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We're going to begin the practice of a higher level being—the bodhisattva practice, or at least learning about it, let's put it that way. If you look at the outline*, it's point 'C': Training the mind on the stages of path when you are a person of higher level.

The first two levels and the reason for the words “in common”

Point 'A' was training the mind on the stages of the path in common with an initial level practitioner. In that one, we were trying to develop some care and concern for how we are going to die and what we are going to be when reborn. We realized that unfortunate rebirths are a possibility, and that they're due to negative karma. As an antidote to that, we want to clean up our karmic act. In other words, we want to do some purification, to avoid doing the ten non-virtues and to try and do the ten virtuous actions as much as possible. This is the training of mind on the stages of the path in common with the initial level practitioner.

The reason it's called 'in common' is because the Lamrim, the gradual path to Enlightenment, is designed for somebody who already knows they want to practice the highest level. What you're doing at this first level is in common with the person of the initial level because you are doing it in common with them, but you have in mind that you are going for the highest level. That's why at the beginning of all of our sessions, we spend time generating the altruistic intention of bodhicitta, which is the motivation of the highest level practitioner, even though we might then go back and meditate or study one of the meditations which are in common with the initial level practitioner.

Point 'B' was training the mind in the stages of the path in common with an intermediate level practitioner. An intermediate level practitioner is somebody who not just aspires for a good rebirth, but also wants to totally get out of samsara, and who recognizes the causes of being caught in cyclic existence are ignorance, anger and attachment. At this intermediate level, one practices the three higher trainings of ethics, concentration and wisdom in order to free oneself from cyclic existence. We practice the path that is in common with the intermediate level practitioner because we are still aiming for the highest practice, the highest path.

Now, we have finally come to the training of the mind in the path where you are a person of higher level. Even though we ourselves may not be a person of higher level right now, still it's beneficial to hear the teachings on this, contemplate them and meditate on them because it puts some imprint on our mind that begins the learning process. It plants the seeds and these seeds can gradually get nurtured as we listen and contemplate and meditate more and more. It's not that you have to do the initial level practice without knowing the rest and master that level before you learn the next level, but rather, you try and learn the whole path so you have a broad overview of it, and then you concentrate on the level that is really where you are at. You do practice as much as you can on the whole path, even though your emphasis is at the level where you are really at.

This is why we may have taken tantric empowerments. "I didn't understand everything, what do I do? How am I qualified to do this, I can't even spell Chenrezig!" [Laughter] If you have some knowledge of the whole path and some awareness of the determination to be free, the bodhicitta, and the wisdom realizing emptiness, then you start on the Chenrezig practice which belongs to the lowest class of tantra. It's not the highest class of tantra, so it's much easier and much simpler. Even though you don't understand everything completely, it's putting imprints in your mind. You practice it the best that you can. As you practice it, what you do will relate to the earlier levels of the path, and the earlier levels of the path will start relating to the practice, and you will begin to see how it all fits together. So there's no need for despair. [Laughter]

In this section of training in the path of the person of the highest motivation, there are three main sections:

- 1) Discussing the advantages of the altruistic intention or bodhicitta.
- 2) The way to develop it.
- 3) Having generated it, how to engage in the bodhisattva deeds, bodhisattva practices.

Advantages of the altruistic intention

This is the hard sell. Whenever they talk about the advantages of something, it's really to sell you on it. Not just to sell you on it, but to get you to value what this thing is and have a mind that is full of appreciation and optimism so that you will want to engage in that practice. If you don't see the benefits of it, then what's the use of putting all the energy into it? Just as we now see the benefits of making a lot of money, we have much energy to go to work. You want to make money, so you get out of bed in the morning; your wish to make money gets you out of bed in the morning. It gets you in your car and going to work even if you are exhausted. Even if you are sick you still go to work. You spend extra hours working because you see the value of money. You are not lazy in it.

When we see the advantages of something, then the joyous effort comes very spontaneously. One reason why we don't have much joyous effort in our meditation practice, is that we may not yet know the advantages of it. Understanding the advantages of something helps. If we know the advantages then we'll get out of bed in the morning to meditate on bodhicitta, and we will work on bodhicitta all day long without fatigue, even overtime. [Laughter] It won't seem such a big strain because we will see the advantages of it.

People may be quite surprised, I don't know if everybody knows that Lama Zopa doesn't sleep. Nobody's ever seen him lie down. Nobody, not even his attendants, have seen him lie down. So for about forty-five minutes between like 3:30 and a quarter past four, he'll go into a very deep meditation and his head will go like this, and then forty-five minutes later he'll lift his head up and continue doing his prayers. He just doesn't sleep. You know how it is that this happens? It's by the power of the bodhicitta—his bodhicitta doesn't get him out of bed in the morning, it gets him not to go to bed at night! [Laughter] This is the reason why he stays up into all hours of the day and night teaching. We're all sitting there falling asleep but he's completely 'on', one hundred percent. He comes back here and talks to people until all hours, again teaching them, and then he starts his prayers very early in the morning and has this whirlwind schedule.

Also, you look at His Holiness and how he lives—whirlwind schedule, very little privacy. This is made possible by the force of the altruistic intention. These things don't become hardships, but rather become joys. If we contemplate the advantages of the bodhicitta, then engaging in the practice becomes a joy rather than a hardship.

a. It is the only gateway for entering the Mahayana path

When we talk about the advantages of the bodhicitta, they really emphasize that it is the gateway for entering into the Mahayana. And we get all high and mighty because we are Mahayana practitioners, not those Hinayana lower vehicle people who don't have compassion. [Laughter] "We *are* Mahayana practitioners!" What this point is emphasizing is that you are not really a Mahayana practitioner if you don't have the bodhicitta. That just talking about bodhicitta and calling yourself a Mahayanist doesn't really do anything. The whole thing depends upon your state of mind and your level of realization. If you don't have the bodhicitta, even if you practice the highest tantra, it doesn't lead you to realization of the Mahayana path!

In fact, there is even a story of one person who meditated on one deity and because they didn't have the proper bodhicitta motivation, not even the artificial bodhicitta (what we try and create), he was reborn as a spirit in the shape of that deity. It is really emphasizing that, for tantra to be effective, we need to do the bodhicitta practice. Meditating on bodhicitta is the best preparation to make your Chenrezig practice go well. That's why Rinpoche talked about bodhicitta the whole first night. Also, the more you do Chenrezig practice—because Chenrezig is the embodiment of compassion—the more that is going to help your bodhicitta practice as well. Lama Yeshe said if you recite 'Om Mani Padme Hum,' even if you don't want to develop compassion, you will. [Laughter] Doing the Lamrim meditations on altruism plus doing the Chenrezig – or if you didn't take the Chenrezig initiation, then reciting 'Om Mani Padme Om,' – they complement each other, they help each other a lot.

I emphasize this because many people in the West are just so enthralled with, "We want the highest class tantric practice!" We go to this high lama and that high lama, collecting initiations like people collect stamps. You ask them what is bodhicitta and they say, "Bodhicitta?" You can see that if a person doesn't start with the basic fundamentals, the aspiration for the highest goal will not bear fruit. It is really important to cultivate the fundamental practice.

The real miracle

In the same way, many people get all excited about developing clairvoyant powers or healing powers or some special powers. But again, even if you develop these powers, if you don't have the altruistic intention, what good do these powers do you? You might have these powers, but then if you don't have the proper motivation, they go for increasing one's own pride and ego. After death what happens is that instead of having a good rebirth, somebody has a lower rebirth, even though in this life they have clairvoyance or some other kind of fantastic power.

It reminds me of a story. When I was in Hong Kong, I used to teach at the schools (some of the teachers would ask me to come in), and at one school one student asked me if I could do magic powers, if I had miraculous powers. I guess he had just read a book on Uri Geller, because he asked me if I could bend spoons. [Laughter] He asked if I could read people's minds and things like that. People are just so excited by miraculous powers. I told this student that I wasn't impressed with those kinds of things. To me the real miraculous power was being able to have a kind heart towards all the different people that you meet. I think that's much more miraculous than being able to bend spoons. I mean, bending spoons doesn't help anyone, it might even make somebody angry if it's their spoon you're bending! [Laughter] Likewise, reading somebody's mind might make them angry, might harm them too, and it might harm yourself! But if you can have a kind heart towards somebody, and a feeling of altruism, then that's something that is universally beneficial. I think that's the real miracle. That's what we want to emphasize in our practice.

Beware of being sectarian

When the Tibetans start talking about the bodhicitta and the advantages of bodhicitta, they go on a big thing about how superior a bodhisattva is to an arhat. An arhat is somebody who has attained liberation, they've removed the afflictions [Note: 'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'] (of attachment, aversion and ignorance) and karma. They've freed themselves from the twelve links of dependent arising. They've attained liberation, but they haven't yet developed the altruistic intention so they haven't removed the cognitive obscurations [Note: "Cognitive obscurations" is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of "obscurations to omniscience"] in their mind. And so you'll find, in the Mahayana sutras and in the Indian...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape]

... is that it's a way of encouraging us to enter into the Mahayana path from the very beginning. There are two ways to reach Enlightenment.

One way is to enter the Mahayana path, developing the determination to be free, developing the altruism, doing the bodhisattva practices and becoming a Buddha. You go straight that way, that's one way to do it.

The second way is that you enter what the Tibetans call the Hinayana path, we might call it the Theravada path, and you become an arhat and you are free from cyclic existence, but you haven't

developed the bodhicitta. You stay in your blissful samadhi on emptiness for eons and eons and eons, because you are liberated and it's wonderful. But you don't have the bodhicitta. You're in what they call the extreme of nirvana in your meditation on emptiness, and at some point, the Buddha wakes you up, and you have to develop bodhicitta and then start at the beginning of the Mahayana path and do all the bodhisattva practices. It's kind of like taking a detour of becoming an arhat first, then you have to switch back to the bodhisattva practice.

They say that for some people, that's the best way to do it. But if you could enter the Mahayana practice directly, it saves time. And we all want to save time. [Laughter] They say, even if you have to spend a little time in hell on the way to Buddhahood, it's worthwhile rather than detouring into the blissful state of nirvana and then coming back to the bodhisattva practice. I'm telling you this because you will hear it from Tibetan lamas as you go on. I am telling you this to help interpret it a bit.

They always tell a story. There were sixty practitioners who were just about ready to, I think, realize emptiness. They were going to attain nirvana or liberation very, very soon. And Manjushri came and taught them about bodhicitta, but because it was too much for their minds, they generated wrong views and because of their wrong views, they were reborn in the lower realms for I don't know how long, but some time. [Laughter] When they got out of the lower realms, they entered the Mahayana practice and went straight to Enlightenment. People were curious about why Manjushri did this, why he taught them this teaching knowing that they would generate wrong views and be reborn in the lower realms. Buddha explained that this was actually a skillful method to put the seeds of the Mahayana practice in somebody's mindstream in order that they could then progress along the path.

I think there is some difficulty in this. Sometimes the way this is taught may sound very sectarian to us. It may sound to us like we are putting down the people who... "They just watch their breath and practice Vipassana, and try and become arhats, while we're the great Mahayana practitioners." People who hear this may feel that it sounds quite sectarian. I am bringing this all up because we talk about sectarianism at the conference. I am a fundamentalist regarding being anti-sectarian. [Laughter]

I think we have to really know how to interpret these passages very well. They are offered in the context of encouraging somebody to develop love, compassion and altruism, because that person already has that kind of interest and inclination. It's not said as a put down for the Theravada practice, okay? It may sound that way sometimes, and some people who don't know how to understand it, might become very sectarian. The reason it is spoken of this way, is as a way of encouraging us in the Mahayana practice, not as a way of putting down and creating differences with other traditions. They are also, at other points in the teachings, very quick to remind us that we should never disparage arhats. The arhats have much more love and compassion than we do! [Laughter]

It's not that arhats lack love and compassion, it's not that you don't have love and compassion in the Theravada tradition—there is obviously the metta meditation; this is something that is taught. It's probably taught more and emphasized more in the Mahayana tradition, but the teachings on love and compassion, bodhicitta and bodhisattvas are also found in the Theravada teaching.

I am telling you all this just to show you how centuries of Asian misconceptions get passed down. I heard one Westerner tell a story about a Vipassana meditator in Thailand or Sri Lanka in the Theravada tradition, who got very, very far on his meditation and then got stuck and he couldn't deepen his concentration. One of the teachers there saw that that was because he took the bodhisattva vows in a previous life. The moral of the story is be careful and maybe don't take the bodhisattva vows since they may interfere with your practice. Could you have attained nirvana quicker if you didn't take the bodhisattva vows? This is the kind of implication of this story. I heard one Westerner say it, and I'm sure he learned it from an Asian teacher.

It's the centuries of misconception that you have passed down, that the Theravada people might say, "Be careful of bodhicitta because you won't become an arhat," or "It distracts you from the path." Mahayana people say, "Well, those Theravada people, they are from a lower vehicle and they don't have love and compassion." I think both those attitudes are incorrect. I think that as Westerners, we don't need to import these kinds of attitudes from Asia. If we have a tendency and we are interested in a tradition of love and compassion, to recognize that this is found in the Theravada teachings. Learning the metta meditation done in the Vipassana communities is very helpful for us to do. In our own teachings, it emphasizes this practice a lot more, and that may fit more with our personality and our

disposition, so go for it, but don't criticize other people who don't emphasize it.

I think sectarianism happens among the people who don't have realizations. The people who really understand the Dharma, they have no need to be sectarian and put one tradition up or another tradition down. That's why I said I think those people who wrote these passages in the Indian scriptures aren't being sectarian. They are trying to do it as a way of encouraging people with the disposition. But other people might misinterpret it as being sectarian.

One example of this, and why it's good not to be proud, is one time, I was invited by a Mahayana center to teach, but when I reminded them about helping with my airfare, they hummed and hawed and said: "Well, we didn't expect it. We don't know about this and there are all these other expenses." They had just had a big fund raiser and raised a whole lot of money. They were really humming and hawing about helping with the airfare.

When I got there, I gave a talk at another place where the chief was a Sri Lankan monk from the Theravada tradition. Most of the people there practiced in the Theravada tradition, although they have people from all traditions practicing there. At the end of the talk, this chief monk, whom I really respect very much, asked me to come and see him. I came in and some people from his committee were there, and he made an offering and said, "This is for your airfare." Somehow he heard about it through the grapevine, and he hadn't even been asked! Here are the Theravada people who are helping and the Mahayana people who are saying "Well..." [Laughter] That's why it really comes down to what's in your heart and how you live your life, not spouting a bunch of philosophy about how great your tradition is.

What bodhicitta is

Anyway, if we see some advantage to having a Mahayana mind (not just a Mahayana label), and the results that it can bring and how beneficial our lives can become for others, then it is important to know that generating the bodhicitta is the gateway to entering that path.

We have to know specifically what bodhicitta is, because we are talking about it here. I'm translating bodhicitta as the altruistic intention. Other people translate it as the mind of Enlightenment and the awakening mind. There're lots of different translations. Bodhicitta is a primary mind that is accompanied by two aspirations. One aspiration is to become a Buddha and the second aspiration is to be able to benefit sentient beings. You want to become a Buddha in order to benefit sentient beings. The mind that has these two aspirations, that's the bodhicitta. Bodhicitta isn't just wanting to help others, because you can want to help others without wanting to become a Buddha. Wanting to become a Buddha isn't bodhicitta either, because you can want to become a Buddha and not want to help others.

The right way to approach bodhicitta

Bodhicitta isn't just having a kind heart, it isn't just love and compassion, but an actual wish to become a Buddha so that one can help others more effectively. The emphasis here in the bodhicitta, is being of benefit to others, working for the welfare of others. The emphasis is not on becoming a Buddha. Actually, they are both equally important, but I think it is more important for us to work for the welfare of others. Otherwise, we get into this thing of, "I want to become a Buddha. I want to become a Buddha because Buddhahood is the best! I want to be the best! I want to be the highest! I want to be the most glorious! I want to be a Buddha!" Helping others becomes a 'tax' that you have to pay in order to become a Buddha, you know? [Laughter] It's like, "I want to become a Buddha, so okay if I had to help others, I'll do it." [Laughter] That's not the attitude that we want to have, but rather what we want to try and cultivate, is this real strong wish to serve others. We realize that at the present, our ability to help others is limited. We want to become a Buddha in order to overcome our own limitations and purify our mind so that we can help others most effectively. Becoming a Buddha becomes the method for carrying out this strong aspiration to serve others. That's how we want to approach bodhicitta.

b. One receives the name "child of the Buddha"

The second advantage of bodhicitta is that you will receive the name, "child of the Buddha". I will explain it, then I'll give my commentary. [Laughter] If you generate the bodhicitta—which is the wish to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, even though you haven't yet become a Buddha and may not yet even realize emptiness, you are still called a "child of the Buddha" in the sense that you enter into the Buddha's lineage, you become an heir to the position. Think of the Buddha as the parent. When the parents have heirs to their kingdom or queendom or whatever it is, then the heirs are very special. The heirs are their special children. The bodhisattvas, those who have generated bodhicitta, become the

spiritual heirs, so to speak, of the Buddha, so they are called the children of the Buddha. That's considered a great honor.

Now to us, Westerners, I don't know about you, but I listened to this and I feel, "Well, I don't really care if I get called the child of the Buddha. Why do I need another label?" I don't know if any of you felt that way. For those of you who may have this skeptical mind like I do, when I heard this teaching, I thought: "Why is that an advantage for generating bodhicitta? I get the title of the spiritual child of the Buddha—big deal! Who cares about another title!" For somebody like me, that may not appear as an advantage, but if you look at it, for other people, it might be very encouraging. "Wow, that means I'm really entering into the Buddha's family. I become the spiritual child of the Buddha, and just as a child grows up and takes over the Buddha, the parents' place, the bodhisattvas grow up and they also assume the work of the Buddhas. Gee, that's what I want to do!"

c. One will surpass in brilliance the sravakas and solitary realizers.

The third advantage of bodhicitta is that you surpass in brilliance the sravakas and the solitary realizers. The English translation for "sravakas" is the "hearers," because they hear the Dharma, they practice it, they attain nirvana. The solitary realizers also hear the Dharma, they also eliminate the afflicted obscurations [Note: "Afflicted obscurations" is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of "deluded obscurations"] and attain nirvana, but they do so in their last rebirth, at a time when there is no Buddha on Earth. That's why they are called "solitary realizers." In their last rebirth, they practice in a solitary way. Both the hearers or sravakas, and the solitary realizers, are people who practice to attain nirvana. Like I was saying at the beginning, they stay in nirvana for a long time, then later the Buddha has to wake them up and say, "Hey, you aren't done yet. You have to generate the bodhicitta and become enlightened for the benefit of others."

It is said here that if you generate the bodhicitta at the beginning, you surpass in brilliance these sravakas and solitary realizers. Even though they may be out of samsara and you may not be, and they have realized emptiness and you may not have yet, still, they say that you surpass them because of the potential and the force of the bodhicitta. Because the bodhicitta is so powerful it's like a turbo jet? [Laughter] I don't know the latest thing—laser beam? Okay, it's the laser beam of the practice. Even though you may not have the realizations of emptiness that a sravaka or an arhat or a solitary realizer has, because of the power of bodhicitta, you have set yourself on a path where you are going to gain all of those qualities and more.

d. One will become an object of highest respect and offering

The fourth advantage of bodhicitta is that you become an object of highest respect and offering. Somebody who has generated the altruistic intention and working for the benefit of others, because this intention is so profound and so pervasive in the service that it offers to humanity and to all sentient life, then, that person becomes an object of respect and offering.

We shouldn't look at it like, "Become an object of highest respect and offering? I thought I was supposed to give that up? Isn't seeking offering and respect something to give up? Why is this an advantage here of bodhicitta?" Don't think of it that way. It's not like, "Oh, I want respect and offering. Therefore, I am going to generate bodhicitta!" You don't approach it that way. Rather, it's emphasizing again how noble the bodhicitta attitude is. If you have milk and you churn the milk, the rich stuff is the cream that comes to the top. Similarly, if you take all the Buddha's teachings and churn them, the richness that comes to the top is the kind heart. It is bodhicitta. It's a way of pointing out to us that this is really the core of the practice. It is helpful for us to know, so that we make the core of our daily life, developing a kind heart.

I'll continue with the advantages of bodhicitta next time. I want to leave some time for questions and answers now.

Questions and Answers

[Audience:] What's the difference between bodhicitta and compassion?

Compassion is the wish for others to be free of suffering and its causes. Compassion is a cause for bodhicitta. First you develop compassion. But you can have compassion and still not want to become a

Buddha. You can have compassion, but still not want to really engage in the process of helping others. Compassion is a step you develop first, and then you go further and develop the bodhicitta and the wish to become a Buddha.

[In response to audience:] Well, they are both aspirations, they are both mental states. With compassion you want others to be free of suffering and its cause, but you are not yet necessarily aspiring to do anything about it yourself. Nor are you aspiring yet to become a Buddha to do something about it. That's why they say compassion is the cause for bodhicitta. It is a very important cause, so it is very highly praised. You can't have bodhicitta without compassion, but you can have compassion without having bodhicitta.

[Audience: Inaudible]

Philosophically speaking, in the doctrine, they do make a difference—even in the Theravada scriptures—between an arhat's realization and the Buddha's realization.

[Audience: Inaudible]

What happens when the alarm clock goes off? [Laughter] I'm not quite sure. They may just do all this work of developing bodhicitta in the Pure Land, that's my guess. And then maybe, after having developed the bodhicitta, they may voluntarily, out of compassion (not out of the twelve links, because they are free from these), take rebirth in the other realms of existence in order to carry out the bodhisattva activity.

If I can just kind of elaborate, you didn't ask this question but this might be useful information. In the Theravada tradition, they say that not everybody can become a Buddha. Everybody can become an arhat, but there are only a thousand Buddhas in this particular eon (Shakyamuni is the fourth) who would become fully enlightened Buddhas through doing the bodhisattva practice. Everybody else can become arhats. Becoming an arhat is wonderful. In the Mahayana tradition, they say actually everybody can become a Buddha, because everybody has the Buddha potential, and there're more Buddhas than just a thousand in this particular eon.

[Audience:] On what basis is the discrimination made that some people can attain Buddhahood and others cannot according to the Theravada tradition?

This is a question I've always had too. It seems to me, so obvious to my ignorant mind, that a mindstream is a mindstream. How can you say some people have Buddha nature and other people don't? I don't really understand where this comes from philosophically.

His Holiness was saying at a conference that, if you see the Buddha nature in everybody, you want to go like this (hands folded in respect). In the "Eight Verses of Thought Transformation", it talks about making yourself the lowest of all beings. Everybody has the Buddha potential, everybody has some qualities we can learn from, everybody has something to respect. We should go like this (hands folded) to everybody. At the conference, His Holiness was telling the story that when he was in Thailand, the custom in Thailand is that the lay people do this to the Sangha, but the Sangha aren't allowed to do it to the lay people, because the respect goes one way. His Holiness said the first time he was there, he tried very hard, all these people were going like this and he just had to keep his arms down. He said, "This last time I went, I went like this to everybody! I think maybe they didn't like it. They didn't think I was a proper monk!" [Laughter] "But," he said, "I couldn't help it!" It is having an attitude of respect that comes quite naturally from seeing that everybody has the Buddha potential.

[Audience: Inaudible]

They say yes, even in this degenerate age, you can become a Buddha. That's why tantra is so effective in the degenerate age.

[In response to audience:] Yes, I think as the age gets more and more degenerate, the ability to practice does become more and more difficult. It is harder to generate wisdom, it's harder to generate concentration, it's harder to keep ethics. There are many more obstacles. At a certain point, they say, "Okay, during this period, people can't get higher realizations than a certain level."

But in the Tibetan tradition, they say first of all, if we start out with the Mahayana practice, all these degenerate things can become fuel for your practice, through thought transformation. That's why thought transformation is so important—because the times are so degenerate. Based on the thought transformation, if you then do tantra, this helps transform the difficulties of the degenerate age into the path.

[Audience: Inaudible]

They aren't very good at statistics in the scriptures. [Laughter] What percentage of bodhisattvas seek out a hell rebirth?

[In response to audience:] From the side of the bodhisattvas, they would be totally delighted to be reborn in the hell realm. Whether they actually do or not, I'm not sure. It probably depends on the karma of those particular hell realm beings. But from the side of the bodhisattva, he or she is completely happy to do that.

[Audience:] Why do the bodhisattvas want to be reborn in the lower realms?

To help others.

[Audience:] Why do they have to do that?

Because you have to appear in a way, and in an environment that enables you to communicate with others very directly. That's why they say that there can be many Buddhas amongst us right now. But they look like Joe Blow whom we criticize. The reason that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas may appear as Joe Blow, is so we can relate to them. If Buddha had walked in here with a golden body and thirty-two signs and eighty marks, we wouldn't have been able to relate at all, "He is so far above us, how can we possibly become like that?" But if a bodhisattva manifests amongst us as somebody who is just ordinary, that gives you the idea, "Wow! Look, that person is a human being but look what they are like. I can do that. I can become like them!" That's a real skillful way to help us.

In the human realm, a bodhisattva may manifests that way, or they may manifest in a way that directly helps people by giving them food, clothing and other things. Or a bodhisattva may manifest as an animal, and somehow teach the animals the Dharma. Similarly, in the hell realm, if those beings have the karma, if they have some openness and receptivity, then a bodhisattva can manifest and help in whichever way is possible. They may not be able to teach the Dharma, it may only be possible to put out a little bit of the fire or something like that. However, because it's beneficial, they do that.

[Audience: Inaudible]

Yes, it does help those beings in the hell realms. It's interesting that in the Chinese temples (they don't do this in the Tibetan temples), when you wake up in the morning, they ring this enormous gong. They ring this huge gong a hundred and eight times to get you up in the morning. [Laughter] They say that when the hell realm beings hear the Dharma gong, it alleviates a little bit of their suffering. When you wake up in the morning, when you are getting out of your own fog of the night, if you think about this, it makes the mind happy to hear the bell.

Let's just sit quietly for a few minutes.

**This teaching is based on the [Lamrim](http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html) 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>*