

Cultivating Bodhicitta through the Seven Points of Cause and Effect – Part 2 of 4

(lightly edited transcript)

by Ven. Thubten Chodron®, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 28 Apr 93

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1) Recognizing that each sentient being has been one's mother

We're in the middle of talking about the seven points of cause and effect, a technique to generate the altruistic intention to become a Buddha. On the basis of equanimity – which has an equal openness to everybody and isn't a biased, prejudiced or partial mind – we start meditating first that all other beings have been our mother. With this one, we talked last time about having the view of rebirth, or perhaps just provisionally accepting it, so that we can get more of a feeling that others have been our mother in all those previous lives when we've been born in all those incredible number of different realms doing different things.

Think in relation to present life's parents, friends, strangers, enemies, then all sentient beings

Here, it's very helpful to start with your present life's mother, and remember that she was your mother also in previous lives. And then move on to your father, and think that your father was your father or mother in your previous lives. And then take a friend or a relative, and think that they were also this caregiver for you in your previous lives, many, many times. And then after you do it with a friend, then do it with a stranger. Think that person has been related to you in this very close relationship of parent and child in previous times. And then move on to somebody you don't get along with very well. And think that person has been your kind parent in previous times. Then watch your mind start to fight. [laughter]

But it's interesting. Give your mind that space to play with it instead of seeing people as solid, fixed entities, always with a certain kind of body, in a certain kind of relationship with you. Experiment around. Imagine that this person has not always been who they are. They were once my mother and my father, a very kind person to me. And then from there, think about all the other sentient beings. So you see, it's a very progressive way of thinking. It kind of loosens your mind up. You start with your present life mother and think she has been the mother in the past. Then go to the friends and relatives. Then go to the strangers, the people you don't get along with. And then to all sentient beings.

It's important in all these meditations to think about specific people instead of just, "Oh yeah, all beings have been my mother before. All sentient beings have been my mother." You start taking the people you know and imagining them in different bodies and different relationships to you, then you can really begin to see how your hard concept of reality has to budge a little bit. It's quite good when that happens. Shake up that concept of reality a bit. Rattle it around.

Imagine meeting your long-lost mother/caregiver

Another thing that you can use in terms of helping to recognize other people as your mother. If you start feeling doubtful: "How can these people be my mother?", then just think of whoever it was who was really kind to you when you were little. And imagine that somehow, when you were very little, you were separated from that person, and you didn't see them for another twenty-five, thirty-five years. And then

here you are, walking down the street, and you see a couple of beggars or homeless persons on the street... and you know how our usual attitude is, just look the other way and pretend I didn't see that, I don't have anything to do with that kind of person. But let's say initially you had that kind of reaction, and then you look back again and you recognize that that is your mother whom you haven't seen in all these years. Then all of a sudden, you have a totally different way of relating to that street person or that junkie. You have a totally different feeling of, "Wow, I have some relationship with this person. There is some connection here. I don't want to just turn and walk the other way."

In that kind of situation, at first when we didn't recognize them, we felt like, "Urgh! I have nothing to do with them." Then when we recognized them, we felt the closeness. In this situation too, when we don't recognize others as our mother, we tend to tune them out. But when we can have that kind of recall, "This person has been my mother in the past life," then there's that feeling of knowing that person. There's some kind of feeling of closeness and involvement. So it changes the attitude.

I just talked to one person in another city. When she was ten or eleven, her mother just vanished. She didn't know what happened to her mother. She just vanished. The family didn't want to talk about it. She said she went through years and years feeling awry and very motherless, and then just recently (she's probably around fifty years of age now), she found her mother in New York. And she's leaving tomorrow to go meet her mother, after twenty-five or thirty years! If you can imagine that feeling. At first she might not even recognize her, but when there's the recognition that this person has been my mother, then even though you may not recognize them (because the body is so different now), the feeling of closeness is there.

So we can try to imagine this situation, not just after twenty-five years in this lifetime, but bridge it from one life to the next. The body would have changed a lot, so we may not initially recognize that person, but when we do, it's like we've found our mother that we haven't seen in a long time.

We can all make prayers that they have a good re-union tomorrow. I think that must be quite something, huh?

2) Remembering their kindness to you as your mother

When we think about the kindness of the mother, or the caregiver – whoever was kind to us when we were little, we use that as an example – we think of all the different ways that we were cared for by that person when we were young, physically and emotionally and mentally, in terms of our education, protection and so many other ways. And then again, take that feeling of fondness and care, when we remember how well we were cared for as a child, and generalize it to the friend and relative who was my mother before in the past lives. And then the stranger who was my mother before in the past lives. And then the person I don't get along with. Then all sentient beings. So you do that same process there. Remembering all these different groups of people as very, very kind.

The thing is that if somebody was very, very kind to us before, we remember it even now. If your life was in danger and somebody came and saved your life, you would remember it very much, even though that incident happened many, many years ago. That kindness, that feeling of gratitude remains very strong in your mind. So in the same way, if we can develop this feeling that all beings have been our parents in the past, and feel all the kindness that they've shown us in the past, then the fact that that was in the past doesn't really matter very much because it still comes very vividly to the mind, in the same way that if somebody saved your life ten years ago, it would still come vividly to your mind.

And in the same way, it wouldn't matter so much that we don't recognize them. We meet people and it seems like, "Oh, I've just met this person. I've never met them before." That's because we're just looking at them as their present life body. But in this meditation, we really begin to cut through that, so that there is some feeling of connection with all the different beings before. And some feeling of reciprocal kindness to them.

I think my talk in the last session probably pushed a lot of buttons. Talking about the kindness of the parents and having to go back and look at it in our own particular instance, not just at the things we didn't like that happened when we were kids, but also at all the kindness that in so many ways, had gone unnoticed.

It was quite interesting. I feel that in the last session when I talked all about kindness, all the questions afterwards centered around, “But they did this and this and this...” [laughter] I was thinking about it afterwards, that somehow, so easily, we slip back into our old pattern of “but, but, but,...these are all the reasons why I can’t accept that somebody else has been kind to me.” Like I said, we don’t want to whitewash any kind of harmful situations that happened in the past, but what we’re trying to do is to open our heart to let ourselves realize that we have been cared for. Our society doesn’t teach us very much to open our hearts and let ourselves feel cared for.

Learning to open up and let in affection

It’s quite interesting because many people have great difficulty receiving love. Giving love is a problem, but for some people, receiving love is even more of a problem. Sometimes even receiving gifts is a problem for us. We’ve had discussions about this at Cloud Mountain (retreat center), how somebody gives you a gift and you feel like... [laughter] We feel embarrassed. We feel obliged. We feel uncomfortable, or we feel manipulated. We never let ourselves feel loved. I think it’s really important that somehow, we open the mind a little bit to let the love and care and affection that others have given us seep in. When we instantly go into the defensive of, “Well, they abused me and they didn’t do that, and they hurt me this way and that,” then we’re putting up all the walls, trying to prove that nobody else has ever loved us.

Maybe a lot of people have loved us but we can’t let ourselves see it. And when we can’t let ourselves feel that we’re good enough to receive other people’s love, or that other people have loved us, then it becomes quite difficult to see others as lovable and to love them in return. So we have to somehow give ourselves some credit as being somewhat lovable, and recognize that other people have loved us.

It’s interesting. I think this somehow relates to this other thing we’ve talked a lot about in the West: low self-esteem and self-hatred. Not feeling loved. Not feeling worthy of other people’s love, and so going through our whole life feeling, “This person didn’t love me. That person didn’t love me...”, when maybe a lot of people actually took care of us. I think it’s important to let in some of this care and affection, because some of you might notice in your personal relationships – even friendships and intimate relationships – how that feeling of not being lovable comes in and creates difficulties: “How could this person love me? Nobody has ever loved me.” Here we go back on the defensive again. So to somehow give that space to let in other people’s affection, but without expecting them to be number one perfect and always be there every single moment that we need them. So something realistic. While we accept that somebody has cared for us, let’s not then expect them to be God. To realize that they are human beings.

Also when we’re thinking about the kindness of the mother or caregiver when we were little, it’s helpful too to think of the kindness animal mothers show for their young, and just how instinctive that affection is. I remember when I first heard this teaching, I was at Kopan. There was one dog there. Her name was Sarsha. I’ll never forget Sarsha. I think she’s long gone. She was an old white mangy dog whose hind legs were – I don’t know what happened, she might have gotten into a fight or something – her hind legs were totally crippled, so she just dragged herself around by her front paws. She dragged herself all over Kopan like that. Sarsha had some puppies. And I was thinking how difficult it must have been for her to be pregnant and to give birth with her hind legs completely deformed, and yet when her puppies came out, she just loved them to bits. She took such good care of them. And all the discomfort completely gone from her mind. She just loved her puppies.

Everywhere you look in the animal world – the cat mothers, the dolphin mothers, the elephant mothers – there’s all this kindness going from the parents to the young ones. To remember to see that kind of kindness, and to remember also that in our previous lives when those beings have been our mothers, they have been that kind to us. When we’ve been born as animals in previous lives, whoever was our mother was that kind to us. Really letting ourselves feel the universe as a kind place, because there is a lot of kindness in it, if we let ourselves see it.

3) Wishing to reciprocate that kindness

And then the third step, after we’ve seen others as our mother and remember their kindness, is to have a wish to repay their kindness. Why do we wish to repay their kindness? Not because we feel obliged,

not because, “Oh this person was so kind to me, so therefore I owe them something,” but rather, by recognizing that all of our happiness comes from all these beings who have been kind to us at one time or another in our infinite lives, then automatically a wish comes to give something to them in return.

Spontaneous wish to return kindness, not out of obligation

This involves a slight shift from how we often think in the West. Because often in return for kindness, when people have been kind, we feel obligation. This is why I think, so often we have a hard time accepting things. Because instantaneously, our mind puts on ourselves – it’s not coming from others – “Oh, they gave me something, therefore I owe them something back.” And then as soon as we *have* to give something back to others, as soon as we *have* to, then it becomes a burden. And we don’t want this burden. So it just becomes very distasteful.

So here when we’re talking about repaying the kindness of others, wishing to repay it, it’s not coming from that sense of obligation and being put upon. “Others have been nice to me, so okay. All right, grandma, thank you note. Okay, I’ll be kind to others.” Not like that. [laughter] But rather, we’ve received so much and we want to give something in return spontaneously. And this may have happened at certain times in your life, where very unexpectedly, someone did something very kind, and you just instantaneously felt, “I want to share this.”

I remember this one instance. I was in the Soviet Union many years ago. I was a student at that time. I was either at Moscow or Leningrad, as it was called in those days. I was in the subway station, and a young woman just came up to me (I was obviously a lost somebody from somewhere else), and she helped me out. She had a ring on her finger. She just pulled it off and gave it to me, and then she disappeared. This was twenty years ago, and it’s so vivid in my mind. Here’s a complete stranger giving me something which was obviously very valuable not only monetarily, but also to her personally. When you get that kind of kindness, it’s not like, “Oh I want to possess it and hold it all for myself. I can’t share it.” Rather, we feel it’s such a beautiful act; we feel we have received so much and so we automatically want to give something to others as well. It’s that kind of feeling that you want to cultivate here. The wish to repay others. The spontaneous wish of wanting to share.

One of my friends’ mother has Alzheimer’s and her mind is completely gone. She is in a care facility right now because her family can’t take care of her. My friend lives in India and from time to time, he comes over to visit his mother. She’s just completely disorientated. She sometimes doesn’t recognize people, tries to put lipstick on her toothbrush, puts seven pairs of pants on at one time. Her mind in many ways, is very gone, but he told me that her basic quality of kindness is still there. He went one time and brought her some kind of goodies or pastry or something, and immediately after she got it, she had to go share it with all the other old ladies, all of whom were worse than she was in the ward. She didn’t want to take the goodies she had received and just hide them all for herself and eat them. Her spontaneous nature was, “Oh I received something good. I want to share it with other people,” before she even took one. I thought that was so remarkable.

This spontaneous wish to share is different from obligation. Especially this one with Alzheimer’s, there was no mind to think about being obliged. It was just this spontaneous, “I receive, I want to give.” And that joy that comes from giving – that’s what we want to cultivate in this third step.

Here, it’s very helpful to think, if all these other beings have been our mothers in the past, and they’ve been kind to us, their present situation – looking at it from a Dharma perspective – is not really that great, in the sense that they want happiness and don’t want suffering, but they’re creating a lot of negative karma and it is almost as if they are running towards suffering. Sometimes in our world, we can see people create negative karma with so much joy and glee and enthusiasm, as if they can’t wait to create the cause of suffering. When we look at this situation, and we think that all these other beings have been our parents in the past, then automatically we want to do something to help them.

Just in an ordinary situation, if our parents are miserable, especially in old age, they look to their children for help. And if the children don’t help their parents, after what their parents have given, then the parents are in a big jam. Then there’s a problem. If the parents can’t rely on the kids at some point, then who will help them? Social services downtown? Maybe.

But we want to develop some kind of feeling that after we’ve received this much, just as parents would focus on their kids, the kids would want to help back. Then similarly, if all beings have been that kind to

us and given us so much, then we want to help them back. This feeling of, "If they can't count on me for help, who can they count on?" In the same way, in the family, if the older parents can't count on their children, then who can they count on? I know in our society, this really pushes buttons, doesn't it? In our society, things are quite difficult that way, and very different.

I remember in Singapore there was one young woman at the university. She was studying so hard to be an engineer. Her father died in her senior year, and she was very upset about it, not only because she missed him, but because she really wanted to support him. She really wanted him to be able to retire and for her to work and support him after how he had supported her during her whole education. I was so amazed. You hardly ever hear anybody in America say things like that. We usually look at it as, "My parents are so loaded. When are they going to give me some?" [laughter] We hardly ever look at it the other way around. This is a completely different attitude that this young woman had. She was only like twenty-one, twenty-two. Really wanting to take care of her parents.

So again it's this feeling that we want to cultivate, of wanting to reciprocate the kindness that has been shown us. Not seeing caring for others as a burden, but as something that we really want to be able to do.

Gift of the Dharma is the highest gift

The best way to repay the kindness of others is by teaching them the Dharma, by leading them in the Dharma path. They say the gift of the Dharma is the highest gift, because when we're able to help other people in the Dharma way, then we're giving them the tools to free themselves. So that gift of the Dharma is the highest gift.

If we can't give the Dharma, then we can give whatever it is that people need, and whatever it is they are open to receiving. So it's not a thing of trying to convert people and force the Dharma on them, but if we have this kind of inner wish in our heart, that if I can eventually go and teach others the Dharma, especially if I could teach my parents the Dharma, then that would be really wonderful.

I don't know about your parents, but my parents of this lifetime, I think it's going to be a little difficult to teach them the Dharma. Sometimes it feels funny, because I really cherish the Dharma, and I would love to be able to teach my parents the Dharma. I found so much benefit from it myself, and they have done so much for me, I'd love to be able to share it with them. They don't have the same opinion though, so it doesn't become possible. But then sometimes when I'm teaching, I'll kind of realize, "OK, well this life's parents, maybe I can't help directly, but all the other people in the room are past lives' parents, so I'll help these past lives' parents instead of this life's parents." And so it changes the attitude somehow.

A more forgiving attitude towards others who harmed us

Similarly, if we have this feeling of other beings as our mother, then when they harm us... Like if your mother just suddenly went berserk. If your mother just had incredible mental problems and started doing crazy things, you wouldn't hate her. But rather, you would recognize here's somebody who is mad, and compassion comes. Because you know that your mother doesn't have to be this way, but because of causes and conditions, she just flipped out. But you wouldn't hate her and be angry for whatever harm she did.

Similarly, we can look at all beings in that way, and recognize that when people harm, it's as if they have gone crazy through the power of their own afflictions [[Note: 'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'](#)]. Because when we're under the influence of our own afflictions*, whether it's wrong views or ignorance or jealousy, it's like we're crazy at that particular moment. We don't have control over our mind. And so in that way, if we can, when people harm us, look at them as we would look at our mother who for some reason went mad – maybe our mother had some kind of environmental pollution and was taking some medication and suffering from the side effects and just went crazy – you wouldn't blame her for whatever she did. So similarly, when we received harm, to look at those who harmed us as people who are mad, under the influence of their own afflictions*.

And it's true, isn't it? When people have a lot of anger in their mind, they're really like crazy. We can look in our own mind, when we're angry, completely, it's like we're a totally different person. When we really lose it, when our anger just rages, we're a completely different person, we're not like ourselves.

Similarly, whenever others have harmed us in that way, it's really because they're temporarily flipped out.

Like I was saying the last time, when we received harm, it is very helpful if we can think of what that person's mind was like at the time they were harming us – how confused it was. You look at somebody like David Koresh, and what he's done. You try and put yourself in his shoes and think what his mind must be like. Incredible pain and confusion and fear. I look at the theology he gives and it's so inspired by anger and fear. To have his kind of mind must be a complete torture. And so rather than look at him and criticize, to understand it's incredible suffering for him.

And then of course all the karma somebody like him creates under the power of those afflictions, and when you think of the result of that karma that he's going to face, then again, how can you hate somebody who has deliberately created the cause for so much misery in the future? How can we wish that kind of person ill?

It's not a thing of saying what he did was OK, but it's a thing more of looking deeper at what was going on.

Questions and Answers

[Audience:] I find that it's easier for me to forgive someone like Hitler who has done so much harm to people, than someone who harms me in a much smaller way. Why is that?

Adolf Hitler maybe we can forgive, but the person who said bad things about me behind my back, "Urgh!" I think there, sometimes what's happening is that Adolf Hitler didn't harm me. They harmed somebody else. Whereas this person, even if it's a small, tiny harm, it happened to *me*! We know who's most important in this place, don't we? [laughter] So I think it's because we over-emphasize our own value. "How *dare* anybody treats *me* like this!" We take it so personally that even if it's a tiny, small matter, we hold on to it very tenaciously, because they were directed at *me*.

Have you ever had it happen, that a friend came to you and told you their problem. You hear their story: this person did this, that person did that..., and you can look at it and say, "Wow, there is just a lot of attachment there. They're making a big deal. They don't really need to be quite as miserable as they are." Have you had that happen when friends have complained to you about things that have happened at work, or what their parents did, or something, and you can see very clearly, "They don't really need to take it so personally, it's not such a big deal."

But on the other hand, when those things happen to us, "This is *really* important stuff." [laughter] Really meaningful. And the only difference is, one happened to me and the other one didn't happen to me. It just shows how, as soon as we get the "I" involved in it, we really solidify things. So I think sometimes when we have that perspective and we can realize that our mind is adding some extra flavor there, that maybe we don't need to continue to add on the flavor, then we can begin to let go of it.

[Audience:] When we see that someone obviously has a distorted mind, like Hitler, it's easier to think in this way. But isn't it difficult for us to see the people who harm us in ordinary circumstances as having a crazy mind? Like when someone criticizes us or ruins our reputation.

They should know better, shouldn't they? [laughter] When somebody is crazy enough, we'll forgive them. But this person isn't really crazy. They really should know better. So the mind, again, doesn't want to forgive.

Well, I think, firstly, recognize that a person is actually just as crazy under the force of afflictions, whether they did a big thing or a small thing.

Another thing that I find very good in this kind of situations, especially criticism or when your reputation is at stake, is to say, "Oh I'm so glad this happened. I'm so glad this person is criticizing me. I'm so glad this person is wrecking my reputation." Because the mind tends to fight it, "I don't want blame. I don't want a bad reputation. I don't want to be threatened this way." It's all out there. It's like, "I got to build up my defenses real strong here." So to completely take it the other way and say, "Actually, I'm quite

proud and I have a big problem with always putting myself up. So it's quite good that this person comes along and knocks me down a little bit. Actually it's not doing a whole lot of harm. And even if this person wrecks my reputation with a few people, it's okay. I'll definitely live through it, and it could really benefit me in the sense of helping me let go of wanting to parade myself around as a superstar. So it's quite good somebody knocks me off my self-created pedestal."

I find that as soon as I say that to myself, then I don't get angry about it. And then there's almost some humor in the situation. Instead of taking it so seriously, I can really laugh and see the humor in it. Makes some sense?

Also, when you think like that, it prevents you from creating negative karma. It also prevents the situation from escalating. And when you prevent the situation from escalating, then you also prevent the other person from creating more negative karma.

This current thing, they still reap the karma from that. But you really cut it at that point, instead of letting it fester and build up. We have incredible ability in providing very good circumstances for other people to create negative karma. So when we can cut that off, it does help a lot.

[Audience: Inaudible]

Well, I would think more in terms of using these things as ways of protecting our own mind from generating negative thoughts. So in the sense like if we want to protect our own mind from generating negative thoughts, if we can develop a sense of love and compassion, and then send that out to the other person in the form of white light which goes into them and purifies them. So doing that kind of visualization but with love and compassion for the other person.

[Audience:] Is it good to blank out negative thoughts?

That depends on what your attitude is when you're doing it. Because if you deliberately try and push negative thoughts away, then they just come back and they often come back stronger. You don't want to push the negative thoughts away because you're afraid of them, or you don't like them. But rather, I use the example of, "I've run this video before." We all tend to have circular types of negative thoughts. And it's really like a video. There's a "Who do they think they are to say that to me" video, and there's the "Poor me, everybody's always taking advantage of me" video. [laughter] And when we go through that in our meditation, we begin to see how, it is almost as if we've installed a video and clicked on a whole emotional response, a whole pattern. We just put it on automatic and make ourselves so miserable.

What I find really helpful is if I can catch my mind at the beginning of the video, to say, "I've seen this video before. I don't need to see it again." That kind of putting the thoughts aside is okay, because you're not afraid of them, you're not terrified of them, it's just, "This is boring! Feeling sorry for myself is really boring." Or, "Continually getting angry at this person..it's boring! It's painful. Who needs it?" I think that kind of way of leaving it aside is okay.

[Audience:] We try to do good but often, we can't benefit people as much as we want to, and we feel tired. How do we deal with that?

We can't try and be the world's savior if we're not capable of being it. It's a little bit inflated, isn't it, if we think, "Now, I'm so full of love and compassion. I'm going to take all these people off drugs. I'm going to get involved in everybody's life and I'm going to turn the world around..." I think that the bottom-line is being practical. That's what I always come back to. We do what we can, and we don't do what we can't. And just being practical. "I can do this, and I do it. But I can't do that, so I'm not going to pretend to myself or to the other person that I can. Because if I do that and I bite off more than I can chew, then I'm going to be disappointing somebody else, and making some more confusion." So sometimes I think it's actually rather compassionate to let people know clearly what we can't do, instead of making them think we can do a whole lot of things and then let them down later, because we bit off more than we could chew.

So, on those times when we're over-extended and we're stretched, take time out to rest, and get ourselves back in balance. We don't have to withdraw into a totally selfish mode of, "I'm going to block

out everybody else and take care of *me!*” Rather, we think, “I need to take care of myself so that I can take care of others. It’s stupid to pretend that I can do things that I can’t do because that’s not being very kind to other people. If I’m going to be kind to them, I have to keep myself together. So now, I need the time to be quiet and to put myself back together.” One of the things in the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort is knowing when to rest. Resting when you need to rest. It’s so funny. We go on Protestant work ethic over-drive [laughter], and we get this thing of, “I’ve got to do this. I’ve got to do that...”

Many times, we tend to think, “I should be a bodhisattva!” “If I were only like Rinpoche, I wouldn’t sleep. And it’d be so easy. I could do it all!” “So I’m going to push myself, I’m not going to sleep!” [laughter] I think that’s one of the hardest things because it’s very tempting to get into, “If only I had more compassion, I would be able to do this.” Well, it’s true. Maybe if we had more compassion, we could. But the fact is, we don’t. And so, we are the way we are. We can be kind, but we have to accept that we’re limited beings. “I will admit it. I am a limited being. I’m not going to pretend that I am a bodhisattva. But just because I’m not a bodhisattva doesn’t mean that I have to hate myself. I’m a bodhisattva in training. So I still have some way to go.”

[Audience:] What’s the hardest thing to deal with on the bodhisattva path?

I think one of the hardest things is to not expect something in return. I think that’s really one of the hardest things in the bodhisattva path. And why they talk about the bodhisattvas being really courageous. Because the bodhisattvas are helping others even when the other people don’t say, “Thank you”, or don’t get better, or don’t fulfill all their expectations. And I think that’s where the real courage from the path comes from. Just to make our help a completely free gift without the expectation of being satisfied, being thanked, feeling rewarded. But just doing it, and be satisfied by the doing of it. And be satisfied by our own good motivation. And make our help a free gift that they can do what they want with. And it’s very, very hard to do.

We can see it so much when we help somebody. We give our friend a little bit of advice, because of course we can see their situation so clearly and they can’t, and then they don’t follow our advice. “I spent half an hour...” It’s quite hard.

It’s so surprising sometimes how we can help somebody without our even realizing it. I think we’ve all probably had some experience of it. It was a meeting that you didn’t think much of, and somebody’s come back and said, “Wow, you said this to me ten years ago and it really helped.” And you’re sitting there going, “Really?” And just to see that helping others sometimes is not always something we can plan.

And I think sometimes helping others isn’t something we do. It’s something we be, in the sense that sometimes, if we just are a certain way, our way of being helps somebody without us having to sit there and think, “Well, how can I help them?” I think that’s why there’s that one dedication prayer, “May anyone who sees, hears, remembers, touches or talks to me be removed from all suffering and abide in happiness forever.” “May my presence have that kind of effect on others.” Not because it’s *me*, but simply because of the energy and the atmosphere created. So there is a purpose for that kind of prayers. I think it would bring that result.

4) Heart-warming love—seeing others as lovable

The next point is heart-warming love. There’re different kinds of love. There’s one kind of love that wants others to have happiness and its causes. This kind of love is slightly different. This kind of love is just seeing others as lovable, seeing them with affection. This particular kind of love arises from having cultivated the first three steps. After you’ve meditated on those first three steps of seeing others as our mother, remembering their kindness, and wanting to repay their kindness, then this one automatically arises. It doesn’t need to be meditated on specially. It’s a natural feeling of affection for others, wanting to care for them as if they were your kids. In the same way that the parent so readily takes care of their child, having that same kind of feeling of ease in caring for somebody, and real joy and pleasure in doing it.

I think they use the example here of parent and child quite deliberately. After hearing these teachings, I

started doing some research, talking to some parents, and finding out how it was that they help their kids. And I remember my grandmother saying that because my dad grew up in the middle of the Depression and the family was quite poor, there wasn't much food and she would just give it to my dad and my uncle, and not eat herself. And it didn't bother her at all. The idea of taking care of her kids was just what she wanted to do. It wasn't a sacrifice. It's just what she wanted to do. I think very often parents have that kind of feeling for their children. I talked to one other woman when I was in India who was saying that too. She said you just did things for your kids so naturally that you wouldn't do for anybody else. Who else whose diaper would you change? [laughter] Somehow, whatever the child does, the parent always looks on in fascination at who this child is.

I remember my cousin had a baby, and we had a family get-together. I hadn't seen him in years and years and years. He barely looked at me. He was just like completely fixated on the child. The child couldn't do anything. My cousin was just following him around.

So this feeling of seeing others as beautiful and attractive as a parent sees their child. And here, it's not just for those of you who are parents, looking at your own children like that, but taking that feeling you have for your kids, and then generalizing it towards all beings. Because wouldn't it be nice to be able to look at all beings with that same kind of love that a parent looks at their child?

This is what the heart-warming love is about. It's seeing others as really lovable. Instead of the mind making all its lists, "I can't be friends with this person because they did this and that. That one I can't love because he did this and that..." All of our reasons why everybody is so objectionable. It's really putting that down and just letting ourselves see that others are lovable. Why? Because they've been our mother and they've done all these incredible stuff for us in previous lives.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>

*'Afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'.