

The Twelve Links – Part 4 of 5: Explanation of Each Link (lightly edited transcript)
by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 1 Feb 93

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First three links – Review

We have been in the middle of talking about the twelve links. We stopped after the third one. I will recap roughly the first three and then we will go on.

1. Ignorance

We talked about ignorance in the twelve links being specifically the attitude that does not understand who we are, how we exist, or how phenomena exist. That ignorance grasps at the self and at other phenomena as having a solid, permanent, rigid essence that exists from its own side. Due to that ignorance, we generate the afflictions [[‘Afflictions’ is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of ‘disturbing attitudes’](#)] of attachment, anger, pride and jealousy and we act [out of these afflictions].

2. Action or Karma

The action is the second link and is all the mental intentions, mental actions, as well as the physical and verbal actions that we do. Although these actions cease, they leave imprints on our consciousness.

The karma that we are talking about in this second link is throwing karma. Remember when we talked about karma, we talked about throwing karma and completing karma? Throwing karma are the ones that throw us into a specific rebirth and determine what realm we are born into. Completing karma are the karmas that fill in the design. It is as if throwing karma creates the outline of the body and completing karma fills in where you are born, what happens to you in that life and different things like that.

3. Consciousness

The third link of consciousness has two parts: the causal consciousness and the resultant consciousness. The karma (second link) is planted on the causal consciousness. Our actions plant karmic seeds on the consciousness all the time, so the beginnings of many different sets of twelve links already exist because under the influence of ignorance, actions or karma were created and seeds of these actions “placed” upon the causal consciousness. The resultant consciousness is the consciousness at the moment of rebirth. For example, with a good motivation someone is generous. That action or karma places a seed upon her mindstream. That is the moment of the causal consciousness. Later, when that karma ripens and the consciousness is being reborn in the next life, that is the moment of the resultant consciousness.

So that is the review. This is difficult material, even though it is our own experience. That is what is so weird about it; we have done this so many times that we should be sick of it by now. We live this and yet it is real hard to understand.

4. Name and form

The name and form is the fourth link. Remember what ‘name and form’ mean? They mean mind and

body. 'Name' is the mind and 'form' is the body.

Definition: Name and form is the mind (name) and body (form) which exists in the nature of the afflicted maturation result of karma, during the time after the dependently arising link of consciousness has occurred and before the dependently arising link of the six sources has come about.

'Afflicted' means under the influence of afflictions* and karma. 'Maturation result of karma' is sometimes called 'ripening aspect' and refers to the maturation result, the body and mind that we are born into.

Remember when we studied karma, we mentioned that each action had four results? The first one was the maturation result or the ripening result. This is the realm that you are born into. It is afflicted because the rebirth is coming about due to the influence of afflictions* and karma. The resultant consciousness was the moment of conception. Name and form is the next moment right after that, but we have not activated the next link of the six sources yet. So name and form is that little interval, like in the case of a human rebirth, when we are in the womb right after we have taken conception, but we have not developed all of our different capacities to perceive objects.

Right after we took conception, when we were little babies in our mom's womb, we definitely had mental consciousness and we had tactile consciousness. We could feel things. For instance, if your mother goes jogging you can feel it. There are those kinds of sensations. But we are still little babies and the eyes are not working yet, so we cannot see. We cannot smell or taste stuff. So name and form is that little slot in there right after conception.

5. Six sources

The six sources also happen in the womb. Here the six sources mean the six sense doors.

Definition: Six sources are the six organs that exist in the nature of the afflicted maturation result (i.e. the five aggregates) during the time after the dependently arising link of name and form has occurred and before the dependently arising link of the contact has come about.

This is the time when all the senses are developing in the womb. As the eye organ, ear organ, the olfactory and gustatory organs are developing in the womb, we slowly begin to be able to use them either in the womb, or right after we are born. These are the doors because they enable us to contact the external world. These six doors are made up of the five sense doors and the one mental door, which includes all the sense consciousnesses, since these sense consciousnesses act to stimulate the mental consciousness. We think about the things that we see, hear, etcetera.

6. Contact

After the six sources or faculties have developed, contact with external objects occurs.

Definition: Contact is the afflicted mental factor which contacts the quality of its object (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) through its own capability due to the convening of the three—the object, source and consciousness—and which exists during the time after the dependently arising link of six sources has occurred and before the dependently arising link of feeling has come about.

Contact is the arising of the sense consciousness through the object being perceived via the faculty. When I look at the flowers and see the color red, contact is what brings together the red of the flower, the visual faculty and the visual consciousness to produce the perception of red. We do not see anything unless there is an object, a faculty, and a consciousness. Without these three, perception cannot occur.

If you close your eyes, the eye faculty is not working so no visual consciousness arises. If there is no object there, then even if you have the consciousness and your eyes are open, you perceive nothing. In the case of a dead body, the faculty and the object are present, but there is no perception because there is no consciousness. Contact happens when you have those three (an object, a faculty and a consciousness) coming together.

[Audience:] What about if you see something in your imagination or visualize something?

That is the mental consciousness and the faculty in that case would be the different consciousnesses that saw or heard things before that are similar to what you imagine. For example, I see a painting of Chenrezig. That visual consciousness is the faculty producing the mental consciousness that visualizes Chenrezig later, when I sit down to meditate.

The dominant condition for the visual consciousness perceiving the painting is the eye faculty. When you close your eyes to visualize Chenrezig, your eye faculty isn't operative. Thus the dominant condition for the mental consciousness imagining Chenrezig is the previous visual consciousness that saw the painting.

[Audience:] The definitions all start with "the afflicted", is there any concept that is not afflicted?

When we are not under the control of afflictions* and karma, then it is not afflicted. In our state it is as if everything is afflicted. When you think about it, this is pretty heavy stuff. As long as my mind is misperceiving things and giving them extra-added flavor thinking that they are inherently existent, then everything that I am involved in is afflicted in that sense and we are not perceiving things as they are. We are perceiving them through our own filter.

7. Feeling

Definition: Feeling is the afflicted mental factor that experiences the object – suffering, happiness, or indifference – through its own capability by depending on its cause, the dependently arising link of contact.

Feeling is what arises after contact. Contact experiences the quality of the object. Feeling is what experiences a happy, painful, or neutral feeling as a result of the contact. Feeling does not arise if there is no contact that precedes it, and contact does not arise if there is no sense faculty before it.

So if we have sense organs, then we have contact that produces all our consciousnesses. When we have consciousnesses, we automatically get feelings. We see red and the mind gets a pleasurable feeling, or we hear nails going down a chalkboard and we get an unpleasant feeling, or we think of our little toe right now and have a neutral feeling.

[In response to audience:] A lot of our karma ripens in feeling because whenever we have unhappy feelings, it is a result of our own negative karma. Whenever we have happy feelings, it is a result of our own positive karma. Feeling arises because there is contact with the object. Exactly how we experience that contact is afflicted, in the sense that it is influenced by our past karma. We are not experiencing things freshly, but are definitely experiencing them through the influence of our past karma.

[In response to audience:] When you are doing the breathing meditation and something comes up and you label it 'thinking', or 'hearing', or whatever, this labeling is a mental consciousness, a thought consciousness. But while you are doing that you can also observe the pleasant or unpleasant feelings in your body. You do not need to label these and have a little voice in your head that says, "This is pleasant. This is unpleasant." You kind of know it through your own experience.

The advantage of doing that (labeling) when you are meditating is that you make your own experience clear to yourself. When we are not aware of our own experience and we are on automatic, craving quickly follows feeling. Whereas when you are meditating and you have a pleasant feeling, if you notice 'pleasant feeling' then you do not necessarily generate craving after it. You just recognize a pleasant feeling for what it is without the mind jumping in and saying, "But it is so wonderful, I really have to have more."

When you are doing the breathing meditation, labeling helps give you some space between the feeling and the craving. Because usually when we have a pleasant feeling, what happens? Right away we crave it. We want more and better. This is the story of our life, is it not?

8. Craving

From the feeling that can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, we then get the next thing which is craving.

Definition: Craving is the mental factor that by depending on the dependently arising link of feeling, does not wish to separate from its object.

Craving for Sense Pleasure

There are different kinds of craving and it is interesting to look at them. One is the craving for sense pleasure. We have had a pleasant feeling (the preceding link) and now we crave for the pleasure. We have a list of everything we want from hot-fudge sundaes to nice soft beds and hot showers. The mind is very involved in the craving of pleasurable objects and not wanting to be separated from them.

Craving of Fear

The second kind of craving is the craving of fear. The craving of fear is the craving to be free from the unpleasant things. This is the mind that, when you have had a really difficult day, says, "That is it! It is all over! I am getting out of here; nobody bugs me anymore!" We are saying, "I've had enough! I can't stand this anymore. I crave to be separate from it." We want to be released. We want to be free from the unpleasant feeling.

[In response to audience:] I think fear in the sense of when we're afraid of something, we have a lot of aversion for it, and we want to be away from the thing we're afraid of. So the craving of fear is the craving to be free from the unpleasant things.

We are using 'fear' in a very loose, general way, not in our standard Western way of thinking about 'fear'. Fear is real interesting when you start to meditate on it. When you meditate on what fear really is, you come to see fear as related to attachment and also very much related to aversion.

Craving of Life

The third kind of craving is the craving of life. This is the one that happens at death-time. This is the one where a lot of fear comes. People think things like, "Oh-oh, I am dying. I am separating from my body and my mind and my whole ego-structure and this whole identity I built up for myself. What am I going to be?" Panic sets in. They crave for life. They grasp on to this feeling of 'I' because there is a real big fear that the 'I' is going to completely disappear. We are so convinced that the body and mind are one solid, inherent thing that is 'me', but now it is all changing; we are separating from them.

Have you ever woken up in the morning and not been quite sure who you are? Have you ever had that experience? You wake up and not only are you not sure where you are, but you are not sure who you are. Have you ever watched how very quickly an identity comes and you can almost feel it kind of go "wump!" and instantly you know very well who you are. I think what is happening is that we cannot bear the thought of not knowing who we are. We have to have some kind of identity to hold on to. "This is me, I am this sex, I am this nationality and of this race. I have this kind of personality. I like this and I do not like that. People have to treat me this certain way because this is who I am and this is my body." This is the drama of our lives. We are so incredibly attached to this 'I' that is the central figure in our melodrama.

So this third kind of craving arises at death. That is why when people are dying, they may get real frightened and grab on to their body and to the bed. They are really agitated and nervous.

9. Grasping

Then from craving, what we get is grasping. Both craving and grasping are forms of attachment.

Definition: Grasping is attachment which is the strong increase of craving.

When you have gotten craving down really well, you have graduated to grasping [laughter]. Here, we are just clinging on. This happens very strongly at death. It happens at other times in our life like craving does, but especially strongly at death. Whereas craving is very often associated with the present body –

we crave it and we do not want to be separated from it, grasping is grasping at the next body. It is grasping at the appearances that appear to the mind and by grasping at them, it makes the karma ripen and propels us towards the next particular body.

For example, let us say somebody has the karma to be born in one of the life forms of incredible suffering. At death time they might be strongly grasping onto this body. They do not want to separate from it. But they realize that they have to separate from it and then they have an appearance in their mind of a very hot place. At that moment, this hot place seems wonderful. In their mind, it just seems so wonderful so they grasp for it. And then whammo! They take rebirth in the hot hells because the mind is grasping at that.

Remember I mentioned before, how the twelve links are analogous to a dysfunctional relationship? Here you can see that. When you are in a dysfunctional relationship you have an appearance of something that, if you had some wisdom, you would realize was awful. But it is appearing to you as wonderful and you run towards it. Is that not what happens in dysfunctional relationships?

Or to somebody who has a chemical dependency problem, the appearance of the booze or the dope is wonderful and they run toward it and grasp at it. Then what happens? It is complete misery afterwards. This is also what is happening especially at death time. When different appearances come in the mind, we might not be thinking real clear and the mind runs towards these various things. It grasps at them and that grasping becomes a form of grasping at what the next life is going to be.

Four Kinds of Grasping

In general, there are four kinds of grasping. Not all these four kinds ripen at the time of death. This is just a general description of grasping.

Grasping to Sense Pleasure

One kind of grasping is when we are grasping to sense pleasures, to desirable things. This is like craving.

Grasping to the View

The second kind of grasping is called grasping to the view. This is where we are very attached to wrong views. We are very attached to these wrong opinions we have and might say, "There is no such thing as cause and effect. Karma is a bunch of junk, do not tell me about karma and rebirth, these just do not exist and I am completely convinced of this." That is an example of grasping at the view where the mind is super-attached to its own wrong opinion. We are like that, are we not?

When we are talking about attachment to the view, we are talking about important philosophical views like thinking God created the universe. From the Buddhist viewpoint this is a wrong philosophical view. But if you are completely entrenched in that view – God created the universe and there is no other way it came about – that would be attachment to a view. We get real, real attached to our wrong views. Sometimes we feel very threatened by anybody challenging our views and challenging our philosophy. We can even get attached to right views and feel threatened when people challenge them. We can be real attached to our own opinion; "If I think it, it is right."

The attachment to those wrong views can be real damaging. If we think that God created the earth, then it is going to be real hard for us to practice the path to enlightenment, because instead of seeing ourselves as responsible, we might be likely to see God as responsible. I am not saying that Christians cannot create good karma and cannot become enlightened. Do not get me wrong on this. There is as much variety in Christians and what they believe, as in Buddhists...maybe even more. I am saying that if we have this really strong wrong view, this kind of wrong view does not give us the opportunity to free ourselves.

An Example of Wrong View

Let us say there is a particular person who has a strong wrong view and says, "My happiness is completely dependent on God; I do not need to do anything except please God." So they give God some presents (offerings). Some people look at the Buddha in the same way. "I give Buddha some presents and the Buddha should give me some happiness." Or if they do not believe in cause and effect they might think, "Oh it does not matter what I do. I can do what I want as long as when I lie, it does not hurt anyone. Then it is not going to have any effect on my mind. When I use really cruel words, if nobody

else is around, it is not going to affect my mind.” Not believing in cause and effect is a wrong view.

Grasping to the Self

Another kind of grasping is grasping to the self. This is also called grasping to the doctrine. This is a really strong pride or grasping at a true existence of a person, or at a true existence of phenomena. It is thinking, “Things are solid. There is ‘me’ inside this body. I am fully convinced there is a ‘me’. There is my body and there is my mind and everything is real solid.”

Grasping to Wrong Ethics and Conduct

The fourth kind of grasping is grasping to wrong ethics and conduct. This is thinking that things that do not have the capacity to produce liberation do produce liberation. So here you get all the funny paths that people teach.

Examples of Wrong Ethics

Buddhists are always very quick to point out this one story that they love to tell. It is about some ascetic in India who had some kind of clairvoyance. But his clairvoyance was limited; it was not perfect clairvoyance like the Buddha’s; it was limited clairvoyance. He saw that in his previous life he had been a dog and since he is a human being in this life, he drew the mistaken conclusion that acting like a dog creates the cause to be reborn human. Since he wanted to be reborn again as a human in the future life, he started acting like a dog.

This is why you have to be very careful of people who say they have clairvoyant powers. People can have limited clairvoyance and it does not give you the complete story. Acting like a dog is not a cause to become a human being, even though that person may have been a dog in the rebirth before they became a human being. It is different causes that create a human rebirth. So that mistaken belief causes wrong conduct.

More examples of wrong ethics and wrong conduct is thinking that if you walk across hot coals or bathe yourself in holy water, you are going to purify your negative karma. Or if you are Jim Jones’ follower, thinking that if you follow him perfectly and take poison, you are going to attain liberation. Even grasping to ascetic practices, grasping and thinking, “If I fast long enough, I am going to purify myself,” is wrong ethics.

All you need to do is pick up a new age magazine and you will see lots of these different kinds of things – attachment to the view, attachment to the doctrine, attachment to wrong ethics and practices. Do you remember when we were studying about the afflictions* and we were talking about the root afflictions*? Do you remember we covered these things? These are coming up again here.

Craving and Grasping at Death

When craving and grasping arise at death time, they act as the water and fertilizer to make the karmic seed ripen. Let us say that during life I had great faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and I made an offering on the altar and prayed to become enlightened and prayed for a good rebirth. I still had ignorance at that time because I was still grasping at my self, the apple offering and the Buddha as inherently existent. But I created karma and it was virtuous karma because it was the karma of generosity.

That karma, that imprint, was put on my consciousness. At the time of my death, craving and grasping arise – craving for this body, grasping for the next – but I manage to think of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as I am dying. I think of this because I have lots of Dharma friends around me who were not letting me forget; they are all chanting or giving me instructions or showing me pictures of the Buddha, or something like that. Craving and grasping arise and I am still grasping very much at this ‘I’, but my mind is in a positive state. Maybe I have a nice vision coming and my craving and grasping wind up nourishing this seed in the mindstream of having made the offering to the Buddha in the past. So that karmic seed is now nourished by the craving and grasping and is ready to take the next rebirth. This is the tenth link of becoming.

[Audience:] Does everybody die with craving and grasping?

In general, when we develop the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, we will not crave and grasp at the time of death. Then no karma gets activated for another rebirth. For this reason, one point where we can

cut the twelve links is at the time of death, by craving and grasping having ceased. Aryas of the hearer and solitary realizer vehicles have some slight craving and grasping that cause virtuous karma to ripen. They direct their minds so a good rebirth occurs, continue to practice, and attain liberation. Arya bodhisattvas may have some subtle craving and grasping, but due to their realizations they are no longer born enmeshed in samsara, although they are not yet completely free from it either. Their consciousness may be reborn in a pure land for aryas or, out of compassion, they may create many manifestations in samsaric realms to benefit sentient beings.

[In response to audience:] Grasping arises from the craving, so at death time if you are able to focus on emptiness, you will cut the craving and the grasping. At death time we may not be able to focus on emptiness, but we may be able to lessen our craving and make it less strong. We may be able to make the mind more relaxed, which gives the opportunity at least for some positive karma to ripen.

10. Becoming

Definition: Becoming (existence) is the factor existing in the nature of the maturation aggregates (the body and mind of the future life) bound by afflictions*, which is the potentiality of karma made stronger by its craving and grasping.

This is when the karmic seed is just ready to ripen, right before you go into your next life.

An Example of Becoming

Let us say there is somebody who was into killing wild life on the planet and did not care at all about their action. They have the ignorance and the karma of doing the killing, and that seed is planted on the mindstream. At death time they have craving and grasping and due to the environment they are dying in, or due to the way they are thinking, this karma of having killed all this wildlife on the planet without caring two beans, ripens.

An example of how they are influenced by the environment is, for example, dying to 'L.A. Law' on the television in the hospital. How often in the hospitals, people die listening to 'L.A. Law' on the television! 'L.A. Law' is on with all these violence, and this makes the person dying think violent thoughts. When we watch these things, that is how we begin to think, is it not? We need to be real careful what we watch on TV.

So to go back to the example, the person is dying while watching the violence on TV, and they start thinking violently and generate craving and grasping. Then the karma of having killed all the wildlife ripens. They might have some appearance of all these animals and it appears really nice so they grasp at it, and whammo, they are reborn as a calf and put into a veal cage.

[In response to audience:] I would not like to use the word 'deserve' regarding rebirth. Let us say someone creates one set of twelve links because he gets angry and he speaks harshly. But he also helps an old lady carry some packages, so he creates some good karma. Then five minutes later, he is telling somebody off again and another five minutes later, he is making an offering on the altar. After another five minutes he is saying the Four Immeasurables and then later he is lying to somebody [laughter]. This is kind of the way it is, is it not? So he has created the first two and a half links (ignorance, karma and causal consciousness) of many different sets of twelve links. They are all resting on his mindstream.

Let's say he is flying to India and the plane gets hijacked. The hijackers torture him and his mind is completely bananas and berserk. The craving and grasping at that time activates the karma, let us say, from a time when he lied to somebody with a manipulative motivation. That karma gets activated and his consciousness takes rebirth in a dog's body. His consciousness still carries the first two and a half links of the twelve links from actions he did while he was a human being.

Then when the dog is dying, a Dharma practitioner is present and gives him a nectar pill, recites mantra, reads Dharma out loud, and instructs the dog to take a human rebirth. As a result, the dog is calm and has a positive frame of mind. The craving and grasping at that time activate the karma from when he helped the old lady carry the packages. The consciousness is reborn as a human again. Becoming is when that karma is just ready to produce the next rebirth.

11. Rebirth

Definition: Rebirth is the aggregates existing in the nature of the maturation aggregates bound by afflictions* and joined to a new life in cyclic existence under the control of afflictions* and karma.

Rebirth is the body and mind at the time of conception.

12. Aging and death

From rebirth, you get the next link, which is aging and death.

Definition: Aging is the body which decays by being under the control of afflictions* and karma; death is the cessation of a similar type of mental and physical aggregates; that is, the mind separating from the body under the control of afflictions* and karma.

Birth is when you are conceived in the womb. Right after that, you have aging and death. That is an interesting way to think of life because when we think of children we do not usually think of them as aging, do we? We think of them as growing. But in actual fact, from the time that we were conceived in our mom's womb, we have been dying the whole time. We are in the process of aging and it leads to death.

This is going on during our whole life, but we do not see it. We always think that aging and death are things that happen to other people, or if they are going to happen to me, they are going to happen a way long time from now. But in actual fact, from the very moment after conception, we have been in the process of heading towards death.

So the whole impetus in this process is that it is all under the influence of afflictions* and karma. In other words, we are all on automatic, so to speak. Whenever our minds are under the influence of afflictions* and the karma, we are running, running, running, thinking we are finding happiness, thinking what we are doing is fantastic and yet in actual fact, our minds are just completely on automatic and under the influence of the afflictions* and karma. We are not really free at all. We make a big deal about being free in America. We think we have so much freedom, but we do not have freedom from our own anger, we do not have freedom from our own attachment, jealousy, pride, laziness or wrong views. We are not really free at all.

Questions and answers

[In response to audience:] At least the first few links are happening with great rapidity. Each day with the ignorance, the karma and the causal consciousness we are starting many new sets of twelve links. But while I am alive today, I am just experiencing the one link in one set of twelve links, the aging.

[In response to audience:] It is not like we are only experiencing one set of twelve links at a time. We have many, many sets that can overlap and link. For example, in this lifetime I am experiencing the rebirth, aging and death of one set of twelve links from karma that I did fifteen million eons ago. At the same time, I am creating the ignorance, karma and causal consciousness of many new sets of twelve links. It is kind of mind-blowing, but when I go through this next time, you will see a little bit clearer how they fit together. That is one of the reasons they are called links, because things are linked together and interrelated.

[In response to audience:] The body is always changing. If we look at the body in this lifetime, we are looking at the link of aging and death. Our body, from the time after conception until we die, is one link of aging and death of one set of twelve links. But within that, the body is changing moment to moment to moment. What is aging? Aging is that which existed in one moment, but does not exist in the next moment. So like you said, everything is re-generating and changing, changing, changing.

The Wisdom of Emptiness

[In response to audience:] Only the wisdom realizing emptiness cuts the continuity of the afflictions*. In other words, we can have greater or lesser moments of afflictions* throughout our lifetime because we

have moments where we are much clearer and other moments when our mind is really bananas. Sometimes during moments when our mind is bananas we might think that we are really clear, but actually we are not clear. Have you ever had a time when you thought you were being real clear and then two days later you look back and thought, 'Boy, was I messed up!'

So we can have moments of greater or lesser clarity on a relative level, but still, all that is often done within the grasping at inherent existence. We are still thinking, "I am a real thing and what I am experiencing is real, solid and here." The ignorance is grasping at something that is non-existent as existent and is making everything very solid in our minds. The wisdom realizing emptiness is the thing that cuts the ignorance. It is seeing that all these solid concrete things our ignorance is grasping at as existing, in fact do not exist as solid and concrete. That is what cuts the continuity of the afflictions [Note: 'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'delusions']. That is what the wisdom does.

To develop wisdom, we start by hearing teachings so that we can learn from other people what does exist and what does not exist. Then we have to contemplate it, think about it, reflect on it, see if it makes sense. We try to understand what inherent existence is so that we can know what it is we are negating. Then we have to meditate and make that part of our own experience. Understanding emptiness is not a thing of just sitting and clearing your mind of all thoughts.

[In response to audience:] You might have great concentration and you might have removed all the discursive thoughts, but you still have this very innate sense of 'me' and there is probably a lot of grasping at the bliss of the concentration. We get tricked by the bliss.

Importance of meditating on the twelve links

This is really important stuff to meditate on because it gives us a way of understanding what our experience is and it helps us break down our notion of self. We need to do this because we have a very strong notion of self. We think, "This is me. This is who I am. These are important things in my life. This is the way things are." When you start meditating on the twelve links your sense of self changes because you begin to realize, "I am only in this body and in this mind because the causes for it have been created. If the causes had not been created, there would not be this body and this mind and this identity that is happening right now. This identity that I have right now is not going to last forever. When I die and leave this body and mind different karmas are going to ripen and I will wind up in a different place."

So if you really reflect on this, it helps you loosen up the grasping at self and the grasping specifically at 'who I am right now.' It also helps you have a really different attitude toward what you consider problems. The things that we usually get so bound up with as problems pale very much in comparison to this whole problem of being under the influence of the afflictions* and karma. So when we really know that that is the real problem, then all the little headaches we experience today do not bug us so much anymore.

If you spend time thinking about this it gives you a whole different way of looking at your life and feeling about things. This is not just intellectual stuff. It is real interesting to think about this as, "Here I am experiencing the aging and death in one set of twelve links. I have experienced the birth of this twelve links because I had craving and grasping at the end of my last lifetime. I had created karma that ripened at the end of my last lifetime and that is how I got here."

We are karmic creations. Sounds like a new line of clothes, Karmic Creations [laughter]. But that is really what we are. It is not like we are solid personalities that are real; we are just manifestations of karma. It is a matter of "Come, come – Go, go" as Lama Yeshe used to say.

Let us just 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'