

**Fourth Noble Truth: Becoming Convinced of the Nature of the Path to Enlightenment –
Part 2 of 2 (lightly edited transcript)
by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 15 Feb 93**

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Review of points covered in Part 1

To review what we talked about in the last session, we said that to break out of samsara, the best kind of body to do this with was a precious human life because with this particular body, this particular intelligence that we have as a human being, we have the greatest possibility for generating the realizations of the path. So our present situation is very fortunate, very rare, and very excellent. Next time you start complaining about something, remind yourself of this. [laughter]

Then the path to free us from cyclic existence is the path of ethics, concentration and wisdom. Wisdom is needed because that is the thing that actually cuts the ignorance, by seeing that the object that ignorance thinks exists doesn't exist at all. Wisdom sees that there is no elephant in the room, so you don't need to be afraid of an elephant. That is why wisdom is so important, because it's able to see that the inherently existent objects that our ignorance, attachment and anger grasp onto do not really exist at all and as a result, it dissolves those afflictions².

In order to generate wisdom, we need to be able to analyze what exists and what doesn't exist, and we need to be able to hold our attention on whatever conclusion we get. We need to have some concentration, because it's difficult to keep your mind on something when it's roaming all over the place. If you can't keep your mind steady, then it becomes very difficult to meditate and to hold your mind on the conclusions that you get, as well as to keep your mind even on a line of reasoning long enough to get to the end of it.

To have concentration, which is a mental stability, we need to first develop this stability in our verbal and physical actions. The mind is much more difficult to control than the body and speech, so if we want to control the mind through concentration, we need to start training with what is easier, which is doing something about how we speak and act towards others. That is the higher training in ethics.

Training in ethics is an important thing to remember because you see many people who don't want to act ethically but they want to meditate and gain concentration. But how are you going to control the mind and subdue the mind if you can't even do what's easier, which is to control the verbal and physical actions, and realize that our verbal and physical actions are motivated by the mind. It's like first the mind has the intention, then we speak, then we act. There is this delayed process going on. Ultimately we have to control the mind, but because it's much easier to control what we say and do, we start with that

and then having controlled that, then we begin to be able to do something with the mind and its motivations.

'Control' is a touchy word, because in America we think of control as: "This person is controlling." "I've got to control this!" -- like putting a noose around something and holding it and now it's controlled. But when we are talking about controlling our mind or controlling our actions, it isn't putting a straightjacket on. We have to be very clear about this because a lot of our subtle preconceptions about words sneak in and influence our understanding even though we are not aware of it. So we're not trying to put a straightjacket on our mind. We're not trying to make ourselves completely tight; more tied up in knots than we already are. [laughter]

'Control' means letting go of the things that tie up our knots so that we can be a little bit peaceful, because our mind is quite tied up in knots already. So when I say, "Let go of those knots," it does not mean act them out and do whatever you want, but to untie the knots of jealousy, pride and so on, let them go. Maybe rather than say 'control' the mind or 'control' the speech and body, you can say 'manage'. Of course, 'manage' is another loaded English word [laughter]. Somehow, you get the feeling of what I'm saying?

Returning to the specifics of the higher training of ethics, it meant abandoning the ten destructive actions. Specifically, if you can keep the five lay precepts or the vows of a novice or fully ordained monastic, then that's very good for doing the higher training of ethics. We started talking about the advantages of doing that in the last teaching.

Advantages of observing the higher training in ethics

1. We will maintain the Buddha's teachings as a living tradition

We have said that the first advantage was that we will maintain the Buddha's teachings as a living tradition. Here we discussed how the Buddha, at the time he passed away, said, "After I passed away, look at the pratimoksha, the Vinaya, as your teaching." In other words, he was referring to the higher training of ethics as the basic thing to look for as his teaching after he passed away. So, we maintain the Buddha's teachings as a living tradition when we live in ethical conduct.

2. We will become a vessel for holding the bodhisattva and the tantric vows

The second advantage we will have by keeping ethics is we will become a vessel for holding the bodhisattva and the tantric vows. The pratimoksha vows – the five lay precepts or the monks' and nuns' vows – are specifically to help tame our body and speech. The bodhisattva vows are specifically to help free ourselves from the self-centeredness, so that's taming the mind. And then the tantric vows are to help free us from dual appearance, which is a very subtle taming of the mind.

So it's a progressive thing, and to be a good vessel, not a leaky one or a punctured one [laughter] or an upside-down one, one that can hold the bodhisattva vows or hold the tantric vows, then it's good to have trained in the pratimoksha vows beforehand. This is because they're much easier to keep than the bodhisattva vows and the tantric vows. The pratimoksha vows, like your five precepts, they have to do with body and speech, whereas the bodhisattva and tantric vows are dealing with the mind.

Now again, I'm pointing this out because you will see many people in America don't want to take the five lay precepts, but they sure want bodhisattva and especially tantric vows. "Let's collect tantric initiations and tantric vows!" They don't have much understanding of what the vows are all about, or they have a weakened capacity to hold them because of not having some training in the things which are easier, like the five precepts. The way to build yourself up so that your practice can kind of grow in an organic way is to start with the five precepts, get used to them, then take the bodhisattva vows, get used to them, then take the tantric vows and get used to them. Then things kind of build up and fill you up in a nice, comfortable way.

These days, it's kind of happening like that – where people just plunge into taking the higher level vows. I think because many times, people come in very excited and they want high practices, and the teachers, from their side, figure, "Well, better plant some seeds in their mind and give them some karmic connection, and then in a few lifetimes, it will ripen." And so I think they do it to put seeds in people's mind even though people aren't properly prepared to do the actual practice, and to somehow also

inspire the people maybe to go back to the beginning. Like if you get something high, then maybe it inspires you to go back to the beginning and do the things so that you can get up to where you thought you were before. [laughter] So I think it happens like that sometimes.

[In response to audience question:] There are four classes of tantra. When you take initiation into the lowest two classes, often you take the bodhisattva vows then. And in the higher two classes, you take bodhisattva and tantric vows. You don't just get vows by sitting somewhere. They're actually given in a ceremony. So you know what you're going into before you do it and then you can understand what's happening.

Understanding the meaning of 'vows' in the context of Buddhism

Here also, I should say, don't be afraid of vows. Again, we are importing our Judeo-Christian meaning here, aren't we? You see, what is good to do is that when our mind reacts to the Dharma, instead of thinking it's the Dharma that causes it, start looking at what our preconceptions are. How come we get so nervous about vows? What is our understanding of vows? In the Jewish tradition, there are more than six hundred vows that you're supposed to keep. In Christianity, there's poverty, chastity and obedience, and then all the vows. We've somehow in our culture made everything really heavy – if you don't keep vows, you are a sinner and you know what happens to you if you are a sinner.

We come into Buddhism with this same, very tight attitude about fear and guilt and failure and not being good enough. That is something we're importing to Buddhism. That's not coming from Buddhism. Vows are just things to help us. They are guidelines to follow. Nobody's saying, "Thou shall not do this!" Nobody is imposing it on you. Rather, you're saying, "I want to develop my mind. If I keep doing this [negative action], I'm not going to be able to grow in the direction I want to grow in. So I think I'd better change. What kinds of ways do I want to change in?" So you look at the vows, and say, "Oh yeah, these are the kind of things I want to develop." In that way, you see the vows as a companion on the path, as something that's going to help you and aid you and nurture you and free you. And again, we take them because we can't keep them purely. If we could keep them purely, we don't need them!

Last week when I was in St. Louis at this Catholic high school, one of the kids asked, "What happens if you break a vow?" I'm not sure whether he was expecting me to say, "Well, you know, hell looks like this... You get a direct Metro ticket there on the express bus." [laughter] In Buddhism, what happens if you break a vow? You use it as a tool to look at your own mind and what is happening with you as a way to understand and improve, and then you do some purification. So it's a very different attitude. We have to be clear here, not import our old attitudes.

3. We will become a living example to inspire others

The third advantage of ethics is that we will become a living example to inspire others. "Who, me? I'm going to be an example that inspires others? Inspires them to do what?"

It is important to give ourselves credit for the vows that we hold, for the precepts or the guidelines that we live according to, because it does have an inspiring influence on other people. Like I have said before, the fact that you as one person keeps the precept not to kill, means that every single living being on this planet doesn't have to fear for their life around you. That is inspiring.

Or if you don't steal, that means five billion human beings and I don't know how many billions of animals and insects, do not have to worry about their possessions. The same goes with lying and unwise sexual behavior and taking intoxicants. Just by settling our life down, it becomes a safety mechanism for other people to feel safe around us. So we're contributing to world peace, contributing to harmony in the society just by being one person keeping precepts. And so that inspires other people. It not only makes them feel safe, but it also inspires them to become like you.

You can also recall, in your own evolution in becoming a Dharma student, what was it that inspired you? What kind of people did you come into contact with that you said, "Hm... these people seem to have something in them, I think I'll like to be with them" ?

Somebody went to a retreat at Cloud Mountain [Retreat Center] because they met a couple of people from the group and these people were so nice that they figured, "Gee, if I went on retreat, I might become nice like them too!" [laughter]

In lots of ways, you don't have to try to be an example, but just by living ethically, automatically you become one. I think it's difficult if we try and be a good example to others, because I know whenever I try and be a good example, it's like... "Forget it!" I was thinking about my teachers, I don't think they try to be a role model or try to be a good example, but just by doing their practice, they become one.

Often, we don't realize how we benefit others by keeping good ethics, or just by being friendly, happy, cheerful people, or by welcoming other people. Somebody new comes into the group, and you're friendly and happy and welcoming and show them around. Small things like these that show that we're putting the teachings into practice can really influence others in many, many ways.

Just yesterday, one woman who had been sick called one person in our group just to talk to her, and that person cheered her up and that inspired her to come to the session last night. So we can benefit others in many ways. Just look at His Holiness and how inspiring he is. What is it that inspires us about His Holiness? His compassion. And the root of compassion is non-harmfulness, not harming others, which is ethics. Also, it's good to give ourselves credit for what we do and to aspire to do more because we can see benefits like this that accrue for both ourselves and others.

Even when you blow it, even when you completely demolish your ethics because you totally lost control [laughter], by the process of figuring out why we did that, and how we can counteract that in future, we can inspire other people. Because then they can see that they can do it too.

Look at Milarepa. He came to the Dharma having killed thirty-five people! When you talk about botching it, killing thirty-five people is pretty heavy karma! And yet if you look historically, he is somebody who has inspired so many people. Why? Because he was able to look back at what he did, sort it out and purify it, and forgive himself and grow. So even in the mistakes we make, there can still be benefit for self and others.

4. We will uphold the insight Dharma

The fourth advantage of keeping ethics is that we will uphold the insight Dharma. We have what's called the Dharma of insight and the Dharma of doctrine. Sometimes it's called realizational Dharma and verbal Dharma. There're different ways of translating it. The Dharma of doctrine are the teachings, the intellectual understanding of the teachings and the words of the teachings. You uphold those as you study and as you teach. The Dharma of insight is the actual practice. When you abide in ethical conduct, you are practicing. Your precepts become that Dharma of insight. And so you're able to uphold that Dharma of insight.

It's funny because we sometimes don't think of precepts or vows as insights into the path. And yet they are, aren't they? These are actual things that we are doing, understandings that we are gaining, ways of practicing. So we uphold all the teachings of insight. And this is what makes the Dharma flourish. When the realizations of the path, the practice of the path, the integration of the path into our life is alive in human beings' consciousness, that's the Dharma flourishing. Building a big huge temple is not the Dharma flourishing. Because you can have an enormous temple and millions of dollars spent on statues and stuff, but nobody goes there and nobody keeps precepts and nobody studies. When we pray for the Buddha's teachings to flourish, the principal way they flourish is by our practice. The temples and the buildings and the statues and all the external things, these are aids. They are tools and ways of making the practice of the Dharma easier, but they aren't the Dharma flourishing in and of themselves.

I saw this quite clearly when I was in Singapore. There was one temple there, which was huge. This temple was so rich. (We had a little bitty struggling group, completely poor.) The prayer room was just enormous, with huge statues. It was in a separate building, and I used to go there and lead camps for the university and the polytechnic students. They also had a big kitchen and the monks' quarters and beautiful landscape and a pond where you can liberate animals. They only had maybe three monks living there. The lay people who came, mostly came on Sundays to do a little bit of chanting and to offer money. But in terms of what you people are doing, giving your time and coming for teachings on a regular basis and doing regular practice and going to retreats, very few people were doing that.

So that always made me feel really sad. I used to go in the main temple room and think, "Wouldn't it be incredible to have His Holiness here and the whole room packed?" When they did special ceremonies, for example on the Buddha's birthday, then many people would come, and people would come on Sundays to do some chanting, but what you people are doing in terms of learning and understanding,

thinking and looking at your own mind and working with the teachings, what you're doing is really making the Dharma flourish. So again, it's important to remember that, it's something to rejoice at. [Note: the situation has since changed and there are many Dharma activities and people practicing there now.]

5. It is especially beneficial in degenerate times

The fifth advantage of keeping the higher training in ethics, is that it is especially beneficial in this degenerate time. Times are very degenerate, and they say because of this, when we compare holding one precept now versus holding the entire monastic ordination at the time of the Buddha, the merit you get from holding one precept now is greater, because the times now are more degenerate. In other words, at the time of the Buddha, it was much easier to keep precepts. People's minds, the society and the whole atmosphere made it very easy to practice.

But in the degenerate times, we have so many obstacles, both internal and external. When we succeed in keeping even one precept now, it's much more noteworthy and valuable. You create much more positive potential than somebody who kept the whole ordination at the time of the Buddha. It's very surprising, isn't it? So it's important to remember that. And then also, to remember that keeping even one precept creates more positive potential, more merit than making offerings to all of the Buddhas for eons. This might seem rather shocking -- how come keeping one precept is more valuable than making huge elaborate offerings to all the Buddhas for eons? This is because it's much more difficult to keep precepts, and because when you keep precepts, you're really taming your mind. You're really working with your mind and putting things into practice. So there's a very strong influence on your mindstream.

Advice for keeping our ethics well

In order to keep our ethics very well, they usually give some suggestions at this point, particularly to monastic people, like not to do business unless you have debts. This is a difficult thing. Actually, monastics shouldn't be doing business, but then the way the society is, it has become extremely difficult. You look, even in old Tibet, the monasteries -- this doesn't mean every person in the monastery did business -- but the monasteries themselves did business and they owned land and they sold things and so on. Therefore, while the actual way is it is better not to do business, you have to see what's happening in the society and how you can survive.

See, this is part of the degenerate time. It doesn't look too good when monastics go and do business and they're bargaining and dealing and everything like that. And yet... for example, I've known many Westerners, they take vows, but there is no system of support for monastics established in the West like there is in Thailand or China, and so the people have no choice but to go out and get a job and work. As Dharma develops in the West, I think it's something to think about. If we want to keep the monastic tradition alive in as pure a fashion as we can, we have to try and set up ways so that people don't have to do business and don't have to put on lay clothes and roll their hair out and go downtown and work.

Monastics are also not supposed to seek sponsors out of greed. Very often, monastics need to seek sponsors, and it's a really touchy one if you try and get sponsors and your mind is being greedy and manipulative and wanting more and not being satisfied. These are the kinds of things that make ethics deteriorate.

Then just some general advice for all of us to help us have good ethics, is to have the minimal number of possessions, in other words, not have our house chock-a-block full of things. Why? Because the fewer things we have, the less things we need to worry about.

It is true; we live in a very complicated society. At the time of the Buddha, you didn't need a computer and a car and a telephone. Nowadays, almost just to live in the society, these are things that you need. But the thing is, what are things that we need just to function in a normal way with a good motivation, and what are things that we don't need that we're accumulating because we want more and better? The fuller our house is with things (because we want more and we want better and we have to upgrade this and do that), the more complicated our life becomes. As much as you can simplify your life in terms of possessions, it just makes your ethical conduct that much easier, and your life that much easier actually.

In a similar way, as much as you can, simplify your social life. Now, I'm not telling people to cut off all relationships, go home every night and lock yourself in your room and pretend it's a cave. [laughter] I'm not encouraging this. But rather, to deal with the mind that always has to keep busy. The mind that has to go to this party and has to see this person. Has to talk to that person. Has to socialize. Wants to see

this movie and that dance, that theatre performance, concert etc. Our life just becomes incredibly complicated. As much as you can make your life simple and select only the things that are important for you, then you will have less stress and as a result, your ethical conduct improves.

Simple life. It's something to think about, especially in American society. I think one important way to have a simple life – we talked about this before – is to not have too much contact with the media. This is because our mind is so swayed by the media. This is a discipline in itself. Can you imagine the Buddha coming now making another monastic vow – you can only read the front page of the newspapers; you can't read anything else. You can watch fifteen minutes of news and nothing else. [laughter] Just to make sure that the life stays simple.

So basically, just to have the possessions that we need. Again, I'm not saying go on deprivation, but just have what you need and get rid of everything else. Maintain your friendships and things, but you don't have to be the socialite of Seattle. Keep some quiet time. When you do get things, you don't have to get the best quality of stuff, you can get what's adequate. You don't need the absolute best quality of everything. Keep the place where you live neat and clean, without tons of junk all around. I know I sound like your mother [laughter]. But my teachers told us this, and I think there is a lot of value in it. I know for myself, when I simplify my life and keep the place I live in relatively neat and tidy, it affects my mind. It just makes life a whole lot easier. The basic thing is to cultivate an attitude of contentment. The way to help us to be happy human beings as well as to keep good ethics, is to cultivate contentment, "What I have is good enough. It's okay."

Disadvantages of not observing ethics

The next outline¹ is the disadvantages of not observing ethics.

The disadvantages of not observing ethics is that you don't get all the benefits from observing them. Plus, your life just becomes a mess. You read in the newspapers how these big important people's careers crashed, and so much of that was due to basic ethical violations. Even if you don't consider future lives, bad ethics just makes a disaster of our current life. It creates so much confusion.

I talked to one man just a few days ago. It was funny. I had just been going over karma and talking about the ten non-virtues at this place. We were talking and I asked him how his girlfriend was, and he said, "Well, our relationship isn't going well because actually, I went off with another woman and it happened just like what you said in the teachings. You said it was disadvantageous because it made a mess in your life and you're right." [laughter] His life has been in a mess for the last six months just because of this thing. And he owns it. He says it was his own fault, and you can see how much suffering he's having, let alone his girlfriend and everybody else involved.

Just in things like this, you can look around and see that when we don't keep good ethics, our minds and our lives fall into disarray and we cause a lot of harm to others and we feel guilty about it. That's how we generate guilt, because we act negatively. So one way to get rid of guilt is to abandon the ten destructive actions.

Furthermore, even if we practice tantra without any kind of basic foundations in ethics, our practice isn't going to get anywhere. Even if you grab for something high and wonderful, "The highest teachings. I'm going to meditate on bliss and voidness." "I'm going to meditate on Dzogchen." "I'm going to meditate on Mahamudra." But if we can't do the basic practice, as much as we squeeze our mind to gain realizations, it's going to be really difficult. This is because the mind won't be fertile.

The whole conclusion is when we see the benefits of keeping ethics and we see the disadvantages of not doing it, then it becomes something that we *want* to do. It will not be something that we *have* to do or something the teacher said you *should* do, or something the Buddha said you *ought* to do, because otherwise you're not going to be good or you won't get realizations. We have to really look at the situation clearly -- "This happens if I do it and this happens if I don't. So what's really good for me? What's really good for the society?" -- and draw our own conclusion. What is really important in all these teachings that are given, is that you really go home and think about them and come to your own conclusion. The teachings aren't 'should's and 'ought to's and 'you'd better's, and these kinds of things. They're things for you to contemplate so you can gain your own understanding, because it's only by

understanding that, that our practice becomes 'tasty'.

Four factors that lead us away from pure ethics

There is also another thing to talk about here that's not listed directly in your outline¹. There are four factors that lead us away from pure ethics. These four are important to know because if we see the advantages of ethics and the disadvantages of not living ethically, then we want to know how to practice ethics well? What are the pitfalls to avoid?

1. Ignorance

The first of these four factors is ignorance. This means specifically, ignorance of what the vows are, and what negative and positive actions are. When we don't know the difference between positive and negative actions, it's going to be difficult to cultivate one and abandon the other. When we take vows but we don't ask for teachings on the vows, or we don't receive teachings, then it's going to be difficult to know how to keep the vows and what constitutes keeping the vows and what constitutes breaking them. Ignorance is a door through which our ethics degenerate, simply because we don't know.

The way to counteract this, is to have teachings – to listen to teachings, to read books, to study, to ask questions. In other words, to learn what are constructive actions, what are destructive ones. To receive teachings on your five lay precepts, to learn what constitutes breaking the precept from the root and what constitutes an infraction.

What constitutes breaking the five precepts from the root?

How do you break the five lay precepts from the root? Breaking it from the root means that you have really botched it. When you break the vow from the root, then that ordination becomes like ashes. It becomes ineffective.

For example, the precept of killing. How do you break it from the root, a serious break so that your lay precept becomes like ashes? If you kill a goat, is that breaking this vow from the root? No. You break it from the root when you kill a human being with all those factors [that were explained in previous sessions on karma] – you have the intention, it's not an accident, you want to kill this one and not the other one, and you do it and you feel good about it. If you kill a goat, it's definitely an infraction of the vow. It's negative karma. But your whole lay ordination doesn't crumble to ashes and it's not as serious karmically as killing a human being...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

...With lying, breaking it from the root is to lie about your spiritual attainments. Deceiving somebody in spiritual terms, so that they think that you're some kind of high, realized being when in fact you're not. The reason why this is said to be breaking it from the root is because this is very damaging to other people. If we lie about our spiritual attainments and other people think we're some great bodhisattva or something, but we are not, we can really damage that person.

For example, you did some small favor for somebody, then they told you, "Oh you are so kind. You must be a bodhisattva." And you go, "Um Hm [agreeing]." [laughter] Or you kind of go around saying, "I realized bliss and emptiness." "I entered samadhi." Making these kinds of public statements. Look at Genla [Gen Lamrimpa]. Genla is such a good example [of a good practitioner]. He has been meditating for years. He has incredible meditation experience. What does he say? "Oh, this is what the holy beings do," kind of, "I don't know. I don't have any realizations." Genla is just really humble and a very good example.

With the drinking one, I'm not really sure what constitutes breaking it from the root. I do know that the Buddha said that his followers shouldn't take even one drop. But I'm not sure if one drop would be breaking it from the root or not. My assumption would be if one gets completely loaded.

With the intoxicants precept, it's not only the alcohol. It's also cigarettes and other intoxicating things.

[Audience:] What do we do when alcohol is passed around during the tsog puja?

You're supposed to stick your little finger in and take a drop. There is one puja called the tsog puja, and they have a little bit of meat and alcohol. The thing is when you do this puja, in your meditation you dissolve these things into emptiness, and generate them as pure substances, and then later when they're passed around, you taste a little bit of both, looking at them as pure substances because you've done this meditation. Still when you do this, you take just a little piece of what looks like meat and you dip your finger in the alcohol and take a drop. At least that's the way my teachers have taught us. Other teachers might do it differently. At that time when you are doing it, you are not seeing it as ordinary alcohol, because you have done this whole meditation process of transformation and seeing things as pure.

So, the first door leading to the downfall is ignorance, not knowing what the precepts are and not knowing how we break it from the root, not knowing what the ten destructive actions are, not knowing that we need four factors in order to complete a negative action perfectly. We spent a lot of time in previous sessions going over karma and the four factors necessary for each negative action. That isn't just a legalistic pickiness. It's giving us information on how to look at our own actions, to see how serious our action is. It's to give us an idea of how to act constructively as well.

2. Disrespect

The second door that leads us away from pure ethics is disrespect – disrespect for the Buddha's doctrine, disrespect for our own precepts, disrespect for sentient beings. It can sometimes be a very proud attitude, like I just don't care. It's like, "Who's the Buddha to give all these guidelines? Why do I need to follow them? What am I going to get out of it? Why shouldn't I harm these other sentient beings? He's a real idiot!" [laughter] This kind of disrespect for the teachings, for others, for ethics itself. It's clear, when you don't respect ethics, it becomes more difficult to live ethically.

The antidote is to reflect on the qualities and the kindness of the Buddha, to reflect on the advantages of keeping ethics and the disadvantages of not, and to develop friendships with Dharma practitioners and people who really help us, who inspire us, who set good examples. If we're around people who respect ethics, then we come to do so too. When we are around people who don't take it seriously, then we easily gain their view as well.

3. Lack of conscientiousness

The third door is lack of conscientiousness. Remember when we did the twenty secondary afflictions², lack of conscientiousness is one of them? It is a very reckless attitude that isn't at all interested in avoiding destructive actions or acting constructively. It's just reckless. It just doesn't care. "I can't be bothered to be mindful. I don't really care if I act positively or negatively. I can't be bothered to be mindful. It takes too much time. It's too much energy." Just this very reckless attitude. We talk about being kind to ourselves -- that's a big thing in American culture, being kind to yourself. If you want to be kind to yourself, keep good ethics. It's true, isn't it? If you want to be kind to yourself, act ethically.

The way to overcome this lack of conscientiousness is to contemplate the advantages of keeping good ethics or being kind to ourselves, and to contemplate the disadvantages of not respecting our own ethical integrity, not respecting ourselves as human beings. Often when we have this careless attitude towards ethics, we're not in touch with our potential as human beings. We've forgotten about our Buddha potential. It's almost as if we don't even respect ourselves enough to let our Buddha potential come out, when we have this very reckless attitude. The things to cultivate, in order to oppose it, are to cultivate an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages, and also to remember that we are followers of the Buddha. It gives us some kind of energy as well. Also, train ourselves in mindfulness, to be aware, to be mindful of what we're saying, thinking and doing, and to see how it fits in with the ethical behavior that we've learned about.

4. Having lots of afflictions²

The fourth door leading us away from pure ethics is having lots of afflictions². We might not be ignorant. We might not be disrespectful. We might not lack conscientiousness. But when we have very strong afflictions², the force of our own emotions pushes us. I'm sure we've all had that happened. It's like you're in the middle of saying the most outrageous, horrible, cruel things to somebody, and one part of your mind says, "Why in the world am I doing this? Why don't I just close my mouth. I'll be a whole lot

happier if I close my mouth right now.” [laughter] But somehow, you can’t close your mouth.

Our afflictions² just come on very strongly and whisk us away, even though we don’t want to be acting that way or saying that or doing that. I’m sure we’ve all had that experience. You might be in the middle of being so angry and ticked off at somebody, and thinking of all these cruel things to say to them, and part of your mind is saying, “Why don’t you just be quiet, mind? Leave me alone! I really don’t want to think like this.” But your mind still continues to be obsessed. Or you might be in the middle of doing something and like I said, part of your mind is going, “Why don’t I just stop this?” All these happen because of the force of the afflictions² that haven’t been tamed before, and so they’re just coming on very strongly at that moment.

Reviewing the antidotes to the individual afflictions²

The antidote to that is to learn the antidotes to the individual afflictions². The wisdom that realizes emptiness is, of course, the general antidote to all of them. Contemplating death and impermanence is also a very good antidote. But specifically, for anger, the simplest antidote to meditate on is compassion and patience. If you have attachment, lots of greed and desire coming up, you meditate on impermanence. Besides impermanence, which is really good for attachment, we look at the ugly aspect of the thing. This is not to develop aversion or anger, but to balance the mind out and take the fantasy away. When we are very jealous, the antidote is to rejoice, because jealousy can’t stand them to be happy, and rejoicing is being glad that they’re happy.

When your mind is really restless and you have a lot of cynical, nitpicking doubt about the Dharma, you meditate on the breath. When your mind nitpicks, like asking, “Why did the Buddha say this? I don’t know why the Buddha said that...” refuge is helpful, but especially the breath, just settling the mind down, coming back to the present moment, getting rid of all that junk.

[In response to audience:] You brought up resentment. That could fall under the category of anger. Because when we resent things, we’re holding on to anger. It’s a form of anger. Or it could be a form of jealousy. You have to look at the particular kind of resentment it is.

For pride, you meditate on the twelve links and rebirths. Because they’re so difficult to understand, this gets rid of your pride. There is another point, which is not in the scriptures, but is something that I’ve discovered myself. It is that when I think of how whatever I’m proud about has come due to the kindness of others, then that takes the pride away, because I realize it’s not mine to be proud of. It’s only nominally labeled ‘mine’ basically because other people made it possible.

So although emptiness is the general antidote, if we can’t use emptiness because we’re not advanced enough, then we use one of these other antidotes, and we become familiar with it in our daily meditations so that we can take it out and use it.

In addition, we try and cultivate the attitude of self-respect. Remember when we talked about the afflictions² and death, one point was the ‘lack of self-respect’, not caring about your own ethics and your own practice? The antidote is to develop a sense of self-respect. I value myself enough to keep good ethical behavior, and I value my own integrity as a human being.

Also, cultivate a sense of consideration for others. Remember we did ‘inconsideration for others’ as one of the twenty secondary afflictions³? ‘Consideration for others’ is where we abandon acting negatively because we don’t want it to affect others in a harmful way – for others to lose faith in the Dharma or lose faith in us, or to be harmed.

Consideration for others and a sense of self-respect really help us get rid of the afflictions².

Figuring out which is our greatest affliction²

In this light, it is very helpful to try and figure out which is your greatest affliction². Do most people have an idea of which is their biggest problem? It’s very helpful to figure out what’s your biggest problem, and work specifically with that one and try and balance it out, and then go on to work with the other ones. Work with the most serious afflictions² first.

I remember Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey was teaching one text that says, if your greatest affliction² is attachment and greed, then the skilful teacher will put that student in difficult situations where they can’t

have whatever it is that they're attached to, or where they have to give up what it is they are attached to. Not necessarily ascetic situations, but in circumstances where they're forced to overcome their attachments and let go.

On the other hand, a student whose basic problem is anger, you don't do that, because if you do that, that person only gets angrier. For a person who has a lot of anger, you're nice and sweet to them and give them the basic things that they need and then teach them to meditate on patience.

Learn to be skilful with your mind and not push yourself, but figure out what your biggest affliction² is and then working specifically like that. You've got to learn to be like a skilful doctor for your own mind.

Purification practice helps too. When you feel stuck, and you feel, "Gosh! My mind is just going totally bonkers and I can't control it. Ethics is beyond me," then do some purification. Do some prostrations; do the prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas. Or do the Shakyamuni Buddha meditation. Because that helps you to let go of that energy and restore your confidence.

We've now completed the teachings in common with the practitioner of the middle level.

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1. 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>
 2. 'Afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes.'
 3. 'Afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'delusions.'