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Review

We've been talking about the far-reaching attitude of patience or tolerance, which is one of the six bodhisattva practices.

First, we generate the determination to be free from cyclic existence by seeing that there is no possible way to find lasting happiness within cyclic existence. Then, we recognize that we are not the only ones in this situation. Everybody else is also in this situation. We see that freeing ourselves alone is really rather limited and self-centered.

So, we generate the altruistic intention, which is the wish to become a fully enlightened Buddha in order to be able to lead others on the path to enlightenment. Having that motivation, then we seek the method to practice to attain enlightenment. We practice the six far-reaching attitudes.

We have talked about the first two: generosity and ethics, which I am sure you have been practicing at Christmas time. [laughter] Purely or not purely, I don't know, you have to check that up, but there was lots of opportunity to practice it.

What is anger?

Then we started talking about the third far-reaching attitude, which is patience or tolerance. We talked a little about what patience is. It is the mind that is undisturbed in facing harm or suffering. It is an antidote to anger, anger being an attitude or a mental factor that exaggerates the negative qualities of an object or projects negative qualities that aren't there, and then being unable to endure the situation, wants to strike at it or run away.

Anger covers the whole spectrum of motivation from irritation and annoyance to being critical and judgmental, to being hostile, holding grudges, belligerence, rebellion, rage, and all these kinds of things.

Just from the definition of anger, we can see it's an unrealistic attitude because it exaggerates and it projects. But the problem is, when we are angry, we don't think we are being unrealistic. We are convinced it is the opposite, that we are being quite realistic and we are seeing the situation exactly as it is. We think the other person is wrong and we are right.

Can anger be beneficial?

It's something to check up especially now because in many therapies, self-help groups and support groups, there is all this talk about anger being good, and people are encouraged to be angry.

It's quite interesting at the retreat at Southern Dharma that was attended by many therapists. When I talked about things like that I could see them in the back of the room looking at each other. At the very end, after we did the evaluation and everyone was very happy, one of them said: "Tell us something about your family background." [laughter] It was funny. It was like she couldn't feel like she knew me unless she knew my family background.

The Buddhist way: neither expressing nor suppressing the anger

Because there is this certain take on anger now in our pop culture, I think it's very important that we think deeply about the teachings on the far-reaching attitude of patience.

Buddhism doesn't see the issue as either expressing the anger or repressing or suppressing the anger. It's not either dumping it out or stuffing it in. The alternative that Buddhism wants to get at is to reframe the situation, looking at it in a different way so that there is no anger there to start with, or to finish with. If we stuff the anger in, then we are still angry. Expressing the anger, too, does not mean it is gone. We are still angry. We may have gotten rid of the physical energy – maybe the adrenaline level has gone down – but the propensity to become angry is still there. We really have to look much deeper to root it out.

Disadvantages of anger

It is important that we think first of all about the disadvantages of anger and assess realistically, according to our own experience, whether anger is something beneficial or not. I say this because so many people say: "My therapist has been telling me I need to get angry." I think it is something to really look at.

We have to be real clear here, that I am not saying: "Don't get angry." It's not a question of we shouldn't get angry or we are not supposed to get angry or we are bad if we get angry. There is no value judgment involved in it. It is more a question of checking up whether it is advantageous for ourselves and others when we get angry. Does it bring about the kind of results that we want in this and future lives?

If we are angry, we are angry. We don't need to judge ourselves as right or wrong, good or bad, success or failure. We are angry – that's the reality of how we are feeling. But the question we need to pose next is: "Is anger beneficial?" Is it something that I want to cultivate inside myself? Or is it something that takes away all of my happiness and so I want to let go of it? That's the question we really need to ask.

Do we feel good when we are angry?

The first question to ask ourselves: when I am angry, am I happy? Just look at our life. There is so much to meditate on. When we are angry, are we happy? Do we feel good? Does it make us happy to be angry? Think about it. Remember the times when we were angry and check up what our experience was.

Do we communicate well when we are angry?

Secondly, check up: do we communicate well when we are angry, or do we just go blah, blah, blah when we are angry? Communication isn't just saying our piece. Communication is expressing ourselves in a way so that other people can understand it from their frame of reference, their reference point.

When we are angry, do we take the time to think about what the other's reference point is and explain the situation accordingly to them, or do we just say our piece and leave it to them to figure it out? When we are angry do we communicate well?

Do we harm others physically when we are angry?

Another thing to examine is when we are angry, do we harm others physically, or do we act physically in ways that benefit others? I don't usually see angry people helping others. Usually when we are angry, what do we do? We pick on somebody or we hit somebody or something. There can be a lot of physical harm done to other people by the force of anger. Just look at that in our lives.

Are we proud about our behavior afterwards?

After we have been angry and we have calmed down, when we look back at our behavior when we were angry – what we said and what we did – do we feel pleased with it? I don't know about you, but I suspect you may have situations that are similar to mine, where I looked back at what I have said and done when I was angry and felt really ashamed, really embarrassed, thinking: "How could I possibly have said that?"

Anger destroys trust and contributes to our sense of guilt and self-hatred

Also, think about the amount of trust that has been destroyed. We have worked very hard at our

relationships but in a moment of anger we say something very cruel and destroy the trust that has taken us weeks and months to build up.

Often, we ourselves feel really lousy afterwards. Rather than giving us more self-confidence, expressing our anger contributes to our sense of guilt and self-hatred. When we see what we say and do to other people when we are uncontrolled, it makes us dislike ourselves and we go spiraling into low self-esteem. Again, something to look at in our life.

Anger destroys our positive potential

With our Dharma practice we are trying very hard to build up a store of positive potential. This is like the fertilizer for the field of our mind so that when we listen to teachings and meditate on them, the teachings sink in, we get some experience, and the realizations grow. We really need this positive potential.

But in a moment of anger we can destroy a lot of that positive potential. When we work very hard on our practice and then we get angry, it is like vacuuming the floor and then having the child with muddy feet come and play in it. The anger works against everything that we have been trying very hard to do.

Anger leaves a negative imprint on our mind

By getting angry and allowing the anger to grow instead of subduing it, we set a very powerful imprint in our mind so that in our next life, we again have this strong habit to be quick tempered, to be irascible, to lash out at people.

Any kind of anger should be directly counteracted. If we get into the habit, then we will keep acting it out not only in this life, but also in future lives. Some children are difficult to please. They are always getting into quarrels. Other children are very easy going and nothing much bothers them. It shows who has cultivated anger and who has cultivated patience in the previous lives.

If we realize that a lot of our current habit of anger that makes us so miserable came about because in previous lives we didn't practice patience, or we didn't practice it sufficiently, then that might give us some energy to counteract it. Especially when we recognize that we have a precious human life right now to work with our anger. Then at least in the next life, we won't be in the same dysfunctional pattern of behavior again, again and again.

This is, I think, the beauty of being a human being – we have the opportunity to look at ourselves and do some house cleaning. Especially when we are not kids but adults right now and have the opportunity to take charge of our own conditioning to some extent. When we were kids we didn't have that much option; we don't know so much. We are very much conditioned by our environment.

But, now, as an adult we can stop and look at the situations that made us angry and ask ourselves whether we were justified to get angry and what was happening in our mind, and do some work on that. Instead of just acting or reacting in some kind of perpetual way of "I am right and they are wrong", we examine a situation closely.

In our culture, not only is the anger directed at others, but a lot of the anger is also directed at ourselves. This is because as kids, we were sometimes taught that it's not so nice to get angry with other people. So what we do instead, is we think: "Well if I can't blame them, then I have got to blame myself." And so in our culture, we have a big problem with self-anger or self-hatred. The same antidote applies here. We are adults now. We don't need to keep doing this. We really need to look at the situation and check up what's going on.

Anger destroys relationships

When we are angry it destroys our relationships. It makes it very difficult for other people to be nice to us. It is funny, because when we are angry, what we really want is happiness. That is what we are trying to say when we are angry, which is "I want to be happy."

But then we act in ways that make other people distrust or dislike us, and so the anger, even though it is motivated by the wish to be happy, actually brings about the exact opposite result. Nobody likes an angry person, a short-tempered person or a person who screams and yells and blames.

Also don't think that anger is just shown by screaming, yelling and blaming. A lot of our anger is shown

by withdrawing from the situation. We just withdraw. We shut down. We won't talk. We won't communicate. We turn the anger in. It becomes depression or it becomes self-hatred.

The mind that causes us to withdraw or be very passive is the same as that when we are acting out and expressing it. Anger is the internal emotion, and with it we can either act passively or aggressively. Neither one of those behaviors bring about the state of happiness that we want, although we think that we are trying to bring ourselves to a state of happiness when we get angry.

Whether we withdraw and shut down, or whether we lash out and strike back, neither one of these behaviors endear other people to us. We can see this very clearly, because we certainly aren't endeared to people who are like that. So the anger doesn't bring about the result that we want in this lifetime.

Anger brings harm

In addition, through what we say and what we do and all the plans we create about how to get our revenge and how to stop somebody from harming us – through all the verbal, physical and mental actions – we create so much more negative karma. So, in future lifetimes, we find ourselves in more problematic situations with other people harming us.

This is something to remember. As long as we have anger in us, we are going to have enemies and we are going to have people harming us. First, we conceptualize other people as enemies and as being harmful. In addition, when we are angry, we harm other people. This creates the negative karma that causes us to be in situations where we are threatened and harmed by other people.

Anger creates fear and obscures the mind

When we are angry, we create a lot of fear in other people. Through what we say and do, we make other people fearful. It creates the karmic cause for ourselves to experience a lot of fear in future lives. This is very interesting to think about. In this lifetime when we feel fearful or suspicious or insecure, it is good to recognize that a lot of that is the result of having acted in angry ways in previous lifetimes.

Thinking like this helps us to get some energy to work with the anger instead of stuffing it or expressing it. We see that anger doesn't bring happiness in both this and future lifetimes. It just puts more and more obscuration on our mind.

To become Buddhas, we need to purify the negative karma and all the afflictions [['afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'](#)] on our mind. When we get angry or act out of anger, what we are doing is the exact opposite – we are putting more garbage on top of the clear light nature of our mind, making it harder for us to touch our Buddha nature, harder for us to develop our loving-kindness.

It becomes a super big obstacle on the path. This is important to remember. When we are angry, instead of getting mad with the other person, recognize that it is not so much the other person but the anger that is harming us. The other person doesn't send us to the lower realm. Our own anger does. The other person doesn't obscure our mind. Our own anger does.

I once lived at a Dharma center in Italy and I was working with this Italian man. We didn't get along very well together, and I remember thinking: "He's making me create so much negative karma! It's all his fault that I am creating this negative karma. Why doesn't he stop and be nice to me instead!" And then I realized: "No, it's not him that's making me create the negative karma. It's my own anger that's doing it. I have to take responsibility for my feelings." (Although I still think it was his fault!) [laughter]

Reflecting on disadvantages of anger

Do some reflection in this way on the disadvantages of anger, making many examples from our life about it so that we become convinced about the disadvantages of anger. It is very important to be convinced of that. If we are not convinced about the disadvantages of anger, then when we get angry, we will think it is wonderful. We will think we are right and that we are seeing the situation accurately, so we are back to exactly where we started.

Can anger be beneficial?

It is very interesting. The people who get most upset with me when I talk about anger and its advantages, are firstly, the psychotherapists and secondly, the mediators. The two professions that work

most with human interaction and human harmony are the ones that get the most upset when I talk about the disadvantages of anger.

One of the common things they say is: "But anger is good! It tells me when something is wrong. If I didn't get angry, I wouldn't know something was wrong." My question to that is: "If you know something is wrong, why do you need to get angry about it?" Or "Is anger the only emotion that can let us know that something is wrong?"

Is anger the only thing that is going to make us change when there is a bad situation? What about compassion? What about wisdom? What about clear-sightedness?

I don't think we can say that anger is wonderful because it lets us know something is wrong, because lots of times, it is just so subjective. If our friend does one behavior and a person we don't like does the exact same behavior, we like our friend when they do it, but we dislike the other person when they do it. When the person we dislike does it, we say: "Well, I got angry at him and that lets me know that what he is doing is wrong." But when our friend does the exact same thing, we don't bat an eyelash. It's completely okay. So it is not that anger lets us know that something is wrong. It is just that at that moment, our mind is being quite subjective and judgmental.

Another thing the psychotherapists and mediators say is that anger is very important for correcting social injustice. That without anger, we wouldn't have the civil rights movement. Without anger, we wouldn't be against child abuse. But again do we need to be angry in order to correct societal injustice? Is that the only motivation that can bring that about? I don't think so.

I think compassion is a much stronger motivation to bring about change and intervention in bad situations. Why? Because when we are angry, we are not thinking clearly. We don't take the opportunity to think whether we are communicating well. So often when we see that there is an injustice and get angry at it, the actions that we do to combat that injustice perpetuate more conflict. So, I don't think that anger is the solution to societal injustice.

I really saw this when I was protesting in the seventies with the Vietnam issue. We were all out there protesting against sending soldiers to kill people. Then at one point, one of the protestors picked up a brick and started throwing it, and I went: "Wait a minute here!" It became very clear to me at that time, that if you have that kind of mind, then your mind and the mind of the people you are protesting against, are exactly the same. This side of the people might be pacifists, but by being aggressive towards the other side, both sides are locked into the position of: "I am right and you are wrong."

Similarly, an environmentalist who gets angry at the loggers or somebody who gets angry at the KKK – anger in the name of societal justice and stopping bad practices – I think they perpetuate hostility and conflict rather than solve it. Now I am not saying to not do anything. If somebody is harming somebody else, we definitely need to intervene, but we intervene with a compassionate attitude. It doesn't have to be an angry one.

Please do spend some time thinking whether anger is beneficial or not in your own life. When we are able to come to a firm conclusion about the disadvantages of anger through looking at our life, then it becomes much easier to let go of the anger.

But when we aren't convinced yet, then when anger comes, we usually think: "Anger is good because I am protecting myself. I am protecting my interests. This is a good motivation, a good feeling and it's right that I have this, because if I am not angry, all these people are going to step all over me! I have to stop them from stepping all over me. This is a hostile, nasty world; I have to protect myself!"

Where is our loving-kindness? Where is the bodhicitta? Look at that mentality we lock ourselves into when we start thinking like that.

Antidotes to anger

Now, there are three different kinds of patience. One is the patience of not retaliating. This refers to the situations that I have just been describing – when somebody harms us. The second is the patience of

enduring undesirable experiences or being tolerant of undesirable experiences. The third is the patience of practicing the Dharma.

The Buddha taught many different techniques we can use when we face hostility from other people and problematic situations. The thing that is so wonderful about these techniques is that instead of saying to ourselves: "I shouldn't be angry" (which doesn't do anything because it only makes us feel worse for not feeling that way), we have a way to transform the anger into something different.

The 'nose and horns' technique

This first technique comes in very useful when we face criticism, because criticism, I think, is one of the things that we get most angry about. We are very attached to others' praise and approval and their good opinion of us, so when we get criticized, anger arises very easily. I call it the "nose and horns" technique.

The idea is that when somebody criticizes us, we think: "Okay, forget about the tone of voice they said it in and all this other stuff. Is what they say true or not true? Did I make this mistake? Did I do this action?"

If we look and we find out: "Yes I did do that!", then it is similar to somebody telling you that you have a nose on your face. We don't get angry about it because it's there, it's the truth, everybody saw it, so why get angry?

Similarly, if we made a mistake and somebody saw it, why do we need to get so defensive? It's like somebody coming and saying, "Hi, you have a nose on your face!" You don't go around like this [hiding your nose with your hand]. We have to admit it...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

Practice changing the way we look at a situation

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... in our meditation, we apply this new way of looking at the situation that happened to us before, and in this way change our attitude towards it. That gives us practice in changing our attitude towards situations that we have actually experienced, so that in the future when we come up against similar situations, we have some training in how to deal with it.

Be realistic

His Holiness likes this one. He chuckles so much when he teaches this one. He says: "Well, ask yourself, 'Can I do something about it?'" Some situation happens. You can't stand it. It's a disaster. Everything is falling apart. Ask ourselves: "Can I do something about it?" If the answer is 'yes', then why get angry? If we can do something to change it, it is of no use to get angry. On the other hand, if we check up and we can't do anything to change it, then what use is getting angry? It doesn't do anything.

This one sounds so simple, but it is actually incredibly difficult. It is very good to think about it. When you are sitting there in a traffic jam going totally nuts, just think: "Can I do something about it? If I can, do it – turn off on this other street. If I can't, then what use is it getting angry? I am going to sit in this traffic jam anyway whether I am angry or not, so I might as well sit back and relax."

This technique is also very useful if you are a worrier. If you have a lot of anxiety and worry, then think, "Is this a situation I can do something about?" If so, do something, then you don't need to worry. If you check up: "I can't do anything about it", then again why worry? Of what use is the worry? It is very effective to pose these questions to ourselves instead of just acting out our habitual worry or our habitual anger.

Look at how we got involved

Another technique is to look at how we got involved in the situation. This one has two parts. First, look at the causes and conditions this life that got us in this situation that we find so disturbing. Second, look at the causes and conditions in previous lives that got us in this situation. Now this is one of those techniques that the therapists just bristle at because they say: "You are blaming the victim! You are telling the victim to ask themselves how they got themselves into this situation, telling them that it's their fault!"

Not blaming the victim

This is not at all what we are saying. We are not blaming the victim. What we are doing is that when we are in a situation where we are receiving harm, instead of getting angry at it, we try and look at how we got ourselves in that situation. Because that might help us learn how not to get ourselves in that same situation in the future.

It doesn't mean we deserve what is happening to us. It doesn't mean that we are bad people. If a woman nags her husband and her husband beats her to a pulp, it is not the woman's fault that the husband beats her. He has to deal with his anger and his aggression, but she has to deal with her nagging.

It is helpful to recognize: "Oh yeah, when I act in a certain way to somebody, I irritate them. Then they get angry at me and harm me back." It doesn't mean that we deserve the anger and the harm and that as a victim we are getting blamed. It is just to look at what we do. If we look closely at our behavior, sometimes when somebody harms us, we feel: "Who? Me? What did I do? I am just little old me minding my own business and here is this horrible person being so incredibly, outrageously nasty to me."

I don't know about you, but I find that if I look closely at the situation and the evolution of the situation just in this lifetime, very often there was a lot of hostility on my part that got acted out in very subtle ways. I mean sometimes somebody just hit us from left field and we are thinking: "Huh? I didn't know there was a problem there." But sometimes if we look, it might be that we were, as they say, subconsciously pushing somebody else's buttons.

I would say sometimes it's quite conscious, but we are not aware of it. We do things that we know is just the thing that is going to bug that person, or we act in not very nice ways to that person, but we look on the outside like it is all okay, and then we say: "Why are you getting so upset? Why are you getting so angry at me?"

Sometimes, out of attachment, we get ourselves into situations where we are harmed. A classic example – why does the woman continue to stay with the man in many of the wife beating cases? Because there is a lot of attachment, either to him or to the position, to the financial security, to her image, to many different things.

The attachment is making the person stay in a situation that is quite harmful. Again we are not blaming the victim. We are looking at what was our share of it when we get harmed. How did we find ourselves in this situation? How did we get into this kind of relationship with this person, the dynamics of which worked out like this?

This is not an attempt to blame ourselves rather than blame the other person. In fact, I think the whole thing of blame has to be thrown out of the window altogether. It's not a question of: "If I can't blame the other person because then I am going to be angry at them, then I am going blame myself and be angry at myself." That's not it. That's not a healthy way to look at it.

The other person did do certain things that are their responsibility, but we have certain attitudes as manifested in our behavior, that are our responsibility. It is important to recognize that, because if the situation is a dependent arising, then if you change one of the factors involved, the whole dynamics is going to change. Even if the other person has not harmed us much more, still we can look at how we find ourselves in that situation and maybe change it so that we will not be in that kind of situation in the future.

Not helpful to put blame on childhood

[In response to audience:] First of all I am not describing this as a technique that we use with other people. I am not saying this is a technique that you go and tell somebody who is getting beaten by her husband. This is a technique for us to use when we are in situations where we feel we are being taken advantage of, and to look in our own mind about what it is that got us in that situation. "Why am I still there? What attracted me to that and why am I still there?" They are techniques to use on our own mind.

I am not trying to simplify the complexities of a wife-battering situation. I recognize that it is very complex, but even if you trace things back to childhood, you can see patterns of attachment. And, again,

I don't think we can blame childhood. Childhood is childhood. The problem isn't the childhood. The problem is the patterns of thinking, the patterns of emotion that we have in reaction to events.

Is that making some sense? I think it is a prevalent belief among people these days that our childhood is to blame for everything that happens to us and think: "I've got to remember everything that happened to me in my childhood and relive it". I don't agree. None of my teachers have said that to get rid of your anger, go and remember everything that happened in your childhood. Neither did the Buddha, and Buddha got rid of his anger and became a fully enlightened being.

I am not negating the fact that there were harms and things that happened in childhood, but there are also harms that happened when we are adults. I mean this is samsara. There is harm all the time no matter what we do, no matter where we are.

The thing to do is to look at the patterns of our reaction so that we don't perpetuate them. And when we see that certain patterns got cultivated, instead of blaming the people who were in the situation, look at our pattern and recognize that mental attitude as an unhealthy mental attitude. Otherwise, we will go through our whole life thinking: "I am in this habit of stuffing my anger because when I was little, my parents didn't let me get angry. So my whole problem with not being able to deal with my anger is my parents' fault."

If we think like that, we are never going to be able to deal with our anger, because we are putting the responsibility outside of ourselves. We are making ourselves victims. We are giving ourselves no power in the situation because we are saying that the problem is due to what somebody else did. First, since it is somebody else who is responsible and we can't control what they do, we can't change it. And second, since it is something that happened in the past, we definitely can't change that. So this kind of attitude leads to a certain dead end.

So, I think it's really a thing of looking at our own patterns. I think this habit of blaming everybody else is making our whole society neurotic. Everybody is going around saying, "It's this person's fault. It's that person's fault." "It's the government's fault." "It's the bureaucrat's fault." "It's my parents' fault." "It's my husband's fault." And then we are so unhappy as a result of it.

We should just look at our own patterns of behavior and see what's going on there. It's true that certain patterns did get cultivated in childhood, but they aren't our parents' fault. We had these patterns in previous lives, and we didn't do anything about them then, so they came up very easily in this life too.

That's not to deny the conditioning we received. We did get conditioned a lot by our environment, but we can't say everything is due to the fault of the environment. It is this habit of blaming that I really object to. Why do we have to blame anybody when there is a problem? Why can't we see that it is a dependently arising situation? The environment contributed to it. So did my past habits. There are all these different things that were going on. It's dependently arising. Some of these things I have some control over and some of them I don't. Instead of getting into judgment and blame, just look at what factors we have some control over, where we have some responsibility, and then work to change that.

[Audience: Inaudible]

I am not saying that the woman is nagging the man deliberately to push his buttons. But then the thing is, if we are nagging somebody, ask ourselves why are we doing that? Or if we are hitting somebody, why are we doing that? What are we trying to get out of this situation? What are we clinging to here? So it is not like we are directly planning to get ourselves into that situation. It is just that sometimes we are attached to something or we want a certain outcome, but we are completely unskillful in bringing that about. So we just wind up using behaviors that bring about the opposite outcome.

[Audience: Inaudible]

If you examine the family dynamics, for example, look at our relationship with our parents. We always say they know how to push our buttons. But we know how to push their buttons too. We might do all sorts of funny little things that on the surface look completely okay, but which irritates them or makes them angry. And one part of us knows that this is our way of exerting our power in a situation. So we need to check: "What am I getting out of it when I do that? What am I really trying to say when I do that

behavior?"

Now, back to explaining the technique. Look at how we got ourselves into the situation now in this lifetime, and also look over a period of lifetimes and see what is the karmic cause for landing ourselves in the situation. "Why am I in this situation where I am powerless? Well, it would be quite reasonable to say that in previous lifetimes, I was probably rather condescending and I took away other people's power and abused them. So now I find myself in this situation."

Again, instead of attacking the situation and the other person, recognize that it is because of negative actions that I have done in the past that I am now in this situation. Again, this is not blaming the victim. It's not blaming ourselves but it's just recognizing that when we act harmfully, we create the causes and conditions for ourselves to have certain experiences.

Cause and effect is infallible. If you plant apple seeds, you get apples, not peaches. Rather than blame ourselves, just say: "Okay. This is due to my own obnoxious behavior in the past. If I wish to avoid this kind of situation again in the future, then I have to clean up my act now and make sure I don't perpetuate this same kind of behavior creating more and more causes for myself to have this experience."

I'll give you an example of how I use this. There was one situation that was quite painful for me. I always seem to have some difficulty seeing my teachers. Often, I am not able to see them as much as I want. When I was in Dharamsala a while back, I wanted to see one of my teachers. I tried to make an appointment with him but I couldn't have the appointment. When I got one, he was sick and I was sick, and we didn't have it. And when I went to say good-bye, there was no time to do so. And I was going back to the West, so I just felt like: "Why does this always happen to me? I can't see my teacher and talk to him. And the stupid person who got in my way..."

And then it just kind of hit me at one point: "Ah! I bet you that in a previous life, I acted in the same way as that 'stupid person' was acting. I bet you that I interfered with people's relationships with their teachers, and did my little jealousy protection trip, and now I am getting the karmic result of my own actions."

And as soon as I thought like that, the anger, the upset went away. It was like, "Okay. Here is the result of my own actions. What am I complaining about? Now the thing is, how am I going to be in the future? Am I going to create more negative karma by getting angry or going on these jealousy trips, or am I just going to clean up my act?"

Again, in this practice of looking at the karmic cause, we are not blaming the victim. Rather, we are looking at the kinds of behavior that we ourselves could have done in previous lives that landed ourselves in these troubling situations.

Now the reason why people don't like to do this is because it means that we may have acted pretty horribly to other people in the past, and we like to think of ourselves as good guys. But how do we purify negative karma if we don't have some kind of humility that is willing to recognize our own potential for being obnoxious? If we think: "Oh, I am so wonderful. I can never act like that", with that kind of pride, how can we ever make any spiritual progress, thinking that we are somehow one notch up from everybody else?

Again, this doesn't mean that we think we are worms and we are low class, but it's just acknowledging our own potential to be idiots sometimes. [laughter] It doesn't mean that we are solid, concrete idiots but it is just acknowledging that potential. It's the potential. That's all.

[Audience: Inaudible]

I think that is quite helpful because instead of saying: "Look at all these people. They are doing all these sinful, evil, horrible acts. Look at what Saddam Hussein is doing. Look at what Adolph Hitler is doing! But me? I would never hurt anybody else! Why is the world so awful to me?" There is a lot of pride and denial in that and we have to just recognize: "Well, actually, if you put me in that kind of situation, I could probably act just like Adolph Hitler. You put me in a particular situation, I could probably beat somebody up."

To me, that was the whole teaching from the LA riots. I could just look at all the different people in the trials and say: “Oh yeah, if I had grown up like them, I would probably have done what they did.” Really acknowledging that potential within us. And if there is that potential within us, then is it any wonder that sometimes we find ourselves in situations where people aren’t treating us nicely? Even if we look at what we have done this lifetime to other people, is it any wonder that we get criticized and blamed for stuff? Who, among us, hasn’t criticized others?

When we start looking at it this way, then, instead of just dumping it all on others: “The world is unfair. This is an unjust place. How come everybody has something good, but I get everything nasty?” we say, “I am going to look at what kinds of actions I could have done in the past that cause this result. I am going to clean up my act, and I am not going to let my mind go under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment. I am not going to let my body, speech and mind create this kind of negative karma.”

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>