Audience: inaudible]

Sometimes it doesn't come because we don't even recognize that our mind is under the influence of an affliction*. That is one of the problems, that we don't even recognize that the mind is full of garbage. The second thing is, even if we recognize it, we don't know what to do about it.

So, it is a thing of training the mind to recognize it. Once we have recognized it, we practice the different things that we can do about it. It becomes a matter of developing some skill. It is like when we familiarize ourselves with the Lamrim - we think about the teachings; then we get some familiarity; and then it becomes much easier for us to relate them to our daily life when different things happen. Whereas if we haven't spent much time thinking about the teachings, then they are not going to come up when we have a difficulty.

The more familiarity you have with the teachings, the more you think about them, the more they make sense. Because you have been contemplating on them, it is more likely that the teachings will come into mind when you go: "Ai ya ya, my mind is completely out of control, what can I think instead? How else can I look at it?"

Sometimes, you just don't have enough familiarity or you are not even aware of what you are feeling. It is like you are all upset and topsy turvy inside but you don't know whether it is attachment or anger or belligerence or grudges. Then what you need to do is to go and sit by yourself; sit, breathe and watch all those different thoughts that are going on at the moment. Try and identify what it is that you were feeling and thinking. You notice what kind of story line you are telling yourself, so that you can at least identify what it is that is going on. Once you have done that, it becomes easier to find the antidote.

It is a thing of learning through our own experience, through trial and error. I remember one of my Dharma friends said to me she has never gotten bored since she started practicing. [Laughter] The mind is so interesting, so you don't get bored anymore.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

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.'

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

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