

**The Far-reaching Attitude of Meditative Stabilization – Part 8 of 9:
Deterrents to Calm Abiding and the Antidotes – Cont'd** (lightly edited transcript)
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We have been discussing the hindrances. We discussed the **first hindrance** to developing calm abiding, which is laziness, not being able to get ourselves on the cushion. What do we do to combat laziness? Faith, aspiration, joyous effort, and pliancy are the four antidotes to laziness. Laziness is when we are too busy or distracted with other things, when we are just hanging around, or when we are very discouraged. To combat laziness we need to develop faith by thinking about the advantages of calm abiding. By thinking about all the advantages of developing calm abiding, our mind gets excited about practice. Once we have a sense of faith, the aspiration that wants to practice and get the results of practice arises. From this we get effort to put into the practice. That leads eventually to having pliancy of body and mind, which makes it very, very easy to practice.

The **second hindrance**, which we also discussed in a previous session, is forgetting the object of meditation. What is the antidote to that? Mindfulness. Mindfulness means remembering the object of meditation, going over the details, fixing it in the mind so that distraction doesn't arise.

3. Laxity and excitement and its antidotes

The **third hindrance** is laxity and excitement.

Laxity

That's what we were talking about the last time we met. We went into a big discussion about laxity, the gross laxity and the subtle laxity; how if you don't take care of those, then you get lethargy, which is when you are falling asleep. When we start falling asleep, we have definitely lost the stability. There is no stability. We have lost the object. If our mind gets super excited and runs after something else, we have also lost the object; we have also lost the stability. Lethargy is when we are on the verge of sleeping. Laxity is when we are just spaced out. So there is stability with laxity. With the gross laxity, there's not a whole lot of clarity, but with the subtle laxity there can be a lot of clarity. (Remember, "clarity" means clarity of the subjective mind, not just clarity of the object.)

You can see this sometimes in your own experience. The first big challenge you have to get through is getting yourself to sit down. Then when you've gotten yourself to sit down, the big challenge is remembering the object of meditation and getting yourself to focus your mind on it to start with. Sometimes after we have finished saying the preliminary prayers, the mind starts wondering even before we could hit the object of meditation. So we have to remember, "Breath," or "Buddha," or whatever it is that we are meditating on. We need to make that mindfulness strong so at least at the beginning we can get our mind on the object and have some stability there. (At the beginning it's really much more important to just focus on trying to keep the mind on the object. Don't worry so much about the clarity. Worry more about keeping your mind on the object. When distractions occur, just keep bringing the mind back, and bringing it back, and bringing it back.)

Antidotes to laxity

Once your mind is on the object, sometimes either laxity or the excitement interrupts. You are just getting there, you just have kind of an image of the Buddha. Maybe it's not super clear, but you are on it for more than two seconds, and then whammo – maybe laxity hits and you can feel your mind start to get slightly spacey, and the mind just doesn't feel completely present. It doesn't feel vivid. It feels somehow foggy, veiled; something isn't right. When we are experiencing laxity, this is the time to use the antidotes we discussed previously: visualizing your mind as a small white pea at your heart, saying the syllable "PEY," and imagining shooting it up and out and blending with the sky. That expands the horizon.

Or, if the mind is too depressed, you temporarily shift your object of meditation and you think about something that's going to uplift the mind. You could meditate on the precious human life, bodhicitta, or the qualities of the Triple Gem - something that you have meditated on before, something you have become familiar with. When you think of these subjects the mind can get happy, and that awakens the mind. It refreshes the mind. If none of those things work and if you are in a retreat situation, then you can temporarily break your session. Go take a break, take a walk, splash cold water, look off into the distance, and then come back and have another session. In terms of your daily practice, if every time you started to get lax you stopped your session you would never have a daily practice. So sometimes in spite of it all we have to hang in there with our daily practice and keep going.

Excitement

The other thing that takes us away from the object of meditation is *excitement*. Excitement is basically a form of attachment caused when our mind starts going toward something that's pleasurable, something that we want that's going to bring us happiness: it could be food or sex or money or beaches or flowers. Our mind can get attached to almost anything! So this is the predominant thing that leads our mind away from the object of meditation. When a lot of anger, resentment or jealousy comes up, that is also a form of distraction. We get all of these distractions when we meditate. We get all sorts of different emotions. Sometimes we might even be distracted by a virtuous object. We might be trying to meditate on the figure of the Buddha and all of a sudden we want to think about bodhicitta instead. Or, like we were talking the last time we met, we start planning all these great Dharma centers we are going to build, and Dharma activities we're going to do.

During this session I want to talk more specifically about excitement, because I think this is probably one of the things that we confront a lot. Just as with laxity (where we discussed gross laxity and subtle laxity), the same is true with excitement. And in the same way with the laxity (where it wasn't just two types, but it was a shade, a gray between the gross and the subtle), so too with excitement. There's gross excitement, then it shades into the subtle excitement.

Gross excitement

Gross excitement is when some desirable object pops into your mind and off you go. You are off the object of meditation and you are daydreaming. Everybody knows what I am talking about? Gross excitement is fairly easy to recognize, but to recognize it we have to use another mental factor called alertness, or introspective alertness.

Introspective alertness is the same factor we use to recognize the laxity. This is the one that's like a little spy. It comes from time to time and checks up to see if we are concentrating or not. When we don't have strong introspective alertness, then our mind goes off in excitement. We start daydreaming about something, and then ten minutes later we hear this [sound of bell] and we go, "Oh, wow." Because we didn't even realize we were distracted. We didn't realize we were daydreaming. That happens because the introspective alertness is very, very weak. What we need to do is strengthen that introspective alertness so that it can catch the wandering mind sooner. Instead of catching it when the bell rings maybe we can catch it after a minute or catch it after a few seconds. So introspective alertness is very, very important.

Introspective alertness is going to be very, very useful in our lives. It helps us to get to know ourselves. Sometimes you get in the car, you drive from home to work, and if somebody asked you when you got to work, "What did you think about in the car?" you couldn't tell them. You know that you were thinking about things the whole time in the car but you can't remember what they were. Well, that again is because there is no introspective alertness coming up. The introspective alertness is what pops up from time to time and surveys the situation and says, "What am I thinking? What's going on here? Is my mind

doing what I want it to do?" The reason that our mind so often just rambles all over the place and we don't know what is going on in it is, to a great extent, due to this lack of introspective alertness, this lack of the little spy that pops up from time to time. If the spy pops up and sees that we are wandering, then we can renew the mindfulness.

In meditation we renew the mindfulness by returning our mind to the object of meditation. In our daily life we renew our mindfulness by going back to – let's say you are driving the car – reciting the mantra. Or going back to remembering what your precepts are. Or going back to thinking about the teaching that we have had. Or going back, when you are in a traffic jam, to thinking about the fact that all these sentient beings want happiness and none of them wants suffering. So you renew your mindfulness about some virtuous object that you are contemplating. This is using the events of daily life so that you can take advantage of everything that's happening in your life to practice.

Antidotes to gross excitement

So we notice the excitement with introspective alertness. With gross excitement, because the mind is too elevated, it's too hyped up, it's too excited and has too much energy, what we need to do is think about something very, very sobering. We can think about suffering. We think about death. We visualize skeletons.

This is really great. When you get the giggles in meditation and you can't stop, just visualize skeletons. It works really well. I have tried it many times. When your mind is completely bananas all over the place, then just sit and imagine corpses; think about the death of your loved ones, think about your own death, think about the transient nature of life. Visualize yourself as an old person and what it's going to feel like. Visualize yourself as being sick and what it's going to feel like. Think about something that just sobers the mind down. Again, don't think of these things when your mind is already slightly depressed, when you are having laxity or lethargy. When the mind is depressed, you think of something [uplifting] like the precious human life or the qualities of the Buddhas to uplift the mind. When your mind is too excited with attachment, then you think of something to bring it down. Are you with me?

Subtle excitement

Subtle excitement is when you haven't completely lost the object of meditation; you are concentrating on the object but something else is going on, too. There are different analogies used to describe subtle excitement. One example is that it's like a fish under the water. The water is smooth, but something is going on underneath the surface. The fish swims under the water. So in the same way with your meditation, you are mindful of the image of the Buddha, you are mindful of what you are meditating on, but you are aware that something else is going on. You can feel the energy of excitement and you are about ready to give birth to a really good attachment here. The mind is about ready to go off on some tangent. So the subtle excitement is when the mind is about ready to go off.

Or another example is when you are on the object but you keep going off and on, off and on. It's like you are saying the mantra but you are also daydreaming at the same time. Or you are kind of there visualizing the Buddha, but you are also planning things at the same time, thinking of what you are going to get and how you are going to spend your money. But the Buddha is still kind of there. Or the breath is still kind of there. You're kind of with the breath, at least you are getting "in" when it's going in and "out" when it's going out [laughter] ; you are not saying "rising" when you are exhaling. So you are kind of with the breath, but you are not completely there because the mind is just getting distracted and wants to go off on something else.

Antidotes to subtle excitement

That's the subtle excitement, and that's a little bit more difficult to recognize; but again, we use the introspective alertness to recognize it. There are various ways to deal with subtle excitement. One way that's often encouraged in the vipassana meditation as taught in the Burmese tradition is just to note it, just to observe it. Give it a label. Label it "excitement". Label it "attachment." Label it "restlessness." Label it "daydreaming." Whatever it is, be aware of it but don't feed energy into it. Instead let it peter out and shift your attention back to the breath. For some people that works really, really well.

For other people the labeling technique doesn't work so well. What they need is to do this much more sobering meditation of thinking about death and suffering and impermanence; or thinking about the disadvantages of attachment; or asking themselves, "Even if I got what I am attached to, would it make me happy? What other problems would it bring?" So for some people, they need much more of an

analytic approach to really see how the subtle excitement is an affliction [Note: 'affliction' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitude'] and something worthy to be let go of.

With the subtle excitement, what we need to do there is loosen the mind a little bit, relax the mind a little bit. We don't necessarily need to meditate on death or something like that because the problem isn't quite so serious, but the subtle excitement comes because we've tightened the concentration too much. Our mind's getting a little bit pushy, a little bit tense. We are trying too hard, and so it's this delicate balance in the meditation between making your attention too loose and making it too tight. If you make it too tight, the mind is going to get excited. If you make it too loose, the mind is going to get lax.

I find this teaching extremely helpful. I mentioned before that when I would start falling asleep in meditation I would think about death, which is the absolute wrong thing to do when you are falling asleep. Similarly, when my mind would get excited, I would tell myself, "I have to concentrate stronger. I have to concentrate stronger." That's the exact opposite of what you really need to do, because you don't need to push yourself at that moment. What you need is a certain kind of relaxation in the mind, not something that increases the tension. It's interesting, isn't it?

Another way to deal with the excitement is to meditate on a black drop at your navel chakra. When the mind gets too excited, if you lower the concentration level in the body, the energies of the body lower. In the same way, when the mind is too lax we visualize something white at the heart and shoot it up and out. Here, the mind is out all over, so we visualize something dark, lower on the body, and small. We bring the concentration inward. So that can also act as an antidote to the excitement.

Introspective alertness

Introspective alertness is described as an antidote to both laxity and excitement. It is an aspect of wisdom; it is the nature of wisdom. It's not listed specifically as a separate mental factor, but it's included within the mental factor of what is sometimes translated as "wisdom," or more often translated as "intelligence." It's that mind that can discern what's going on, that can discriminate when we are on something skillful and when we are on something not skillful. It's the mind that can tell when our mind is going in the right direction and when our mind is going astray. That's why it's an aspect of intelligence, because it can discriminate. It's very helpful because when you are meditating and you don't know if what's going on in your mind is something to practice or something to abandon, then you get really confused. Introspective alertness helps us to discern that, then we can apply the antidote. The introspective alertness itself isn't what removes the laxity or the excitement. It just notices them, then other aspects of the mind follow suit to apply the antidote - either loosening the concentration or tightening the concentration, switching to another object temporarily, or something like that. It's the introspective alertness that notices, and then we bring in other antidotes.

An analogy is given that's quite good: your hand is holding the glass and your eyes are looking at it. The glass is like the object of meditation and your hand is the mindfulness. Your mindfulness is on the object of meditation; then every once in a while you look at it to make sure you are not spilling it. So with the introspective alertness it's a fine balance here. You don't want to use it too much, because if you sit there and look at yourself all the time you are going to get so nervous you are going to drop the whole thing. In the same way, we need to be real skillful with the introspective alertness. It comes up from time to time, not too often; but if it doesn't come up enough then it's like holding the glass but not watching what you are doing, and sooner or later you are going to spill it. So that's one analogy describing how mindfulness and the introspective alertness play together.

Another analogy is the example of an elephant. (Maybe our experience is more with dogs.) If you are walking an elephant down the street, you are going to be concerned with keeping the elephant on the street; but you also have to pay attention that he doesn't go off the street. The street is our object of meditation and the elephant is our attention; the mindfulness is having the elephant stay on the street. That's the principal thing we have to do, to have that stability of mindfulness so the elephant doesn't go somewhere else. The main thing is to keep him on the street, but you also look to see he doesn't go somewhere else. That is like the introspective alertness, where it comes up and sees, "Am I going somewhere else? Am I falling asleep? Am I spaced out? Am I daydreaming? Am I planning the rest of my life?" Whatever it is.

All these different things - like mindfulness or introspective alertness - are mental factors, so they are already present within the mind. Some of the mental factors may not be very strong, but they are there. If we practice, we increase them. We shouldn't think that they are not there and we have to create something that's not there. This is the whole idea of Buddha potential: the factors necessary for enlightenment are already present in us. What we have to do is bring them out and make them grow. So we learn mindfulness. We learn introspective alertness. The way they are learned or developed is simply through practice. We're habituating our mind, making new habits.

At a conference we just had with His Holiness, somebody asked him what strengths and weaknesses he saw in Westerners, and he said, "You are very practical. You want to do something and you want to see results. Whereas we Tibetans, we believe in the bodhisattva stages, we believe in Buddhahood, but we are a little bit complacent and we think 'Yeah, they are there, but they will come later.'" He says, "Therefore the Tibetans don't get the energy to practice. They have the faith. They have the belief but there isn't that kind of energy. With the Westerners, the faith and belief may not be real stable, but there is a lot of energy." He said that we are practical; we want to see results. We have to take that practical mind that wants to see results and make sure that we use it, but use it consistently. That's the whole idea of practicing again and again.

He also made the comment that with the Tibetans there is not too much danger that they are going to give up the practice because they think, "Bodhisattva stages, yeah, it comes a long time in the future, so I am not expecting to get them now. I'll just do my practice and they will come when they are ready." Whereas the down side of our practical mind that wants results is that we are sitting there digging up the flower seed every day to see if it's sprouted yet. We are so eager, we want to get somewhere in our practice; then that eagerness becomes an obstacle. We need to focus on continuous practice. What he was talking about is this merging between east and west, where you have the Westerners' effort to do the practice but the Easterners' long range vision to be able to stay with it. It's this whole idea of being able to practice again and again, that things aren't going to drop like bombshells out of the sky: "Now I have perfect concentration. I slip into samadhi and there I remain." Maybe in the movies but...[laughter].

4. Non-application and its antidote

The **fourth hindrance** is called non-application. This refers to noticing with your introspective alertness, for example, that you are starting to fall asleep, or noticing that you are day dreaming, but you don't do anything about it. We know that one too, don't we? Finally we notice, but then we say, "Um . . . it's kind of nice to think about this. I don't want to go back to the breath. I don't want to go back to the Buddha. My boyfriend is much nicer." [laughter] So we don't apply the antidote. Or we get angry in our meditation. The introspective alertness comes up and we notice there is anger, but then we don't do anything about it. We just sit there and we get angrier and angrier and madder and madder as we think more and more about what that person said, how they looked at us, and how obnoxious they are. So non-application is the fourth hindrance.

You see how there is a series here. The first hindrance is laziness; then forgetting the object; then laxity and excitement; then finally your noticing the laxity and excitement but not doing anything about it.

The remedy for non-application is application. So do it; apply the antidote. We have been talking a lot about the different antidotes, so apply them. Make an effort to do that. It is very interesting to watch our mind sometimes. With the introspective alertness, we may notice a defilement, but then we don't do anything about it. We get a certain amount of ego mileage out of our defilements sometimes. It's kind of interesting to watch.

5. Over-application and its antidote

The **fifth hindrance** is called over-application. We discussed non-application and how the antidote to that is application; but then if we keep applying this antidote even when we don't need it, then we are doing it too much, and we are driving ourselves nuts. The analogy for non-application is our not doing anything when a child in a classroom runs out. That is non-application. The antidote to that is application: we call the child back into the classroom, sit them down, and get back to the lesson. But then if the kid is already seated, and we are still hanging over them saying, "Do this," and "Do that," and

"Don't you dare go out of the classroom again," we are going to become an interference to their concentration. That's what over-application is. Although your mind has come back to the object of meditation, you continue to apply the antidote. For example, your mind wandered off and got attached to something. You noticed that and started thinking about death and impermanence. You recovered your concentration and could go back to the object of meditation, but you didn't. You kept batting yourself over the head with "death and impermanence." You over-applied the antidote. The antidote becomes a kind of distraction because it begins to interfere with our own ability to concentrate.

So, when we fall into the extreme of over-application - that is, in our meditation we are applying the antidote when we don't need to - then the antidote is equanimity. Lay off. Be relaxed. Just be equanimous. Let your mind be. Don't drive yourself nuts.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Could you explain how to apply the antidotes to excitement?

How do you apply that? First of all, use the introspective alertness, and note that the hindrance is excitement. Actually, right away this is a good thing to do, because part of the reason why we go off thinking who to tell about our far-out meditative experiences is because we have not really been able to discern this process as a disadvantage, as a defilement. We are so excited and caught up in it that we think it's really good to be so excited about how we are concentrating. We haven't been able to discern that excitement is itself a lack of concentration, because we are no longer on the object of meditation, we are now daydreaming about who we are going to tell, and how well they are going to think about us, and how much status we are going to have because of our far out experience. So you see, we are no longer on the object of meditation. This is very common. Very common. [laughter] We do this all the time.

The antidote we have to use in this case is introspective alertness. We notice, "Oh, look at me. Let's come back to the Buddha." And if that mind persists - we keep getting distracted by it and we keep thinking, "But I really want to tell so and so" - then we need to recognize that as attachment to reputation and approval. We then need to ask ourselves, "Well, so what if I tell all these people? Is that going to make me a better person?" Or we ask ourselves the question, "If I let myself get all inflated and proud about this, am I practicing the Buddha's teachings properly?" Usually putting these kinds of questions to ourselves will pop the bubble of pride.

Dealing with interesting feelings and experiences/visions

[In response to audience:] We need to remind ourselves, "This interesting feeling is not the purpose of my meditation. It's a distraction." And we have all sorts of incredible interesting feelings all the time. People tell me so many incredible things that have happened to them in meditation: visions and sensations, and this and that, and bodily things and mental things and all sorts of stuff. Every single time I asked one of my teachers (and I've asked this several times, because people tell me really far-out things and I often check with my teachers about what advice to give to those people) my teacher inevitably said, "It's no big deal. Go back to the object of meditation." If this experience helps the person and gives them more energy for meditation, great, but if it doesn't and it just makes them more proud and more excited then it actually becomes a hindrance for their spiritual path.

You just have to have a little bit of equanimity with it, to not let the mind get all carried away. One of my friends, a Westerner, was telling me a story about one Tibetan lama he knew. This Tibetan lama just said, "Well, one day while I was meditating, Tara came and said something to me, and it was helpful." And that was it. My friend was saying how this person wasn't all involved in, "Oh, I saw Tara and this is fantastic and now I am getting somewhere in my meditation!" But it was just, "Okay, Tara was there." It wasn't even like he was sure that it was really Tara. It might just have been a vision appearing to the mind, because lots of times we have visions due to the physical elements or due to karma. It's not necessarily the case that you are having a pure perception of Tara. But it was like he wasn't even wondering if it was this or it was that. It was just, "Well, there were some things that were useful for my meditation, so that was good. I put them into practice, and I went back to my meditation."

I find this contrasted sharply with a lot of the stories that I hear where people are so excited, "I saw Chenrezig!" We are driving down the highway in Singapore and somebody's telling me about their vision of Chenrezig. And that's very different from the way this particular monk happened to put it. So it depends how you relate to these things. Try not to get distracted by them, even by visions; because lots of times when visions come, it could be a spirit interference, it could be just a karmic appearance or it could be due to the airs or winds in the body.

The bottom line

I asked one lama about this because somebody was talking a lot about it. I asked, "How do you tell if it's a real vision or not, since people are telling me these stories. Do I try to help them determine if it was a real one or not?" He said, "I don't know." His basic conclusion was, "Well, if the person can interpret it in a way that gives them more energy to practice, then that's useful. If they can't and it just becomes a cause of evil or a cause of complacency, then it's useless." So in his eyes it wasn't even important to discern whether it was a real one or not. The whole point seemed to be: How do you use it? Do you use it to continue your practice or do you get distracted by it?

[In response to audience] I don't even know sometimes how we can determine them, because I think sometimes what people call visions are actually thoughts. I don't know what the difference is. I think maybe once you get to be a really high practitioner, like when you reach certain levels of the path, then you can see the Buddha in the sambhogakaya form. That's going to be something. The Buddha appears to you in your meditation. But I think that's different from our having a clear visualization, or having a strong feeling, or a thought about a particular Buddha. We often get things really confused. Sometimes we might think very much of somebody and we think that person's actually there. We often get our thoughts confused with reality, and we have to remember that thoughts are just thoughts.

[In response to audience] Well, we are not making a schism between heart and mind. In fact there is one Tibetan word that refers to both of them. So we are not pushing the mind out. We are not seeing it in this dualistic way of heart and mind. We are just saying that if a certain experience helps our mind go more in the way of the Dharma so that our body, speech and mind (our thoughts, words and deeds) correspond more to what is taught in the teachings, then we're going in the right way. If our thoughts, words and deeds are going contrary to the teachings, then we are going the wrong way. And that's why we really need some wisdom sometimes to be able to discern the difference. That's why they always say first we hear the teachings; then we contemplate them; then we meditate on them. If you hear the teachings, it gives you a tremendous amount of ability just to start to discriminate between what's constructive and what's destructive. Before we hear teachings, we often do not know what is constructive and what is destructive. We think inflating ourselves up and projecting our good qualities to the whole universe is good. We think that getting angry and laying down the law to somebody is good. So already, just starting to hear teachings is beginning to give us a little bit of wisdom to discriminate. Then we have to think about what we have heard and try and understand it. Then we have to meditate on it and really put it into practice.

So that's the bottom line. In our meditation practice or in our daily life, are our thoughts, words and deeds corresponding with what the Buddha taught or not? And when I say this, it's not like what the Buddha taught is some kind of rigid, fixed thing that we have to squeeze ourselves into. It's not like we are trying to squeeze ourselves into some dogma. It's just we need to be able to discriminate with our own intelligence that what the Buddha said makes sense, that the Buddha knows what he talks about. Therefore, we are using his ruler to evaluate our own behavior, because he knows what he is talking about. It's not that we are using his ruler because Buddha is "right" and Buddha is "good" and we've got to make ourselves do what Buddha wants, otherwise he is going to hit us with that ruler.

Laziness of discouragement

[In response to audience:] No, then you've gone back into laziness. Because one of the types of laziness is discouragement, putting ourselves down, feeling like we are incapable of doing the meditation.

[In response to audience:] It's a preconception. It's a harmful preconception that we happen to cling onto and hold very strongly, and this is also another real big problem for us: thinking that we just can't do it. "Buddha gave all these wonderful teachings. I heard them all and I still can't concentrate for more than two breaths. I'm a catastrophe!" [laughter] We need to safeguard against that mind, too, because that mind just totally zaps our energy. And again, we need to use introspective alertness to recognize, "Now I

am getting discouraged.” Instead of just having the discouragement and letting the mind develop it, and really thinking ourselves into a rut, we have the introspective alertness come up and say, “Ah, discouragement. This is the hindrance listed under laziness. This is the first of the hindrances. This is a non-virtuous state of mind. This is not reality. What this mind is thinking - putting myself down, telling myself that I am incapable - this mind is false.”

Now the key is just to recognize that. It really starts to help us counteract that mind of discouragement, but then again, don't go to the other extreme and say, “Okay, I won't be discouraged. Now I am wonderful. Everything is great!...”

[Teachings lost due to change of tape]

...I mean, this is really practical stuff. This is why when you set up a regular daily meditation practice, it helps you so much to begin to get to know yourself. Because you begin to sit there and observe what's going on in your mind. “Look at what I'm thinking about. Look at how I approach situations.” Usually we are sitting right there in the middle of it acting out this thought, acting out that thought, getting so involved in all the stuff. Just getting ourselves to sit down on a day-to-day basis is helpful. Getting ourselves to sit there and just try to do something constructive and notice what comes up that gets in the way. We begin to get to know ourselves and we begin to get to understand how the mind works. We begin to develop some compassion for ourselves, because we can see that we do have some sincerity and some honesty. We do want to progress along the path. It is unfortunate that we have these negative mental states that get in the way, so we generate compassion for ourselves, wanting ourselves to be free of this kind of suffering. We cultivate some patience with ourselves, recognizing that, “Yes, I do have this good motivation and I do have this junk that gets in the way. But I can be patient. I don't have to get angry at myself because there is junk. That's the way it is.”

Then as we start to develop this patience and compassion for ourselves because we've gotten to know ourselves better, it becomes much easier to have that patience and compassion for other people. Why? Because you see that what other people say and do is basically the same as what you say and do. So we begin to have a little bit of a feeling of compassion and understanding for other people; the judgmental, critical mind goes down. We will feel such a sense of relief when the judgmental, critical mind goes, such a sense of relief to be able to breathe again.

This all comes from just taking the time on a daily basis to sit and try and follow one of the practices, to do the prayers, and just try and watch what the mind does. It's really beneficial. His Holiness always says, “Don't look and compare yourself to the way you were last week or last month. But look a year ago, look five years ago and then you can see what difference your Dharma practice has made.” You think back to the way you were a year ago and compare yourself to how you are now; then you can see the change. Then you can see the benefit of listening and thinking about the Dharma.

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>