

**Advantages of Bodhicitta – Part 3 and  
Developing Equanimity – Preliminary to Cultivating Bodhicitta** (lightly edited transcript)  
*by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 21 Apr 93*

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**Advantages of the altruistic intention**

We were talking about the advantages of the altruistic intention. The Sanskrit term for the altruistic intention is bodhicitta. I went through the ten advantages that are commonly listed, such as being able to purify negative karma very rapidly, creating vast amounts of positive potential, and gaining realizations of the Path. There are some other advantages that I thought I would go into.

**We please the Buddhas**

One is that we please the Buddhas. By the force of having an altruistic intention and love and compassion, we take some effort to act constructively and so all of our constructive actions are pleasing to the Buddha. We please the Buddhas especially when we work for the benefit of others with a sense of altruism and compassion. The whole reason why anybody who is a Buddha became a Buddha is because they cherish others. Therefore anytime we cherish others and do something to benefit others, that's something that is automatically very pleasing to the Buddha. When we have the altruism, the Buddha becomes very, very happy.

**Bodhicitta is our real friend who never deserts us**

Another advantage is that the bodhicitta is our real friend and it's something that never deserts us. Ordinary friends – they come and they go and we can't always be with them. Whereas when we have the bodhicitta in our heart, it will always be there. No matter what is happening around us, whether awful or good, it doesn't really matter. The bodhicitta is still in our heart and it's our best friend that keeps us company always.

**Our lives become very purposeful**

Also our lives become very purposeful. We begin to have a sense of meaning in our lives. Last week I was telling you about the class of new people, that many of them said they came for some sense of meaning in their life, some sense of purpose besides having a house and a spouse, besides accumulating a lot of things.

You can see that when there's a sense of altruism and when there's a sense of compassion for others, life becomes very purposeful. There's something that's really driving you, pushing your energy. You have some reason to live, some feeling that you can do something for others, that you can do something for the state of the world. The situation in the world doesn't overwhelm you anymore. Not only do you have the ability to cope with it, but you also feel that your life is very purposeful. And I think that's something really important because as the world gets crazier and crazier, the opportunity and the necessity for bodhicitta or altruism, love and compassion becomes much stronger, doesn't it? In some way, the crazier the world, the more important compassion is. Actually in some ways, it should be easier to develop compassion when things are really crazy. We see how out of control things are, and when we see suffering in a very deep way, then compassion automatically arises. So in some ways the fact that we are living in a degenerate time can make our practice stronger, can't it?

**It is the best way to serve others**

Also, if you have some kind of wish to help your family, the best way to help is through altruism and love and compassion, through the aspiration to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. If you're feeling exceptionally patriotic, and want to help your country, the best way is also through the altruistic intention. When somebody in the society or in a family has a sense of altruism, that person's actions automatically

contribute to the benefit of the family or the society or the world. So the best way really to serve those people is if we change our mind to one of altruism.

### **We will be balanced and we will relate to people in a very direct and straightforward way**

Also, when we have a sense of altruism, we're going to be really balanced and the way we relate to people is going to be very direct and straightforward. If we don't have altruism and we try to be people pleasers and win other people's approval, our actions aren't going to be very straightforward because we will be wanting something in return or we will be looking for something in return. So even though we may try and help, it's not going to work real well because there's going to be a lot of trips involved. But when we have an altruistic intention, which means wanting others to be happy and to be free of suffering simply because they exist and are just like us, then there're no trips involved. Then what we do can be very direct. Things don't get mushy.

### **We will not feel alienated or discouraged**

Also, when we have altruism, we won't feel alienated or discouraged anymore. They say that bodhicitta is a very good anti-depressant - better than Prozac, and cheaper too [laughter]. You might think now, "Wait, wait, how is love and compassion a good anti-depressant? Compassion means I have to think about other people's suffering. That's going to make me depressed. So how is this going to work? How am I going to be not depressed thinking about this?"

The thing is that we get depressed because we feel overwhelmed by situations. We feel like there're no resources, no tools. We can't do anything. When we have a sense of altruism, we realize that there's a lot that we can do, and we feel very encouraged. We feel very uplifted because we see we can do something. We see some path out of the misery, some path out of the confusion. And so we see that there is no reason to be depressed. We have some self-confidence to be able to do something. We have the inner strength to endure situations by the force of love and compassion. The mind doesn't get discouraged and depressed.

### **Bodhicitta eliminates fear**

Similarly, bodhicitta is very good for eliminating fear. This is interesting, when you think of how many things in our lives terrify us, how much fear overwhelms us. Very often in retreats, people ask questions about that.

How does that work? Well, fear comes when there is a lack of clarity. Fear comes when we have a lot of attachment to things, and we're afraid of losing them. Fear comes when we can't find our own internal resources to deal with a situation. When we have love and compassion for others, we have a sense of our own confidence and power in the situation, a sense of our ability to contribute. We're in touch with our own internal resources. We know that we have available, tools that we can share with others. And because we aren't attached either to our own ego or to our own body, possessions or reputation, we have nothing to fear about losing those things. So for all those reasons then, bodhicitta just makes the mind very courageous, very, very strong and no longer submerged by fear. When we get fearful, what happens to the mind? It curls up into little balls like the stinkbugs. Well, that's how we get when we are afraid. Altruism, on the other hand, makes the mind very strong and courageous. It's free of attachment and it has access to inner tools.

### **Bodhicitta frees us from our pride**

Bodhicitta also frees us from our pride, conceit and arrogance. Why? Because bodhicitta is really based on looking at others as equal to ourselves, in that others want happiness and want to be free of suffering just as we do. Because we see ourselves and others as equal, there's no reason for pride to arise. And because we are not seeking a good reputation and praise and we believe we're okay, we don't need to put on a false air of arrogance. We really don't care if we have a fantastic reputation or not because we see that as rather meaningless.

### **"Old Age" Insurance**

Also, bodhicitta is a very good old age insurance [laughter]. They say that if you have an attitude of love and compassion, you don't need to worry about who's going to take care of you when you're old because if you spend your life living from a space of kindness for others, then others naturally are attracted to you. They naturally want to reciprocate. So we're going to try this one out and see if it beats Medicare or not [laughter].

### Very good antidote for loneliness

Also, bodhicitta is a very good antidote to loneliness. When we feel lonely, we feel disconnected from others. We feel unrelated to others. We don't feel the kindness of others in any way. Whereas when we have bodhicitta, there is a definite feeling of connection with other people because we realize we're all the same in wanting happiness and not wanting pain. We're all exactly the same, so there's that feeling of connectedness and the heart opens towards others.

Also with bodhicitta, we're quite aware and conscious of the kindness we receive from others. Rather than shriveling up into our own self-pity, "Others have been so mean to me", "I've been abused", "Others are cruel" and "Others judge me" - you know, our usual trip - bodhicitta gives us strength to be able to overcome that. We remember the kindness that we've received. We realize that we have been the recipient of a lot of kindness in the universe, instead of thinking we are the recipient of a lot of cruelty. So it just depends on where we put our concentration on – what we emphasize will be what we perceive, what we experience.

Bodhicitta continuously brings us back to remembering everything we have received and how much of it is from others, so that takes away the feeling of alienation, the feeling of loneliness. It's a very powerful, very good medicine. You never hear of the Buddha being lonely, do you? Never heard of Buddha having to call somebody up on the telephone because he's lonely [laughter].

### Why be kind to others?

Before we get into the different techniques for developing altruism, I just want to talk a little bit also about the question, "Why be kind to others?" because this whole section on altruism is based on the idea of kindness. In many ways, kindness and compassion are what we all want in our lives. Yet somehow, especially in recent years, it's almost as if kindness and compassion are being equated with co-dependency. I think that's really quite dangerous for people: the feeling that if you're kind to others, then you're opening yourself up and they're going to take advantage of you. Nobody wants to think that if you're kind to others, they're going to get dependent on you, and you're going to get dependent on them.

Also, thinking, "I've spent my whole life taking care of others, now I'm going to meet my own needs and take care of myself." And we get that really hard, tough attitude that completely blocks out kindness. People, in some ways, feel insecure about being kind nowadays. It's so strange because we can see so directly from our own experience, what happens to us when other people are kind to us. It's like the whole heart chakra opens up. It's like, "Oh wow, I can smile, I can laugh!". You can feel what it does to you physically when you receive a little bit of kindness from somebody else.

And so if we can give that kind of kindness to other people, how can that be bad, how can that be co-dependent? How can others take advantage of us if from our heart, we're really giving kindness? If we're not really giving kindness from the heart, but we're looking for approval and other things, then of course, people can take advantage of us. But that's not because of their actions. That's because of our sticky motivation. If from our side, we're being real clean clear and just being kind for the sake of being kind, how can anybody possibly take advantage, because in our mind, there's no space to be taken advantage of?

His Holiness quite often, in response to this question of "Why be kind to others?", tells this very simple story. I don't know, somehow this is very powerful for me. He says, "You look at the ants. Sit sometime in your garden and look at the ants. You look at all the ants, they work together. Some of them are building the big anthill. Some are running out and telling the other ones, "Go this way, there's a real good fly over there." [laughter] "Go that way, a child has dropped a piece of cheese, go get it!" [laughter] And so they all communicate and they tell each other where to get food. They tell each other where to get blades of grass or things to build up the anthill. They're all very busy and they all work together in harmony. There're thousands of ants in one anthill. They don't fight each other. They all work together. As a result, they're able to build this huge anthill.

The reason they work together is because they see that everybody needs to work together for any one of them to survive, that no ant can survive on its own. So very naturally, the ants work together. They don't need to come to Dharma class to learn about kindness. [laughter] They don't need to hear about the ten advantages of bodhicitta. They just help each other. So the question comes: "If little, tiny

creatures like ants can be that way, then what about us?" It shouldn't be that difficult for us as human beings to work together for a common purpose, if the ants and the bees can do it. You watch what the bees do? They all work together harmoniously. It's really quite touching when you think about this.

His Holiness also says that kindness is not something unusual. Sometimes, we feel it's very unusual, but he says actually it's something that's quite normal in our society. He says the fact that it's so normal is shown by the fact that the newspapers very seldom reports acts of kindness, because kindness is expected. We take the fact that there is kindness for granted. But the things that are irregular, the things that stand out – certain cruelty or something like that – get reported because that's an aberration.

If you look at it, really, our whole society is created by kindness. It's not created by cruelty. Cruelty really is the aberration. If we look again at how inter-dependent we are as a society, and how everything we have really comes from others, it's very clear that we function by the force of the kindness of all beings, by the force of what everybody contributes to the general good. Even when people don't have the wish to contribute to the general good, just by the fact of their doing their job in society, they contribute to the general good. That's an act of kindness.

So it's really something that is present in our lives, that is ingrained in us, if we open our eyes and look at it. If we look at everything we have in our life, the source of it is kindness. We have this house because of the kindness of the people who built it. You have your cars by the force of the kindness of the people who built them. That we can speak is due to the kindness of the people who taught us to speak when we were little. All the people who held us up when we were babies and talked baby talk with us so that we eventually learnt to talk regular talk. All the people who taught us when we were young. All the skills we have, the abilities we have, are again the result of the kindness of others. So kindness is something that's very present in our lives, very present in our society. Kindness shouldn't be something that's difficult. It's not a strange thing, it's not a weird thing.

Again, why be kind? Because we are so inter-dependent. Just like the ants, one human being can't live alone. I think especially now, more than at any other time in human history, we're more dependent on each other. In ancient times, people maybe could go and grow their own vegetables or they could shear a sheep and make some wool and do their own clothes and build their own houses. But nowadays, we can't do any of that. It's very hard to be self-sufficient because our society is arranged such that we're so inter-dependent. And if we're that dependent on one another, then the happiness of one part of the society depends on the happiness of the rest of the society. It's quite difficult for us as one person to be happy if we don't take care of the other people who live around us. His Holiness, for that reason, always says, "If you want to be selfish, at least be wisely selfish and take care of others." If you want to be selfish and you want your own happiness, then do it by serving others.

And you can really see how that's true. If you're living together in a family and you take care of the people whom you live with, the whole ambience of the family is going to be nicer. Whereas if everybody in the family just gets really defensive and says, "I want my happiness. Why are all these other people bugging me?", then that sets up an atmosphere of tension that breeds and festers. Nobody in the situation will be happy even though everybody is going around saying, "I'm going to work for my own happiness. I'm tired of being kind and doing what these other people want." [laughter].

Because we're so inter-dependent, we've got to take care of each other, not just in our families but in society as a whole. I remember a few years ago, Seattle was voting on a new school bond, and I thought a lot about it (I used to be a teacher so these issues are very, very personal). Some people who didn't have children in school thought, "Why do I need to vote for a school bond? Teachers already get paid enough. Kids already have enough stuff. I don't want to pay more property taxes for these brats to go to school. I don't have any kids at home." People felt that, because they didn't have children who would directly benefit from their paying more taxes. I was thinking that that's really quite silly because if you cut the money available to the schools, what are the kids going to do? They're not going to have as many activities or as much guidance. They're going to get into more mischief. Whose house are they going to vandalize? Whose neighborhood are they going to mess up because they don't have proper guidance and activities?

So it's not sufficient to say, "Well, my kids won't benefit from it so I don't want to help other people's kids". You can see we're so inter-related that if other people's kids are miserable, it very directly affects your own happiness. It's really the same with all aspects of our society and with what's happening in the

whole globe. Now, that doesn't mean that we have to feel, "I can't be happy unless this world is Utopia". Not like that, because then we get overwhelmed again by the suffering. But rather, whenever we feel that we want to withdraw because the world is too much, to remember that it's difficult to be happy if you withdraw, because we are so inter-dependent.

Little acts of kindness can have very, very strong repercussions. Again you can see it from your own experience. Have you ever been down and somebody who is a stranger smiles at you, and you feel kind of "Wow!"? One person whom I stayed with one time, told me when she was a teenager, she was just so depressed, just overwhelmingly depressed. While she's walking down the street one day, one stranger just said, "Hey, are you okay?", or something like that, and all of a sudden, that one little taste of kindness she just had gave her the space to realize that there was kindness in the world. If we look in our own life, we could see how small things of kindness affect us. And they just stay in the mind and they can be very powerful.

I went to the ex-Soviet Union when I was about nineteen years old. I think I was in Moscow that time, or maybe it was Leningrad. Anyway, I was in a subway station, an underground station. I didn't know any Russian. I was trying to get around somewhere and I was obviously a foreigner. [laughter] One young woman came up to me. She had a ring. I think it was amber or something. She just pulled it off and gave it to me. I mean, she didn't know me from a hole in the head (as my mother would say). [laughter] So many years later, I still remember that simple act of kindness of a stranger. And I'm sure all of us have many stories like that to tell.

If we can see how we feel when we're the recipients of that, and know that we can give that to others too, we can see that there is a way to make a contribution for human happiness, for world happiness.

### **The value of keeping precepts**

This is also where the value of keeping precepts comes in. Because if we keep one precept, if we're able to restrain from one kind of negative action, this is a contribution towards world peace. It's something you don't think about very much but if one person, let's say, takes the precept not to kill, not to destroy life, then every other living being that that person comes in contact with, can feel safe. It means that 5 billion human beings, and I don't know how many billion animals, have some safety in their lives. They don't need to be afraid. If every person on this planet took precepts, just even one precept not to kill, what would we put in the newspapers everyday? [laughter] How dramatically different things would be! We can see what a contribution that is towards world peace.

Or if we take the precept not to take other people's belongings, or not to cheat other people, then again that means every other person in this universe can feel safe, that they don't have to worry about their possessions when they're around us. When people are around us, they can leave their wallet out, they can leave their door unlocked. Nobody needs to worry about anything. So again, that's a very great contribution to society, to world peace. That comes from an attitude of kindness towards others.

### **Developing equanimity: a preliminary practice for developing the altruistic intention**

When we talk about the altruistic intention of the bodhicitta, there're two main ways to develop it. One way is called the "Seven Points of Cause and Effect", and another method is called "Equalizing and Exchanging Self with Others". I'll go into both of these.

But first, I want to talk about a common preliminary practice for both of them, which is equanimity. Before we can develop love and compassion for others, we have to have some sense of equanimity, because love and compassion in the Buddhist sense refers to impartial love and compassion. We're not just being kind to some people and ignoring others and hating the rest. We're trying to develop a heart of love and compassion that goes equally towards everybody.

In order to do that, we first have to have some feeling of equality about others, which means placating the attachment towards the people that we hold dear, the aversion towards the people we don't get along with and the apathy towards strangers, the people we don't know. So those three emotions of attachment, aversion and apathy are impediments to developing equanimity, and if we don't have equanimity, we can't develop love and compassion. We can't develop altruism.

So, first step is equanimity. We're going to do a little research in the laboratory of our mind. Some of you may have done this meditation with me before but I do it many, many times and learn something each time. So close your eyes. Put your notebooks down. And think of three people. Think of one person that you have a lot of attachment for, a very dear friend, or a relative you really like to be around. Somebody the mind clings to. [Pause]

And then think of somebody you don't get along with very well, who really irritates you. [Pause]

And then think of a stranger [Pause].

Now go back to that friend. Imagine that friend in your mind's eye and ask yourself, "Why am I so attached to that friend?" "Why do I always want to be with that person?" "Why do I hold them so dear?" And then just listen to the reasons that your mind gives. Don't censure it. Just ask yourself that question and see what answers your mind gives. [Pause]

Now go back to that person whom you don't get along with very well, and ask yourself, "Why do I have so much aversion for that person?" And again, listen to what your mind says. Just do research into your own way of thinking. [Pause]

And then go back to the stranger and ask yourself, "Why am I apathetic towards that person?" And again listen to what your mind responds. [Pause] [End of meditation session.]

Why are you attached to your friends?

Responses from audience:

- They like the same things I like.
- They've been kind to us.
- They do things with us.
- They cheer us up when we feel down.
- They really accept us.
- When we do things for them they're grateful, they're appreciative. They recognize what we've done.
- They respect us. They don't take us for granted. They agree with many of our views.

What about the people you don't get along with very well? Why is there so much aversion towards them? Because they criticize me!

Responses from audience:

- They compete with us. Sometimes they win. [laughter]
- They don't appreciate us or they just look at our mistakes.
- They sometimes show us aspects of ourselves that we would rather not look at.
- They have a lot of negative feelings towards us and misunderstand us. We don't seem to be able to clear it up.
- When we want to do something, they get in our way. We have some project and they get in the way of our project, cause interference.

And why do you have apathy for the stranger?

Responses from audience:

- They don't affect us one way or the other.
- It just seems like caring for them would sap all our energy because there're so many of them, so apathy is just the best way to deal with it.
- We're not connected.

Sometimes we very easily put even the stranger into the category of friend or enemy, even though we don't know them. We could see how swiftly we judge people by what they look like or how they walk or how they talk or dress.

What word do you keep hearing whilst we're discussing this? What word? [laughter] *ME!* [laughter]

How much the whole discrimination into friend, stranger and difficult person, depends on how we perceive somebody else relating to us. And yet in this whole process, we don't feel like we're discriminating people on the basis of how they relate to me. We feel like we're looking at what they're like from their own side, objectively. When there's some person that is just so wonderful, whom we're so attached to and want to be with, we're convinced that that person is wonderful from his or her own side. We don't think, "Oh, I think they're wonderful because of what they're doing towards me." We think that there's something in them that makes them more wonderful than anybody else in the world.

And similarly, when there's somebody whom we consider really obnoxious and difficult, we don't feel that that perception is something that arises dependent on us or on the situation. We feel like that person is obnoxious and rude and inconsiderate from his own side. [laughter]. I just happened to walk down the street and here is this jerk out there...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... realize that the friend, the difficult person and the stranger are basically creations of our own mind, that nobody is a friend or a difficult person or a stranger from their own side. They only become that by us labeling them that. We label them that on the basis of how they relate to me, because it's obvious – I'm the most important person in this world. It's very clear. If this person is kind to me, they are a good person from their own side. If they're kind to somebody else whom I think is an idiot, then they're foolish. We feel like we're looking at them objectively, but we really aren't, because their kindness is not the determining thing. It's who they're kind towards. If they're kind towards me, they're a good person. If they're kind towards somebody else I don't like, then they're not.

Similarly, we consider somebody an idiot or a jerk or an enemy or a threat, basically because of how they're relating to us, not because of some quality that they have in and of themselves. If they're very, very critical of us, then we say that they're a difficult person, they're rude, they're obnoxious. If they're very critical of somebody else that we also happen to be critical of, then we say they're very intelligent. Their being critical isn't the point. It's who the criticism is getting shown towards, that's what the basis of discrimination is.

We're not really seeing people objectively, really seeing them for what their qualities are. We're constantly evaluating them through the filter of *me* because I'm so important. When there are difficult people in our life or when there are enemies or people we feel uncomfortable about, they are a creation of our own mind because we have labeled them that way. We've perceived them that way. We're not seeing the totality of who that person is, because no matter how mean that person has been to us, that person is kind to somebody. And similarly, the person who's so wonderful to us can be very mean to other people.

If we begin to realize how we create the friend and the enemy and the stranger, we begin to realize also that these categories really aren't necessary. We will realize that if we took the "me", the "I" out of the picture, it might be possible to see all people in some kind of equal terms, because all of them have some good qualities and some faults. They are all very, very similar that way. The person who has some fault can show it to me, or they can show it to somebody else. Same with the person who has some good quality. So based on that, why should we cherish some beings, have aversion to others, and apathy towards a third group, if all of them really are capable of acting in any of the three ways to us at any particular time. Why cherish some and not others?

We think, "Somebody was kind to me, that's why I should cherish them." Well, let's say there are two people. The first person gave you a thousand dollars yesterday and slugs you today. The second person slugged you yesterday and gives you a thousand dollars today. Now which one's the friend and which one's the enemy? They've both done both things.

If we have a big mind and take a long-term perspective, and we're able to see that we've had lots of relationships with all the different sentient beings at one time or another, that everybody at one time or another has been kind to us, everybody at one time or another has been mean to us, and everybody at one time or another has been neutral, then what's the sense of being attached to some and having aversion to others and not caring about the third group? What sense is it to have this discriminating mind, this partial mind?

If we really contemplate how the relationships change, we will see how silly the attachment, aversion and apathy are. You just look at your life. When we were born, everybody was a stranger. Now, in the midst of that, we felt a lot of apathy. Then some people began to be kind to us and we had friends. And we felt attached. But then some of those friends later on became strangers again. We lost touch with them. Others maybe even have become enemies. People who were once very kind to us, we don't get along with them now.

Similarly, we might have lost touch with people whom we used to not get along with, and so now they've become strangers. Or some of them have even become friends. So all these three categories - strangers becoming friends or enemies, enemies becoming strangers or friends, friends becoming strangers or enemies – all these relationships are in a state of constant flux. When we don't see that all these things are in constant flux, when we don't realize that everybody has been everything to us at one time or another in all of our beginningless lives, then we will just take the superficial appearance. We will take how somebody is relating to me now as a concrete reality and as a reason to either cling to them or have aversion towards them or be indifferent towards them.

## Questions and answers

**[Audience:] If we aren't attached to our friends, won't we feel not as close and involved with them? We'll be disengaged in some way.**

Actually, what we're getting at here is the attitude of attachment. We want to let go of the attitude of attachment. Being attached to somebody is very different than appreciating or feeling close or grateful to them. We can still feel close to some people, still feel grateful to them, but not be attached to them. With attachment, we're exaggerating their good qualities and then clinging to them. Attachment has this quality of "I need to be with this person. I want to be with this person. I've got to possess this person. They're mine." Like all the love songs, "I can't live without you." [laughter]

By freeing the mind of that clinging, it doesn't mean that you disengage from the person. Rather, I think it means that the mind is much more balanced, so that we can still feel close to that person, but we can also recognize that they have some faults, that they may not always fulfill our expectations or be there when we want them to be. That is not because they mean any harm but because that's the nature of life.

So we let go of the expectations and the clinging, but we can still feel involved and engaged.

**[Audience:] So you're saying that the nature of relationships is that they do not remain static, they're constantly changing?**

Yes, continually changing. Relationships continually change. Holding onto anybody at any particular time or pushing anybody away with aversion at any particular time – both of those are unrealistic because as you can see, they change automatically. What we're really hammering away here is our assumption that we know who somebody else is and we know who they are and how they're always going to relate to us. We can bank our nickels on that. We don't realize that that's totally false. The fact is, we don't know.

**[Audience:] So our perception of relationships is very closed-minded, very myopic?**

Right. One reason is because we're only looking at it from the very narrow view of how they relate to *me*. And second of all, we're only looking at how this relationship is right now at this very moment, not recognizing in previous lives, that person has been very kind to us, and also sometimes, they've harmed us. And also realizing in the future, it could be the same.

I think this meditation is quite powerful in breaking down a lot of our preconceptions and a lot of our very rigid mind that thinks we know who somebody else is. The mind likes to put people in nice, neat little categories and decide who we're going to hate for as long as we live because we know who they are. [laughter]

There's a lot of this, isn't there? To tell a story. I remember as a kid, my family had a summer property where everybody went for the summer. But one side of the family didn't speak to the other side of the family. They all came to the summer house on summer vacation – one's living upstairs, the other one's living downstairs – but they didn't talk to each other. That was when I was a kid. Now, my generation is

older, and not only do the adults not speak to each other, but some of the kids also don't speak to each other. You talk about taking vows, "I vow I will hate you for as long as I live." [laughter] And families keep these kinds of vows. It's so outrageous. It's such a tragedy. You look at what's going on in Bosnia. It's the same thing. People taking precepts to hate each other and destroy each other because they think they know who somebody else is, because of the way their ancestors have acted towards each other.

**[Audience:] Don't we categorize people so that we can feel secure knowing who they are and how they relate to us?**

Wanting to put people in boxes so that we know who our permanent friends are and who our permanent enemies are. You just look at the world political situation. When we were kids growing up, Soviet Union is this incredible enemy. Now, we're pouring money into them: "It's great!" Politically, there's no security in any of this. Friends and enemies change all the time, just look at US foreign policy. [laughter]

So what we're getting at is how unrealistic these attitudes of attachment and aversion are. What this meditation is directing us towards is a feeling of equanimity towards others. Equanimity doesn't mean indifference. There's a big difference between equanimity and indifference. Indifference is you're disengaged, you're uninvolved, you don't care, you're withdrawn. That's not what equanimity is. Equanimity is you're open, you're receptive, but equally, to everybody. The mind's free of partiality and prejudice. The equanimous mind is a mind that is involved with others in a very open-hearted way. And that's what we're aiming at by freeing ourselves from the clinging attachment, the aversion and the apathy. That would be a nice state of mind to have, wouldn't it? Where everybody you saw, you can have some kind of equal-hearted openness towards them instead of feeling fear or suspicion or need or something else.

This meditation is actually quite powerful, something we can do again and again and again. And each time you do it, you use different examples. You will really begin to see how the mind works.

**[Audience:] Our mind may be equal and impartial towards everybody, but externally, we may still behave differently with different people, isn't it?**

Yes. What we're aiming at is a mind that's equal and impartial towards others. That doesn't necessarily mean we act the same way towards everybody. Because obviously you have to treat a child differently than you treat an adult. So having an equal internal attitude doesn't mean that externally our behavior is the same with everybody. Because we have to treat people according to social convention, according to what's appropriate. You speak one way to a child, another way to an adult, another way to an older person. We treat people in different ways. You might speak one way to a boss and another way to a colleague, but inside in your mind, you have equal feeling towards all of them, a heart of equal openness towards all of them, even though externally our behavior might be somewhat different.

In the same way, if there's a dog who's wagging its tail and there's a dog who is growling, you treat them differently but that doesn't mean in your heart that you have to be attached to one and hate the other. We can still have an equal feeling towards all of them, recognizing that both the dogs are living beings that want happiness and share common qualities. We can recognize that on an internal level, and yet externally deal with the dogs as appropriate.

It's the same with human beings. We're working at an internal change in our perception here. So you can still have friends. We're not saying, "Get rid of friends, get rid of relatives, move out, go home tonight, pack up, say 'Look, I'm supposed to be equal, so this is it.'" [laughter] We're not saying that. You still have people that maybe you're in closer contact with, that you have more common interests with. There's no problem with that. It's the attachment that makes the problem. That's what we're trying to work with.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes to absorb this.

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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>