

**The Far-reaching Attitude of Joyous Effort – Part 3 of 5:
The 3 Types of (Laziness of) Discouragement that Hinder Joyous Effort**
(lightly edited transcript)
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Contents (click on any heading to view text)

- Review of First Two Types of Laziness
- Third Type of Laziness: Laziness of Discouragement
 - *Discouragement about the result*
 - *Discouragement about the path*
 - Taking a long-term view
 - *“Crazy Wisdom” practice*
 - *Planting the seeds*
 - How to avoid getting discouraged
 - *Pacing ourselves*
 - *Having a good relationship with our teacher*
 - *Developing the courage to face difficulties*
 - *The Middle Way between asceticism and indulgence*
 - *Discouragement about the basis*
 - Value of reading practitioner biographies
- Further Answers to Questions
 - *Learning to evaluate ourselves*
 - Be realistic and go step by step
 - *Positive impact of Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer*
 - *Rejoicing and encouraging ourselves*
 - *Setting motivation*
 - *Benefiting “others” does not mean self-sacrifice*
 - *Opportunity to contribute in every situation*

Review of First Two Types of Laziness

We've been talking about enthusiastic perseverance or joyous effort, and how it counter-acts the three kinds of laziness. The first kind of laziness was hanging around, sitting in the sun, snoozing until who knows what hour on Sunday morning, on Monday morning. The second kind of laziness was keeping yourself really busy with useless things and meaningless activities, just chasing after reputation, objects of attachment, this and that, those things that don't have lasting meaning, things that we have to separate from at death. Remember this is considered laziness, and not being busy, clever and successful. The antidote to this is meditating on impermanence and death, and on the unsatisfactoriness of cyclic existence.

Third Type of Laziness: Laziness of Discouragement

The last time we started talking about the third kind of laziness. It has all these components to it: the laziness of putting ourselves down, lacking self-confidence, low self-esteem, self degradation, discouragement, whatever you want to call it. Within this third type of laziness, it comes out in three different ways. One is laziness about the result, or discouragement about the result, second one is discouragement about the path, and third one is discouragement about the basis.

(I) Discouragement about the result

The result refers to Buddhahood, for example the omniscient mind being able to manifest many, many bodies. Discouragement about the result is thinking, "I can't possibly do that, this goal is too high, this result is too high!" It's discouragement because we think that the result, or the goal of enlightenment or Buddhahood is too much in outer space, that we can't possibly become like that. I'm sure all of us have probably felt this at one time or another, feeling that these qualities are just much too grandiose for us ever to think of developing, they are just out of sight. And so we discourage ourselves from practicing

the path in that way, if we think that the result is too high. Is this ringing some bells? People ever had that happen? You hear about the qualities of Buddha and you go "Huh?"

The way to counteract that is to remember that Shakyamuni Buddha also started out like us, and that he was able to practice and achieve the omniscient mind, achieve Buddhahood. And so it's not that enlightenment is so far and out of sight that it's impossible for anybody to attain. We can see the example of the historical Buddha and how he was able to practice and bring this about in his own mind.

[Audience:] Is it really possible to achieve qualities like manifesting in multiple bodies?

Who can actually do it? "I want to see you do it, Your Holiness. Where are those multiple bodies? [Laughter] Come on! I'm an American and I want proof here!" Some of these, it sounds very grandiose. In a way we have to go on faith, that this will happen.

I know what really helped me in this respect was when I began to do some in-depth study of tantra, and understand the tantric methods for accessing and developing the extremely subtle wind and the extremely subtle mind. Then it became conceptually possible for me to think that yes, it actually is possible to become a Buddha because I began to understand more the resources we have and how they are now untapped and if they were to be tapped, that it is actually possible for these kinds of results to come about. So sometimes getting more in-depth teachings on certain aspects of the path gives you a better idea conceptually how it is actually possible to go through this transformation.

But to expect any kind of visual proof that we can see with our eyes is impossible. Even if a Buddha walked in through the door, what would we see? Because this is dependent on our karma. Do you know the story of Asanga? Remember Asanga who had the vision of Maitreya? He could see Maitreya but the other people in the village only saw a dog? Having direct access to the Buddha is difficult with very obscured minds. So a lot of this we go on as a matter of faith, thinking that other things that the Buddha said have been true and have made sense, so this must be too even though it is not real clear in our minds how that happens.

Like I said, getting more explicit teachings especially on the tantra can help you see how it is possible for anybody to become a Buddha. It's like the more we understand the nature of mind, the more we understand what is mind, then you get more of an idea that these qualities are possible to develop on the basis of the mind. Sorry I can't show you a video of radiating, emanating bodies and stuff like these. I can, at the teachers' conference, put in a request for it, [Laughter]. When I go to Dharamsala I will say, "My group wants to see you radiating, emanating bodies."

(II) Discouragement about the path

The second kind of discouragement is when we're discouraged in relationship to the path. Here is when we think the path is too difficult, in other words we hear teachings for example on the six far-reaching attitudes (what we are studying now), and we say this is just impossible, how can people actually do this? It's too difficult. For example, we hear stories of the bodhisattvas making charity of their body -- remember the *Jataka* tale where the Buddha gave his body to the tigress? And we go: "I can never do that! I can't even cut my hair - and that doesn't even hurt - let alone give my body away". And so we get really discouraged about the path, or we get nervous, we get frightened, because it just seems too much, we couldn't possibly do it.

Here it is good to remember that all these are very advanced practices. We can do these when we are advanced practitioners, not when we are beginning practitioners. In fact, it's said that we are not supposed to give away our body until we reach a certain level on the path where we have control over our next rebirth. So until we reach the Arya level on the path, the path of seeing, we are not allowed to give away our body, or give away our life in that way. By the time we get to that level on the path, giving away our body or giving away our life is going to be as simple as giving away an apple. Because we won't have any attachment to the body and so making this charity will be very simple. So we can have the confidence that when we get to practice that part of the path, at that time it won't be frightening. We don't need to feel discouraged that we won't be able to do it because when we get there, we will be able to do it. And before we get there, we aren't allowed to do it! Okay?

Does this relieve people's anxiety a little bit? And they say, for example like a bodhisattva, due to their collection of positive potential or collection of merit, when they have to do things like giving their bodies

or entering dangerous situations where they can get harmed physically, that because they have accumulated so much positive potential, they don't experience any physical pain. So the accumulation of good karma gives rise to not experiencing physical pain when you have to do something like that for the benefit of sentient beings. And because of the bodhisattva's collection of wisdom, their minds don't experience fear, or their minds don't suffer when they have to do this kind of practice, because they have the wisdom that understands emptiness and so the fear element doesn't come in.

I think this is important for us to understand, that it is actually possible to do these incredible practices we hear of and be completely okay about them. That practicing Dharma doesn't mean going on some big trip where we make ourselves suffer excruciating pain that is unendurable! That's not the idea in Buddhism at all! The idea is that you build up the things, you make yourself capable, and when you have the wisdom and the accumulation of positive potential, you do it, then it will be very, very easy. It is as easy for them, as I said, as for us to give an apple to somebody, it's no big deal.

[Audience:] But it's going to take decades to develop such an Arya mind, isn't it?

Well, this point shows exactly how our American mind thinks. We think a couple of decades is a really long time to practice Dharma! We should be thinking of a couple of eons instead of a couple of decades!

[Audience:] Isn't it a little discouraging?

Only if you have an American mind that wants MacDonald's enlightenment! The lamas say that this is one of the chief problems that Westerners have, expecting really quick results. And this is one of the reasons why people get *lung*, get very tensed and anxious and is one of the greatest reasons why Westerners give up the practice.

Of course Tibetans get discouraged, but from the very beginning when you've been a child, you've been raised with this whole other idea of time. First of all, as a Tibetan you are raised with the idea of rebirth, so you don't think of yourself as just this particular body and you don't think of your capability and what you are going to achieve in terms of just the lifespan of this body. So already from the time you are very, very little, there's a whole different idea of time.

Taking a long-term view

And then when you start studying Buddhism, you really begin to understand how long things take to transform. Look at how long it takes people to stop smoking or to change any of our habits. It takes time. So if you as a Tibetan start practicing when you are very young, you begin to see it takes time for people to do things, you realize there are many, many rebirths. You also see that there's nothing else to do in this universe but to practice and attain enlightenment because the only other alternative is continuing in cyclic existence and that stinks! So what else are you going to do? That's plenty of time to practice the path! So it involves developing a really different idea of time and a different idea of who we are, and not just thinking of who we are as what we are in this present particular body.

To encourage us, they tell the story of Milarepa who achieved enlightenment in this one lifetime. He killed thirty-five people when he was young! So he had a whole lot of negative karma that we didn't have. He killed them through black magic and he was really kind of a gang member even though they didn't have gangs then. And yet he achieved enlightenment in this very lifetime. Also, he had practiced the Dharma very sincerely for five hundred lifetimes previous to that.

Now we have no idea how long we practiced Dharma in previous lifetimes. It is clear we have some kind of connection with Buddha in previous lifetimes, otherwise we wouldn't be here now. We would be at the Scientology church or we will be out channeling, [Laughter] something like that! So it is very clear that we had some kind of connection with Buddhism in a previous life and it is clear that we had some kind of practice of ethics in previous lives because we have a human rebirth this lifetime. And it is also clear that we had some kind of connection with the Mahayana path because we are here. We are not doing any other kind of meditation. There is a connection from past lifetime, but how much connection and how many past lifetimes and how much positive potential we accumulated, we don't know. You know, they didn't send the file with us [Laughter].

So it is really hard to say how long it is going to take for any of us. We don't know. There is this thing in our culture, we really want fast attainments. On one level of our mind, we say, "No, I have lots of

patience", but another level of our mind, we really do want to have fast results. Especially when we hear our friends talking about having attained samadhi and they got this and that experience in meditation, then we definitely get jealous and we think we have to come up with something quick ourselves. We have to leave behind this way of thinking, because it is what causes the discouragement.

Make sense? So, it's a real tough one for us, and I see it over and over and over again. And also, in my own practice. I think that's why the bodhicitta motivation is so important. When you have this motivation to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of everybody, and you know that it took Shakyamuni Buddha three countless great eons to do it, (but he did it,) then, you get some feeling: "Well it's okay, it's a long way away but it is something really noble and it is something I want to do, even if it takes a long time."

They say to try and attain enlightenment this lifetime because we have a human body, we have access to the teachings and the path and everything. So try it, but don't expect instant enlightenment. It's a very different way of making goals than what we were taught in school. We were taught in school to make goals that you are pretty sure you can achieve and give yourself a time schedule, and then get really depressed when you can't control all the conditions and can't achieve your goals because most of our life is out of our control! This is our habit, our habitual way of thinking and we have to let that go because this is a goal that is possible to attain, there is a path to do it, but we don't have any idea exactly how long it is going to take in our particular case.

And anyway, what else are we going to do? Can you think of anything else in samsara that sounds so wonderful you are going to do it rather than practice the path? [Laughter] [In response to audience:] You can practice the path and eat ice-cream at the same time [Laughter]. That's why we offer the ice-cream before we eat it, you see? We transform it, offer and eat it.

[In response to audience:] Saying that there're Westerners who've practiced twenty and thirty years and aren't going around with radiating golden light bodies in Hollywood, that doesn't mean a whole lot, because you have to remember that the Buddha was very, very strong about people not showing off their attainments. There could be lots of realized beings around but we have no clue who they are because they don't show off. And the people who do show off, we should be really careful about.

So again this is a different way of thinking. When you are at a job interview looking for a job, you have to go in there looking good and show off: "This is what I did and this is who I am and ...". But that is not the way bodhisattvas and Buddhas act. They act in completely different ways. They say that they may even look like they have faults outwardly, because that's the way to communicate with us. Because if they look completely without faults, then we'd really get discouraged. If they were some human being that came here, and were totally without any kind of faults, they're perfect and radiating light, then we'd say, "Well, they were born that way, I can't possibly attain that!" and we get discouraged that way. So they said that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas deliberately appear looking exactly like us, acting like us, may even appear having faults because by that way, they can very skillfully teach us the path and show us the example of somebody who practices and somebody who goes through difficulties and somebody who has good qualities. They are realized beings but they don't advertise.

[Audience:] Why does His Holiness say that he doesn't know anybody who has attained enlightenment?

Because I think he is talking on different levels, and he was also clear that just because he doesn't know of anybody, that doesn't mean they don't exist. And he could be referring to the fact that nobody has reported to him in writing. I'm sure His Holiness can check it up mentally, he could pull the charts on all his disciples and see who is where, but again I don't think it would be particularly skilful of him to announce it. If His Holiness went around saying: "Geshe so and so from the mountain has realizations," what's going to happen to that Geshe? All the westerners are going to go up there with their cameras and drive the poor guy nuts!

His Holiness does say at other times, in teachings, that he knows people who have succeeded in tummo meditation, or people who have actualized bodhicitta or people who have attained samadhi. He does say that in teachings.

"Crazy Wisdom" practice

[Audience:] What about crazy wisdom practice?

Crazy wisdom practice. This is a little bit of a misnomer because actually the word is better translated as wisdom unleashed, and it's a way of practicing when you are on very, very high levels of tantra.

When you hear stories of Tilopa who used to eat fish and throw the bones away, people would say why, if he is a Buddhist, is he eating fish? He was catching them alive and eating them. Why, if he is a Buddhist, is he doing this? Shouldn't he be saving lives? Well, he also had the ability, when he threw the bones on the ground, to make the fish come back to live. So he definitely had some kind of high realizations where he could do these magical things.

Then there're other levels of the path where they say that when people have the full determination to be free from cyclic existence, bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness, then they can use sexual conduct or contact as part of the path. But this is for very, very high level practitioners.

This is where misunderstandings could arise in Buddhist groups. You have somebody who says, "I am doing crazy wisdom practice" and they go around sleeping with a whole bunch of people, saying, "Well, I'm blessing you." Whether it is or not is a really questionable thing because there seems to be some abuse going on there. It's hard to say in terms of any particular person, what their level of realization is.

We were having a big discussion with His Holiness. In tantra, people do attain such high levels, do have such abilities to transform things. But they aren't having ordinary sex; it's a completely different thing. First of all you don't have orgasm. One time, a woman came to a lama and said, "Oh, there is this one teacher I was sleeping with. He was telling me that he was a high Tantra practitioner." The first thing the lama said, "Well, did he have orgasm?" Well, that's it, because in the tantric practice, rather than orgasm, all the fluid is retained. So it's not ordinary sex at all.

This whole topic arose because of this seeming abuse that was going on in some communities. His Holiness was asked, "Do you know anybody who is capable of doing this practice?" He said, "No, I don't know anybody personally who is capable of doing it." That's what it was. So it doesn't mean that nobody is ever capable, or that nobody is alive today who is capable of it, or that he is judging anybody else's particular attainment. Is that making some sense?

[Audience:] Would His Holiness know if someone could do such a practice?

Oh yeah, he would know if they could. But then again, he wouldn't go around and advertise it, and say "Yeah, it's okay for this one, it's okay for this one, but it's not okay for that one." Because people don't talk about their levels of attainment publicly like that.

Usually, when you are in the student position, the teachers will not tell you their level of attainment. That's why there's all this criteria for checking if someone is a qualified teacher. Looking at whether they live ethically and if they seem to have developed some concentration in their meditation, if they are compassionate, if they are patient, if they know the scriptures well, if they have a good relationship with their own teacher,... That's why you have to look at all these other things because we don't have telepathy that is able to read somebody else's mind and know their level of realization. Is this clear or is all this confusing for people?

[Audience:] Historically, are there people who can do that?

Oh yeah. Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and many others.

[Audience:] What about Lama Tsong Khapa?

They say that Lama Tsong Khapa had that same ability but he wanted to show the example of the value of monasticism. He didn't do that practice although he had the ability to, because he wanted to set a role model for people to maintain monastic vows.

The basic point is there are people who have these kinds of attainments, it is possible to do this kind of practices but we don't necessarily have the ability to distinguish who they are and who they aren't. What is important for us is to know our level of practice and what we are capable of doing and what we are not

capable of doing. That's the important thing in all of these.

Planting the seeds

So they say be content to create the cause, but don't worry about when the result is going to come. Just be content to create the cause for enlightenment. We hear teachings, we hear what is the cause of enlightenment and what are the actions that take us away from enlightenment. It becomes clear to us what to practice and what to abandon, and so be content in our day to day life to do that. Because more than that, more than abandon what we can abandon and practice what we are capable of practicing in any particular moment, what else can we do? So that's why we hear teachings and we put them into practice according to our best capability right now. And then of course as we practice, our capability also matures. But at what rate it's going to mature, we don't know. I mean you don't know what interest rate you are going to get at the bank next year! So? [Laughter] Lots of things we don't know, but if we are just content to create the cause, then we will be okay.

It's like when you plant your garden in the spring time, you put the seeds in and you wait for the appropriate time and you water it, and you put in fertilizer, so you put all the causes together and then you are content with that. You don't go and dig up the seeds everyday to see if they have sprouted. That's really counter-productive. When we see that, then we know; all we do is put the causes there. The causes will ripen at their own good time, when all the causes are accumulated. And that worrying about: "I've been practicing Buddhism for a whole month now and ...", or we go into retreat: "Oh, I've meditated in retreat for three years now and I don't have samadhi!" – well, who cares! The basic idea is to try and become a better person. The basic idea is in that time that you were meditating, do the best you can. Okay? It is interesting, isn't it, this whole thing about discouragement, we can see that it so often comes about because of unrealistic expectations.

I think so much of low self-esteem in ordinary life comes about too because of uninformed or unrealistic expectations. It's not that we are incapable, it's just that we are expecting something that's unrealistic. So that is also why His Holiness says "When you look at your practice, don't look at how you are doing today as opposed to last week or last month, because you're not going to be able to see the change in transformation. But look at how you were a year ago." And I think that's good to do, that's one of the reasons I ask people to fill up that form about their practice, so that next year you could do it again, and then see the change in yourself. If you look back, what were you doing a year ago? What was the state of your Dharma practices a year ago? Now, then you begin to see there is some kind of change. Or think what you were doing ten years ago or twenty years ago. There's some change since then, some improvement.

[Audience:] What if we have done worse?

Yeah well, then we have to look and see what to clean up. Because we do go up and down a lot.

It's very important to have this long term goal and long term vision so that we have the joyous effort to complete what we want. Because we need that courageous mind and that joy in the practice so that we can complete the path. Because if we expect something really quick, then we are going to do something for a little while and then give it up. And we can look, so much in our life, how many things we've started and given up because we haven't been able to be perfect at the beginning? When we were kids, you start to learn to play football and just because you couldn't make it to the football team, you give it up. Or you start to learn art or whatever, but because you didn't win a prize, you gave it up. How many things do we just give up because we don't meet somebody else's expectations of what it means to be excellent? This kind of mind that is always comparing ourselves to others, that's always wanting to be great and best at the beginning with no effort, this mind is the one that really defeats us.

Those of you who are teachers, I'm sure, see this real clearly in the kids. Because I remember when I was teaching third grade, there's one little boy Tyron, I will never forget him. Tyron was convinced he couldn't learn to read. He was smart, but because he thought he couldn't learn to read, he didn't even try. And thus he couldn't read. It wasn't because he lacked intelligence, it was simply because he expected to be able to sit down and pick up a book and do it just like that [click of fingers] without any effort, without any practice.

So we really have to look in those corners of our minds, where we have those expectations of ourselves.

Not just in our spiritual practice, but in all the different aspects of our life. If we have a habit of starting things and stopping, and starting and stopping, starting and stopping, then of course we don't get anywhere. And so that may be why we are not Buddhas yet, because in many, many previous lives, we came and then we didn't fill up the form and put it off, [Laughter] and so here you are again.

It's quite possible in previous lives, we started a practice and we stopped it. We were on and off again, and so we created on again off again energy, so that's why we're here.

How to avoid getting discouraged

Pacing ourselves

[In response to audience:] That actually comes a little further down. But basically, it is pacing oneself. It's just listen to the teachings, try and understand them the best you can and put into practice what you are capable of putting into practice. And what you are not capable of putting into practice, don't criticize it, don't throw it away, just realize: "I'm not capable of that yet, so I won't try it now, because I don't think I'll be able to do it, but some day when I am capable I will do that." It's knowing what our level is. We have a huge understanding of the whole path and we hear the value of doing long retreats in the mountains and meditating twenty-four hours a day. But if most of us try that, we would probably sleep for half the day and be distracted most of the other day.

So for us, it's more realistic to spend our time, instead of trying to do hard practices that we can't do, it's better to do practices that we can do and this is why we try and create a lot of positive potential by offering service, and by doing purification practices and making offerings. This is why there're these other practices we hear about -- setting up an altar and making offerings every morning, offering to the Triple Gem and the community, offering to practitioners, offering to the sick and needy. These are the practices we can do very, very easily. When you look at the ten negative actions, we can really start to abandon some of them. We are fully capable of abandoning them. Maybe we can't abandon all the little nuances of them, but the major ones: I think most of us can stop killing human beings, and stop stealing things that will be punishable by law. These are things we are actually capable of doing.

And so to look in the teachings what we are capable of doing and do it. Because the laziness is when we are capable of doing something and we just don't even try. That's what wastes our lives. The fact that we don't go off and meditate twenty-four hours a day, that's not wasting our life because that's not what we are able to do right now. But if we are able to do something and we don't do it, that's wasting our lives. Knowing that as you practice, your ability, your capability will improve, and then you will be able to go and do these more advanced practices.

Having a good relationship with our teacher

Having a good relationship with our teacher, and following the teacher's instructions and offering services to the teacher can be really, really helpful in our practice because the teacher pushes you a little bit beyond what you think you can do. In many other things, not just in teaching where I thought I couldn't do it, my teacher pushed me. He gave me responsibilities that I was convinced I didn't have any capability to do, but my teacher kind of pushed me and asked me and I had a lot of regard for him, so I said, "Well, let's go and give it a try." And it was hard, it was very, very difficult but I really saw that the experience of following my teacher's instructions paid off. Because he pushed me, I could really begin to get some of the potential out that I didn't think I had.

That's one of the reasons why it's important. But then of course that depends a lot on us, because it takes time to develop a relationship. We have to be willing to follow instructions. Lama Zopa, he would encourage us to do prostrations or something like that. I had one friend, who, in later years, went to ask Rinpoche what to do. Rinpoche said four hundred thousand prostrations and four hundred thousand Dorje Sempas and four hundred thousand Guru Yoga, and he (my friend) came out of the room going: "It's going to take me many lifetimes to do this." He was just overwhelmed. But your teacher doesn't necessarily do that, they may say, "Try a hundred thousand." [Laughter]

And you can do a hundred thousand, many people have done a hundred thousand. You set aside the time. Some people do it in a month or three months. I took three years to do a hundred thousand prostrations, because I didn't do it in a retreat situation, I did a little bit each day. It took me three years but I was determined to do it and I could see the value of doing it while I was doing it. So I just did it. It depends a lot on our determination and really wanting to do it. These are some kind of goals that we can

set for ourselves: "I'm going to do a two week retreat every year," "I'm going to do a hundred thousand prostrations," or "I'm going to do Dorje Sempa retreat," or "I'm going to meditate for twenty minutes every day." These are realistic goals we can set and we can accomplish.

The whole point is that when we become bodhisattvas, then we won't have problems working for limitless sentient beings. When we become bodhisattvas, then the idea of being reborn in the lower realms in order to benefit sentient beings won't be frightening to us. Right now, we don't even want to think about the lower realms, let alone being reborn there to benefit somebody else. But when we are bodhisattvas, then the mind will be firm enough and courageous enough so that we can be born in unfortunate situations or difficult situations because we have the compassion to work for others and we won't care that the situations are difficult and the mind won't even perceive them as difficult. In fact, for a bodhisattva, to be reborn in Somalia or Bosnia or in the inner city here, they perceive the whole environment as a pure land.

So when we are capable of working for sentient beings in that kind of way, we will also have that kind of perception and so it won't be that difficult at that point. So don't get discouraged about hearing how they practiced because slowly, slowly, by practicing we will be able to get there.

Developing the courage to face difficulties

What is important for us is to recognize that if we undergo some difficulty in the Dharma practice, that difficulty is worthwhile. Sometimes in life, when we meet with difficulties doing something, we just give up doing it. And very often we do this in our Dharma practice too. We get stuck, something's difficult, I don't understand this concept or I can't sit cross-legged or we get stuck on all sorts of different things, and then we just give the practice up rather than try to work through the difficulty.

If we have this long range goal, then we develop some kind of courageous mind, and we recognize that going through difficulty for the sake of Dharma, is difficulty that's worthwhile. Because you look at worldly people; worldly people go through an incredible amount of difficulty. Just look at all the difficulty we went through getting an education so we can get a good job! How much difficulty you went through going to school, and passing exams and writing papers. And we go through incredible trips to get jobs. If we can put some energy in that way, we can also put some energy into practicing the path. And if we meet with difficulties, know that those difficulties are okay, that they are worthwhile.

We go through incredible difficulties traveling here and there to get a job or for some pleasure, but when we have to travel for the Dharma then we get weak-minded. So here again, we have to think that it is worth going through the difficulties traveling to these places and sitting out in the cold listening to teachings in the rain, like I am going to be doing in a couple of months. [Laughter] And knowing that it is worthwhile because if you undergo some difficulties in Dharma practice, it has a good result, whereas all the difficulties we undergo with a worldly motivation, that's not going to lead us to enlightenment.

Then we get some courage to go through the difficulties in the Dharma practice. There're lots of difficulties, lots of them! I mean I just know for myself, I would sit in India and study, I'd hear about how, when the bodhisattva had this situation, they would do this practice and they would do that practice, and I go: "Huh, what's going on? Why are they doing this? I don't understand this." And then you come out, and you try and practice, and then you understand why the teachings are talking about this difficulty and that difficulty and here are the antidotes to them, because you find out that they are real life difficulties. But there are antidotes to them and people have gone through them before, and so you just must kind of, be a trooper.

[Audience:] How does social commitment relate to our Dharma practice?

Again that depends a lot on the practitioner. If somebody is at a very high level and they don't do any outward practice and just do the social engagement, it's fantastic, and they go zooming ahead. For other people though, if you don't have a real firm mind and you do a lot of social work, then your motivation can easily deteriorate and you start getting angry or jealous or proud. That's why His Holiness says that for us, it's good if we try and do the two things at the same time, some practice and some social engagement, and keep it at a realistic balance.

The Middle Way between asceticism and indulgence

When we start to get discouraged about the path and thinking the path is too difficult, then it is also

important to recognize that the Buddha didn't teach an ascetic, difficult path. Buddha taught the gradual path. Buddha himself tried an ascetic trip. Somebody actually sent me this postcard. I've a friend in Afghanistan and in the museum, they have a statue of the Buddha when he was doing the ascetic practice, where he ate only one grain of rice for six years, and was doing samadhi meditation. They say he was so thin that when you touch his belly button, you felt the spine. It wasn't through weight watchers. [Laughter] He did this incredible ascetic practice because he thought that this was the path to enlightenment. After doing that for six years, he realized that he still wasn't enlightened and that torturing the body didn't necessarily bring spiritual realizations. So he abandoned that practice and he ate food and there is this whole story.

When you go to Bodhgaya for pilgrimage, you can go to the place where the Buddha was and Sujata came and offered him this milk rice. He ate it, crossed the river and went and sat under the Bodhi tree. You can actually visit those places. The Buddha showed through his own example that self mortification is not the practice to go by. That's why he talked about the middle way. The middle way between asceticism and indulgence. That's one meaning of the middle path and to remember that so that we don't think the path is some big, ascetic, difficult, horrendous thing. The Buddha himself was very, very practical. I remember Lama Yeshe always used to say to us: "Be practical, dear." [Laughter]

I remember in Nepal there was one monk who slept on the floor. In the rooms we had, it was all brick floor and it could get really cold. So he was sleeping on the floor and Lama Yeshe went in and said to him: "Don't do a Milarepa trip! Go get yourself a mattress." Lama was just incredibly practical! Most of the lamas are. If we remember that, then we see the path doesn't have to be this difficult, impossible thing. That gives us some encouragement. We should also understand that we do have a lot of potential to undergo difficulties, we have done a lot of it for our worldly goals. I don't think the difficulties we had in practicing Dharma could be any more difficult than what we have undergone for worldly goals. If we think about what we've done to get our worldly goals... When we want something, we don't give up. We dig our teeth in, and we don't give up! So we can do the same for Dharma practice.

(III) Discouragement about the basis

The third kind of self degradation and discouragement is in relationship to the basis, which is thinking that I don't have any potential or the basis for Buddhahood: "Everybody else has Buddha nature but I don't! I'm hopeless, I'm helpless, everything I do is wrong." We've been through this one before. Everybody hates me, nobody loves me,... We just put ourselves down and think we lack potential. Shakyamuni Buddha practiced the path and attained enlightenment. He was once an ordinary being. But we feel we can't do that. Why? Because we think there is something inherently unsatisfactory about us. So this is one of the real big obstacles for us, I think, psychologically, putting ourselves down, thinking that we as the basis of spiritual attainments are inherently or intrinsically deprived or deprived or whatever it is. "Everybody else has Buddha potential but not me."

That's rubbish, just pure and total rubbish. It is very important to overcome this. First of all to recognize that all that low self-image, low self-esteem, it is not an externally existent object. It is just thoughts. Self-esteem, self-image is nothing more than thoughts. There's no external objective thing. Self-image is only thoughts. Whatever we think as our self-image, we think it is some real existent entity: "This is who I am, inherently." It is all thoughts! We really have to begin to recognize this and throw out the thoughts that are unrealistic and throw out the thoughts that put ourselves down. In other words not believing everything we think. Like little Tyron who thought he couldn't read. We have to look at all the parts of ourselves, not like Tyron, who think: "I can't do this and I'm incapable of that. I can't practice this and I'll never get anywhere." We should throw those things out because that is really what impedes us.

Value of reading practitioner biographies

Some things to help us overcome that, is to look back and see the progress that we have made. To really look back a year or two years or five years or ten years and see the progress we have made and rejoice at that. Because that gives us some kind of feeling that yes, we can progress. It is also very helpful to read the biographies of some of the practitioners. So read The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa. Read that, hear about his life and see how he practiced, it gives you some kind of energy. There is another nice book called Women of Wisdom where they did some research about female practitioners and what they did and their stories and that is really, really nice. So you read these kinds of stories about previous practitioners and then you see what they did and what they overcame. It gives us some feeling that: "Okay, they lived in a different culture or a different historical time, but we have advantages they didn't have and we may have some disadvantages they didn't have, but the same basic

ability is there and we can do it too." So, when we read the stories of other practitioners, that gives us a lot of encouragement. Any questions about this?

Further Answers to Questions

1. Learning to evaluate ourselves

Be realistic and go step by step

We try and look at what we've been able to do in an accurate way and evaluate ourselves in an accurate way instead of jumping to all these conclusions. We go to a retreat, we sit one day, we have four sessions full of distractions and we say, "I can't meditate, I'm quitting this retreat." That's unrealistic. We have to learn to discriminate between unrealistic and realistic ways of looking at ourselves. This is in all things we do, and this is one of the reasons why I think low self-esteem is so prevalent. We don't learn how to evaluate ourselves. If we spend more time just getting in touch with: "What was my motivation, what really, really was my motivation when I did that," then we know whether either the criticism we got or the praise we got was based on reality. Rather than just relying on other people to tell us our value as human beings, if we get to know ourselves and understand our own motivations, understand our own capabilities, then we can have some more realistic evaluation there.

What we have to do is use the instrument we have and kind of begin to polish it a little bit. If we start to look at ourselves a bit more realistically (we may not see ourselves completely realistically but we get a better idea), then from that we get more encouragement and we do some more practice. And by practicing, we purify our mind, then we are able to see ourselves even a little bit more realistically after that, and that leads us to more practice. So we go step by step. Now, this whole thing is very, very gradual, it's very gradual.

2. Positive impact of Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer

Well, one thing that I find really strong, is when we do the refuge & bodhicitta prayer. When we say, "By the positive potential I create by practicing generosity and the other far reaching attitudes, may I attain Buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings", that's a real positive aspiration. That's saying, "This is something I'm capable of doing, and the way to do it is through doing the practice of the far reaching attitudes. This is something I'm capable of. It doesn't mean that I'm going to practice them all in the perfect unimaginable way with all factors complete at the very beginning, but I can be a little bit generous and I can be a little bit ethical and I can every so often, drum up a bit of patience."

3. Rejoicing and encouraging ourselves

At the end of the day when we do our reflection, do not just look at what we'd messed up during the day, but look at what we did do well and really congratulate ourselves. But not developing pride, not: "I'm so proud because I went to Dharma class. I'm so great because I went to Dharma class". But saying: "Oh, I was a little bit tired but I went to class anyway and it was good. I was able to concentrate and I learnt something new and I thought about things. I was using my mental energy in a good direction when I was at class. I thought about things I hadn't thought about, it gives me some inspiration to practice hard and I'm very glad I did that. That's a very good thing I did today." Or "Oh, I meditated for twenty minutes. Okay, well, some of it was distractions but I did sit down and that's good. I did keep the continuity of the practice and I'm pleased with myself that I did do that. And I did say some prayers and I did generate a little bit of bodhicitta or reflected on it a little bit."

So really look at the things we did do and congratulate ourselves. "Somebody at work really laid into me but I didn't tear him up afterwards. I actually kept my cool and I came home and I thought about it and I dissolved the anger and I'm really glad, I'm making some progress." It's important at the end of the day, not just look at what we didn't do in terms of practice but look at what we did do and congratulate ourselves. That's this whole practice of rejoicing and dedication. We don't just purify, we also rejoice and dedicate. This is very important.

It isn't just: "Oh, I went to Dharma class, aren't I wonderful!" But it's like: "Oh, I went there because I wanted to learn something about the path, and I may not have a real clear motivation but we said the prayers at the beginning and I thought about it afterwards and I got a little bit of bodhicitta in there." Okay? So we know that was worthwhile, that we weren't just doing some kind of perfunctory thing for the sake of it. But that there was some thought and good motivation behind what we were doing.

4. Setting Motivation

Motivation is what creates the cause. The result is the effect of the action that you've done because of the motivation.

We set the motivation at the beginning of the class when we do the prayers. Then we do the meditation, and then I get you to reset it again because I think that sometimes people's minds are calmer after the meditation, so the motivation will be deeper than if they just said the prayers before the meditation. Also we're setting the motivation for the class, not for the meditation that we just did.

That's why when we wake up in the morning, try and set the motivation: "Today as much as possible, I'm not going to harm others. Today as much as possible, I'm going to be of service and help and today I want to do all my actions for this long range motivation of becoming a Buddha for the benefit of others." And so, at the beginning of the day, we try and be mindful and act according to it during the day, and then at the end of the day we sit and evaluate, and we rejoice at what went well and we dedicate all that positive potential. And if it didn't go so well and we got angry and when we blew it, then we do purification. And then we dedicate the positive potential from having done purification.

5. Benefiting "others" does not mean self-sacrifice

You're saying some prayers emphasize benefiting "others". Well, the Four Immeasurables says "all" sentient beings. I think the idea behind saying "other" sentient beings, is that by benefiting others, you benefit yourself too. So it's not a self-sacrificing trip, because if you don't take care of yourself, you can't benefit others. If you go on some self-sacrifice trip, then your ability to help others degenerates. It's very important to know that helping self and helping others aren't two diametrically opposed things. So when we say, "I'm going to do this for the benefit of other sentient beings", it's because we benefit through serving other sentient beings. But it's not "I'm going to benefit through serving you, so therefore I'm going to serve you!" It's emphasizing the "you" and then indirectly I get the benefit from it. So I think that's why it emphasizes other sentient beings, but it comes to the same point of helping oneself.

6. Opportunity to contribute in every situation

In every situation, particularly a potentially unpleasant situation, instead of going into it with: "What are all these people going to think about me? What are they going to do to me?" we can transform our motivation. We can go in and say: "What can I give?" Then the whole situation becomes a situation that is teaching us and providing us with an opportunity. That's why it is so important to constantly remind ourselves. I find it useful for myself because I tend to start looking at an unpleasant situation as: "This is a drudgery, this is something I can't wait to finish so it's all over." And so to keep reminding ourselves, "Well this is an opportunity, and this is a potential," and so we see situations as something to contribute and give to.

Okay, so let's sit and let this sink in 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>