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Now we are going to move on to the second far-reaching attitude, which is ethics. Sometimes ethics is translated as morality. Sometimes for Americans, morality becomes a difficult word. Sometimes ethics becomes a difficult word. Sometimes telling us not to do things that we want to do becomes difficult. Sometimes anything that doesn't please the ego causes an earthquake. [laughter]

Ethics is abandoning the wish to cause harm to others. What makes it the far-reaching attitude of ethics is when we combine it with bodhicitta and the understanding of emptiness.

Ethics comes from generosity. First we practice generosity, and then ethics is the next practice. Ethics is a little bit more difficult to practice than generosity. If you practice generosity first, then the attachment to our possessions lessens, and so we are not so attached to our present possessions. We are not so greedy to get more possessions, and so as a result, we stop harming others in order to protect and procure possessions. That's how if you practice generosity, then it quite naturally leads into the practice of ethics. I think that's an interesting thing to contemplate. How lessening the attachment to things then automatically makes us more ethical.

There are three divisions of ethics in this practice:

- a) Abandoning acting negatively
- b) Acting constructively or positively
- c) The ethics of benefiting others

All of the Lamrim serves to increase these three ethics and all the bodhisattva practices are actually found within these three types of ethics. So we shouldn't see the six far-reaching attitudes as separate things; we should see how all of them fit together, how all of the bodhisattva practices, even if they're of the other far-reaching attitudes, (even if you're doing the beginning portion of Lamrim) all fit into ethics: abandoning harming others, and acting in ways that benefit them. The quote on the bottom of this thangka (from His Holiness) says: Abandon negative things; Do positive things; Cultivate a kind heart – this is the teaching of the Buddha. So it's kind of putting it all together in one verse.

The practice of ethics is an extremely important one and you'll see that it comes very often throughout the entire Lamrim. It came at the very beginning, in the lower scope teachings in the practice of karma, and cause and effect and the ten negative actions. It came in the middle scope when we talked about the three higher trainings being the path out of samsara, and the first of the three higher trainings is ethics. It comes in the bodhisattva practice here, the far-reaching attitude of ethics. And even in the tantra, there's the ethics that goes with the tantric practice because there're different kinds of tantric initiations. For some of them, you take tantric vows and so that becomes your practice of ethics there.

So people should not think – and this is a very common misconception in America – that once you get into tantric practice, you're beyond ethics. Actually it's exactly the opposite. There are very, very strict ethical regulations for tantric practice. If you practice those very acutely and sometimes not adhere to lower ethical vows literally, just by the fact of keeping the tantric vows very, very purely, it becomes a pure action. But some people say, "Well, tantra is the highest practice. You transform everything. We're all Buddhas. This is all a pure land. We don't need ethics. Good, bad – it's all empty."

That kind of idea to me indicates more of an empty head than real emptiness, because if you really understand emptiness, then ethics becomes even more important. This is because the more you understand emptiness, the more dependent arising makes sense. The more you understand dependent

arising, the more the practice of ethics is really crucial, because we realize that things arise dependently, and so our actions influence what happens in the future. Therefore the practice of ethics and abandoning harming others becomes very, very important.

So the understanding of emptiness does not negate ethics. Rather it enhances one's practice of ethics, and similarly, engaging in tantric practice actually enhances one's practice of ethics. You get a whole new set of vows when you take the highest class tantric initiations. So it's not some kind of fuzzy thing of "You go into tantra, now you can have samsara and nirvana at the same time – oh goody!" It's not like that. This is a real, real common misconception and it leads many people to a lot of difficulties this lifetime and future lifetimes.

a) Abandoning Acting Negatively

What this means is if we have any of the pratimoksha vows, (the vows for self-liberation, including the monks' and nuns' vows, the five lay precepts and the eight one-day precepts) then this first kind of ethics means keeping those vows purely. Those of you who have taken refuge, you definitely have the vow to abandon killing, and then you may have taken actually, two, three, four, five of the lay precepts. Keeping those purely with an attitude of bodhicitta, becomes this first type of ethics.

If you don't have any of the vows of individual liberation or the pratimoksha vows, then what this refers to is abandoning the ten negative actions. Actually, if you have some of the vows of self-liberation, if you have the five lay precepts or whatever, this includes abandoning the ten negative actions. They are:

Three that are done physically: killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior

Four that are done verbally: lying, slander, harsh words, idle talk

Three mental ones: coveting, maliciousness, wrong views

We did this at the beginning of the path and it's back here reminding us again. It's really important when we go through this, to remember that these are not laws. The Buddha described these ten negative actions as guidelines to help us, as a tool to help analyze and refer to our own behavior. The Buddha did not say "Thou shall not do this." Buddha just said, "If you do this, you get this kind of result. Now check up. Do you want that kind of result? If you don't want that kind of result, don't create the cause." It's something that's best left very much to our own wisdom and our own discretion. They're not commandments which the Buddha created. The Buddha didn't create the fact that if you kill others, you get a lower rebirth. Buddha didn't create karma, the functioning of karma. Buddha simply described it. In the same way that Newton didn't create gravity. He just described it.

This is a very different way of looking at ethics than what we grew up hearing about them when we were kids. It's another example of how sometimes when we come to Buddhism and hear a teaching, we hear it through the ears of a six-year-old child in Sunday school and misinterpret it. It is important to be aware of this.

Ethics is something that we choose to do because we see how it makes our life happier, and how it makes our life more peaceful. And it's true, because if we examine our lives, a lot of the conflicts with people or messy situations can very often be traced to one, two or ten of these ten negative actions.

When we start lying in our relationships, have extra marital affairs, steal things, or gossip, we can see from our own experience how it contributes to so much confusion and problems in our lives; not only external problems with other people, but also how we feel about ourselves. So sometimes we might act unethically and get an advantage that acts temporarily in our own favor, but underneath it all we don't feel very good about ourselves. This whole build-up of guilt, self-hatred and confusion, even if we got away with it, and everybody else said, "Oh, that was really shrewd and smart," still underneath it all, we're the ones who live with ourselves. So a lot of psychological unease comes from negative actions.

And when we meditate, we begin to feel that when the mind is filled with anger, there is a certain kind of energy in the mind. Even though we rationalize, "Oh, this is good and yes, I should do this, and I need to tell this person off," and even if we build up a whole court case for what we're doing, the fact is the mind doesn't feel good when we sit there alone with ourselves. There's some kind of affliction [Note: 'affliction' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitude'] in there that's giving rise

to one of the ten negative actions and that doesn't go away no matter how logical of a court case we build in our own defense. In psychological terms, that's called denial and rationalization.

Don't expect it to go away quickly as perfecting and generating ethics is something that takes time, deep introspection and constantly coming up with new ways to not let the ego get around the whole thing. But as we explore it more and more, we learn a lot more about ourselves and our mind becomes more peaceful.

Lama Zopa once gave an example when he was talking about ethics that struck me deeply. He was saying that we talk a lot about world peace and how important world peace is, but yet we often don't see the necessity of ethics for world peace, less crime or a more harmonious society. But if we look at our own lives, and make an individual effort to abandon just one of the ten negative actions, let's say just the first one – to abandon killing, then everybody else on this planet can feel safe at least around one person. And when you think about that, that's five billion human beings' safety that we're talking about when we abandon killing. If you go further and abandon also taking things that haven't been given to us or stealing, then that means every other living being's possessions are safe when they're around us.

So our keeping good ethical conduct is something that has a far-reaching effect on the planet. And sometimes we don't see this. We say, "World peace? How are we going to do it? There's just too much going on in society. Everything is screwed up!" But if we just stop and look at one person's conduct, we realize how much we can do if we get our own act together and how even keeping one or two precepts contributes to the safety and security of everybody on this planet.

Imagine if everybody on this planet were able to keep just the precept not to kill for one day – the newspapers wouldn't have anything to report on! What would they put in the six o'clock news? And that's just the impact of one precept! We shouldn't minimize the value of the force of our own ethical behavior and how much positive contribution that makes to society and to world peace.

b) Acting Constructively or Virtuously

This is doing virtuous things so that we can collect a lot of positive potential or merit, which can then be dedicated to becoming a Buddha. Acting positively or constructively includes the practice of all six far-reaching attitudes in general, and that really includes any kind of positive action you do.

So just coming to teachings, contemplating, discussing, meditating, these are all the ethics of acting constructively. Or if you help print Dharma books, if you make prostrations, if you make offerings, if you offer service, if you organize a conference, or do a database, or anything with this kind of motivation, then it becomes acting constructively. So any kind of virtuous actions we do becomes this second form of ethics.

Although some of these virtuous actions are the more active ones that we integrate in our daily life, such as being kind to others or helping people, a lot of them are things that we do as part of a formal Dharma practice– like doing prostrations or making offerings, taking refuge.

I think that's very important because although we really want to integrate Dharma in our daily life, the force of taking the time out to engage in formal practice is important. Because if we just try and integrate in our daily life but don't give ourselves any quiet time to reflect on our life, then our energy very soon gets dispersed. It just goes out the window.

But if we take the time, and that's why I'm really emphasizing making a daily meditation practice for yourself and doing some practices. Really take the time, set some time in your schedule for some quiet time alone, where you can become friends with yourself and work on your mind in a more intense way. I think that's very important. If we just try and integrate all day without any quiet time, we just get frazzled and out of whack.

In this way, some people may want to use their quiet time to read, do the analytic meditation, breathing meditation, or some of the purification meditation. Some people may want to do prostrations, or do mandala offerings. And all these practices are very good.

Those of you who have been coming to class for quite a while, I really encourage you to start doing prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas on a very regular basis. If you like to count, you can start counting them. If you don't want to count, forget it. It doesn't matter. But if you feel that counting would give you some inspiration and direction, it's good to count some. It gives you something solid that you're doing day after day, really doing these prostrations every day as a way of purifying your mind. Or doing mandala offerings day after day as a way of accumulating positive potential.

[Audience:] Can you describe the practice of prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas?

There're thirty-five Buddhas who took special vows to help us purify our negative karma, and so what we do is we bow down to them, recite their names, and at the same time imagine light coming from them into us, purifying and pushing out the negative energy. Then at the end, there's a whole confession prayer where we think of all the different things that we regret doing in this life and previous lives, and we rejoice at the virtues that we and others have collected. Finally, we dedicate all of these for the benefit of all beings.

It's an extremely powerful practice and if you do it daily, you begin to see the difference in your mind. It acts as a very good method to help you reflect on your whole life and do this life review and ethical clean up. They say that when people die, sometimes they have a quick life review where your whole life flashes in front of you. I would advice not to wait until you die to have that happen, because you might not have so much time to reflect on it well. It's much better if we keep up with things, especially at the beginning, to go back and take a serious look at our life. Keep doing that as time goes on because when we understand more and more things, we begin to put our past in order and make some strong determination about the future. And that affects our spiritual practice and makes us psychologically much more healthy.

[Audience:] What's the difference between the Vajrasattva practice and prostrations?

The thirty-five Buddhas practice is particularly beneficial for purifying broken bodhisattva vows, but it also purifies other things as well.

The Vajrasattva practice is particularly helpful for purifying broken tantric vows in addition to other things as well. They're both very strong, and I would actually recommend doing both.

When I started out, Lama Yeshe had most of us do a three-month Vajrasattva retreat in India during the monsoons, when it's pouring rain. Even though you're going crazy trying to recite the Vajrasattva mantra, there's no place else to go and nothing else to do because it's raining. So it's back to the meditation cushion. And it's very effective when you do that. He also had many others do the prostrations. I think it's very helpful.

[Audience:] How do you remember all their names?

Either you sit down and make yourself memorize them, or what you do is, you can put the book on a chair or table next to you, and say the name of one and bow, and keep repeating that name as you're doing that one bow, and then read the name of the second one and do another bow, and repeat that name constantly while you're doing that second bow. Or you can tape it and say it along with the tape.

[Audience:] What do you visualize?

There're different visualizations described by different lamas. One is the more complicated visualization that Lama Tsong Khapa had, where the thirty-five Buddhas all have different colors and different hand gestures. There's an easier one described in the book, 'Pearl of Wisdom Book I', which groups them according to the five Dhyani Buddhas. You can pick which one you want. Sometimes doing the more complicated one helps you personalize it more. Sometimes just doing the one where they're in the five rows is easier.

[Audience:] How many prostrations should we do?

When you're doing it, do all thirty-five. And then do the prayer at the end where you're thinking of all the things you've done in this life and previous lives. When I first did that confession prayer, I said, "I didn't

do this. Why am I confessing this? I didn't do the five heinous actions. Why do I have to confess what I didn't do?" I was like a little kid saying, "Don't blame me mom."

But then I began to realize that it's not just this life we're talking about. We've had infinite beginningless lifetimes, so we've had lots of time to screw up. So it's good to do it anyway, because we have no idea what we've done. And even though we might feel real safe and secure in our life right now, anything could happen in the next moment and our life changes radically. When harmful things happen very quickly, we have to remember it's a ripening of negative karma that hasn't been purified yet.

[Audience:] Why should we rejoice in the virtuous actions of all beings? Is it important to the practice?

The rejoicing is very important so that we don't just look at the negative things. We're rejoicing not just at our own positive actions but what everybody has done. When we spend time doing that, it sets up a whole feeling of community and a feeling of good faith in others. Recognizing other people's potential and their positive actions can really counteract the feeling of despair. So we rejoice and then we dedicate.

[Audience:] How does rejoicing help us accumulate positive potential?

That's because it helps us see how one part of our mind just likes to criticize: "This person did this and this."

The practice of rejoicing at other people's positive things is taking that same picky mind but making us pick out other people's good qualities instead of their faults. "They did this good thing and they did that good thing and I feel happy about it."

So it's helping us to look at the positive qualities of people and society. And in that way, you accumulate a lot of positive potential. And then in terms of mandala offerings, people can do those as well.

There's also a very nice practice of doing the refuge and reciting the refuge 100,000 times. You just do the visualization of the refuge tree and recite this refuge either in Sanskrit: *Namo Gurubhya, Namu Buddhaya..*, or you can do it in Tibetan, or in English: I take refuge in the Gurus, I take refuge in the Buddhas, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha. You just repeat it over and over again, while imagining the light coming and purifying your negative actions. So you see, there's a lot more teaching that can go into this practice. It's a very nice practice because it makes your connection with the Triple Gem very strong, and it gives you the feeling that, "Yes, there's something to rely on here. Yes, I have a very clear direction in my spiritual life. Yes, I can tap into the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that I have inside of me too."

[Audience:] Are there Ngondro (preliminary) practices in the Gelug tradition?

Oh yes, there is. In the Gelugpa tradition, there's more emphasis on doing it gradually; you do a little bit each day. For instance, you might take three months out and do the Vajrasattva retreat. Or you might take three months out and do prostrations, or you might just do some prostrations every day.

The practice we have, called the Jorcho practice or the preliminary practices, contains the refuge, prostrations, mandala offering, the Vajrasattva practice, water bowls, etc.

[Audience:] Do they have to be done in retreat?

Not necessarily. You can do some of it in a retreat. But some of it you can just do a little bit everyday. What's important, according to my teachers, is not that you just do 100,000 and you say, "OK, got that done. Forget that." But you should keep it up and continue that cleansing and collecting positive potential every day for your whole life. Some people may choose to do it in a retreat form, while others may do a little bit every day, but it's the same practice.

For example, I did the Vajrasattva practice in a retreat form, which was very good. I did the prostrations over a span of three years, a little bit every day because it wasn't possible to do a retreat. So I did it morning and evening every day for three years.

You have to do 100,000 prostrations, but then you do 10% more to cover up the times you messed up. So you actually end up doing 111,111 prostrations because you keep doing 10% more to cover up the times you messed up.

I have very mixed feelings about counting, because for some people, counting can be very good. It gives you a cause to rejoice, "Oh, I did this many. This is good." Or it gives you a goal to work for, so it keeps you working. If counting does that for you, count. But other people count, and it becomes more like doing a business inventory. "I did 100 prostrations, how many more do I have to do? If I do so many every day, how many days is it going to take me till I'm done?"

If you have that kind of attitude, then you get all nervous and neurotic about how many prostrations you have to do and how long it will take. In that case, it's better not to count because it just becomes doing a business instead of doing prostrations.

c) The Ethics of Benefiting Others

This, again, can be the first four far-reaching attitudes that are really done for the benefit of others. It can also include what we call the four ways of gathering disciples or the four ways of gathering students:

- 1) Being generous: If you're generous, then people want to come hear teachings from you or want to be influenced by you.
- 2) Speaking pleasantly: This means teaching other people the Dharma in a pleasant way and according to their culture and disposition.
- 3) Encouraging people in the Dharma practice: After you've taught them, encourage them to do it.
- 4) Practice what you preach: Be a good example yourself.

The "Four Ways of Assembling Disciples" are four ways for us to be of positive influence to other people and creating a circumstance whereby you can teach them the Dharma.

Also, in the practice of the ethics of benefiting others, it lists eleven kinds of people we should look out for. This was also mentioned in the last section of the bodhisattva vows, which had to do with the ethics of benefiting others. In our practice of being of benefit to others, we have to pay special attention to the following groups of people:

- 1) To help people who have a lot of suffering, are sick, blind, have different physical deformities or problems.
- 2) To help people who are ignorant of the Dharma, who don't know the right method to practice and how to make their own lives peaceful.
- 3) To work for others' sake by benefiting them, by actually serving them and doing this by remembering their kindness.
- 4) To help people who are in danger, who feel threatened by something.
- 5) To help people who are afflicted with miseries, in other words, those who feel that 'the house is falling down all at once' (we go through that from time to time), or people who are bereaved, who have lost somebody very close to them, so they feel quite miserable.
- 6) To help people who are destitute or poor or who are deserted; they have nowhere else to turn.
- 7) To help the homeless, the people who are homeless because of poverty or homeless because they're travelers.
- 8) To help people who are depressed or people who lack a community of like-minded people. So people who feel estranged or alienated, who feel like they have no friends, or feel depressed.
- 9) To help people who are on the right path, which includes people who know Dharma and who are practicing, by encouraging them, and creating good conditions whereby they can practice.
- 10) To help people who are on the wrong path, who're acting completely opposite to an ethical or compassionate way of life, by encouraging them or setting a good example, or setting up situations whereby they can learn.
- 11) To help others through the use of miraculous powers, if it's necessary.

So those are eleven specific groups of people to look out for.

Material for Meditation

What we're teaching here is not just intellectual stuff – this is all for meditation. So for example, when you go home and meditate on the three types of ethics, you would take the first type of ethics (*the ethics of abandoning harmful actions*), sit there and think about the meaning of the various precepts you have taken and how well you keep them. If there're a few of them that you break very often, or a few of them that are very easy to keep, think about it so that you'll understand what role they play in your life. Or do a review of the ten destructive actions – “Which ones do I need to work on? Which ones are easier and how can I enhance them?” So really think and contemplate about that, so this is all analytical meditation. Very clear outline there.

Or the second kind of ethics – *the ethics of benefiting others*. Think about all these positive actions of listening to teachings, contemplating and discussing them, meditating on them, offering service, doing prostrations or offerings, or reading Dharma books. Make yourself a list of those things and think, “Which ones are easier for me? Which ones am I most attracted to? How can I enhance my practice of these things? How can I help myself be joyful and have motivation to do them?” So reflect on these.

With *the ethics of being of service to others*, again you can go through the four ways of assembling disciples, or these eleven groups of people to look out for, and think, “In my life, who do I know who has fit these categories? When I have encountered people like this, have I benefited them? How can I continue to benefit these kinds of people? Are there people in my life right now that fall into these categories, but I'm spacing out and not paying attention and not benefiting them? How can I benefit them?”

There's a lot of material here for reflection, and doing the analytic meditation. When you do it and apply it to your own life, you really begin to understand yourself. Americans are always saying, “I feel so out of touch with myself. I don't understand who I am.” But if you do this kind of analytic meditation, it gives you a nice framework with which to look at your own life, and you begin to understand yourself, and get some clarity about what's going on. It also includes reflecting on what you've been doing, what your potential is and what you want to do in the future. So it's extremely helpful to take the time out and do analytic meditation.

And then as you contemplate and reflect on these things, and questions come up, it helps to write your questions down and discuss it with your fellow Buddhist friends.

[Audience:] What about miraculous powers, do those come from meditation and how can they help someone?

In fact, when you develop samadhi, you get certain miraculous powers. You get clairvoyant powers where you can see what other people are doing. You can read other people's minds. You can understand people's past actions and their karma, and by that, get a feeling for what their present propensities and tendencies are, and so know how to help them in that way. Or you get clairaudience, where you can hear things at a far distance.

If you have these different kinds of clairvoyant powers, and you use them with bodhicitta, then they really help you to be of service to others. If you have clairvoyant powers, but no bodhicitta, then the powers can be used just basically to increase ignorance, pride and arrogance, and get yourself a lower rebirth. So that's why it's very important you have bodhicitta behind the clairvoyant powers.

If you know people who have some kind of clairvoyant powers because of karma rather than because of spiritual realizations, you should help these people put their powers into the Dharma, so it becomes useful for others. By helping them learn about the bodhicitta and the loving compassionate thought, they'll be encouraged to use whatever capacities they have for the benefit of others.

And basically, whatever talents people have (even if they aren't miraculous powers) maybe as an acupuncturist or herbalist, if they can do that practice with bodhicitta, then the practice becomes quite powerful. It will benefit the people themselves more as well.

So you see how important it is to encourage and teach someone who is ignorant of the Dharma, but who has a lot of talent and possibility. They come under these eleven groups of people.

[Audience:] What if you sacrifice your body to save others?

It depends a lot on the particular person. If at that time you had really strong bodhicitta and felt very strongly, “I don’t care if I go to the lower realm. I want to save these other people.” And you do it. Then it’s different because the power of your motivation at that time is very, very strong and what you’re doing is directly very valuable to other people. But it’s another story if you’re just giving your body and it isn’t so much of direct value to other people.

So it really depends on the person and their motivation at that time. In one situation, you could say, “Oh, I want to do that. That’s compassionate,” but perhaps your compassion isn’t really that strong. And that’s quite different from the time when you really feel compelled to do it because of the strong power of compassion.

So it’s two different things. It is important to preserve our body so that we can practice the Dharma, and not give our body up superficially without a really good reason. But I think if your compassion is so strong that you feel there’s no other way, then it’s probably the right thing to do.

[Audience:] So it’s advisable to sacrifice this life of ours if it greatly benefits other sentient beings?

I think it’s something to be careful about too, because we can practice the Dharma on the basis of this body. So we don’t want to just give up our life if it’s not something really important. By prolonging life and using it to practice in a serious way, it may be more beneficial to others in the long run. So I think each individual situation has to be examined separately as well as our motivation at that particular time.

[Audience:] What is “the root of virtue”?

It means the positive potential that we have accumulated. Dedicating our roots of virtue means dedicating the merit or the positive potential that we have created.

Ethics in a Dharma group

Since we’re talking about ethics, there’s one idea for our group in general because ethics, especially teacher ethics and student ethics, has become a popular issue in various Buddhist circles. There’s been some difficulty with teacher ethics and teachers abusing power, embezzling money or sleeping with students. The idea is to, within our group, set up some kind of system or channel so that if somebody has ethical questions about somebody else’s ethical conduct, there’s a channel or way to bring it up. For example, if any of you think somebody in the group is embezzling money out of the dana basket, or misusing the stamps to mail the fliers, it would be nice to have a procedure where you can feel free and open to bring those things up.

With such a mechanism and a channel set up, not for punitive reasons, people won’t feel guilty or bad by raising questions. The community would then receive them in a compassionate way, and if anybody’s messing up, the person can listen to other people’s views and clean up their act. It’s not a judicial body to kick somebody out. It’s important that whatever procedure is set up is done with a compassionate aspect, knowing that we can all mess up. It’s not about pointing fingers and making accusations.

The purpose is also not to make us mind everybody else’s business. The basic thing in Dharma practice is to look at what we’re doing. Not get into a whole big trip of, “Well, this one is too critical. This one ...” We’re talking about pointing out really major kind of things that are unethical; things that if you just ignore, become harmful to the group.

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>