

**The Far-reaching Attitude of Wisdom – Part 2 of 3:**  
**The three levels of dependent arising** (lightly edited transcript)  
*by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 30 May 94*

**Contents (click on heading to view text)**

- Things are dependent in three ways:
  - 1) Causes and conditions
  - 2) Parts
  - 3) Concept and label
- Why is it important to learn about dependent arising?
  - *Our unsatisfactory experiences*
  - *Ignorance: the root cause of our unsatisfactory experiences*
  - *Wisdom realizing emptiness: the antidote to ignorance*
  - *Example of a hundred-dollar bill*
  - *Example of manners*
  - *Example of "my problem"*
  - *Example of "my anger"*
- Questions and answers

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Things are dependent in three ways:

- causes and conditions
- parts
- concept and label

### 1) Causes and conditions

Thinking about their causes and conditions is often the first way. It is the easiest way. Thich Nhat Hanh, in his writings, emphasizes this a lot. For example, he says if you look at a piece of paper, in the piece of paper you can see the tree, the sunshine, the logger and the mill. He does not mean that the logger is inside the paper or the tree is inside the paper. The tree is the cause; the cause does not exist anymore. The logger is the cause; the logger does not exist in this piece of paper now. The sunshine and the tree do not exist now; they are the causes; they existed before. But when we look at the paper, we can see that the paper is the cumulative result of all of those causes and conditions coming together.

Likewise, when we think of our body, we can trace it back to all its causes and conditions. I was talking about the sperm and egg, and you can trace back your genes and chromosomes ad infinitum.

The same with our mind – our mind arises due to causes. It does not exist as something that has always been there – as some permanent thing. But it arose due to the causes that are the previous moments of mind. We can trace the mindstream back, back and back. The cause of something cannot be also its result. They exist in a continuum, but once the result has come, the cause is long gone. The tree that caused the paper does not exist anymore; the paper is the result of it. The sperm and egg that came together many years ago in your mother's womb, do not exist anymore, but our present genes are the results of those. Similarly, our mindstream today is not the same as our mindstream yesterday or fifteen years ago or when we were in the womb, but it is a continuation of that. The things that exist now, that function and change, all arise from causes.

### 2) Parts

Anything you look at is not a single unitary thing, but it depends on parts. For example, there are different ways to look at the parts of a piece of paper. You can look at the North, South, East and West parts of the paper. You can look at the top and bottom parts of the paper. You can look at the parts of paper like the whiteness as one part, the rectangular-ness as one part, the hardness as one part and the thinness as one part. All of the different qualities that compose the paper are also considered its parts.

So there are different ways to look at parts. It is interesting. Instead of looking at the parts of the paper as being cut up in squares or something like that, you can think of all the different qualities – whiteness, square-ness, hardness or the smell – these are all parts of the paper. Then, you look into them. Are any of them the paper? Quite interesting!

### 3) Concept and label

All phenomena also exist in dependence on the consciousness that conceives of it and gives it a label. Before this thing is called paper, there is no paper there. Before our mind looks at those qualities and conceives of those qualities together as one object and gives it a label, you cannot say that there is one solid distinguishable object here.

This is something quite interesting to think about. When we look at things, they appear as if each is one object – they all look discrete, kind of like distinct objects out there. But if you think about it, none of them are one object. They are all made up of lots of little parts. The only thing that makes it one object, is the fact that our mind gathered all those qualities together, in terms of its concept and gave it a label. But aside from that, there is nothing inside here holding everything together to make it, "it".

What is real interesting to think about is your body. Your body is just all these different parts. That is all. A continuation of these different parts that have been together over a period of time, but it is not like our body is one thing. It is all these different things. But when we think about it, we feel *my* body like it is one thing, as if there is some kind of body-ness that is pervading and keeping all the parts stuck together. Some kind of glue that makes the body stick together.

There is no glue that makes the body stick together. They are just all these parts and the way they are in relationship to each other. They happen to be near each other at the same time, and it is only because our mind then looks at these parts, frames them in terms of a concept and gives them a label, that it then becomes a body.

### Why is it important to learn about dependent arising?

Now the question may come: why is thinking about all of these important? It is fun to talk about, but what does it have to do with anything? Actually, it has a lot to do with a lot of things. We have to go back a little here in order to understand why thinking about dependent arising and the lack of independent existence is important.

#### **Our unsatisfactory experiences**

Let us come back to our experience. Here we are, there is a body and there is a mind. If we look at our experience during our life, there are many unsatisfactory things going on. We get born. We get old. We get sick and we die. In between, we try and get the things we want, but we are not always successful.

There are some things we like, but then we get separated from them. We encounter all types of problems. Things we do not want come automatically to us. This is the very nature of our existence.

This is the first Noble Truth, looking at what existence is – the nature of our body and mind. They are changing. There are lots of unsatisfactory experiences. Even the happiness we experience does not last very long and it changes into something else.

So we have to ask what makes us arise? Why are we here experiencing this instead of experiencing something else? Why do we have a body that gets old and sick and dies? Why don't we have a body that is made of light, that does not get old and sick and die? And why do we have a mind that is full of anger, attachment, pain and resentment? Why don't we have a mind that is easy going and lets things go – that goes with the flow? We have to trace the causes of these experiences.

#### **Ignorance: the root cause of our unsatisfactory experiences**

The Buddha traced the causes of our unsatisfactory experiences to the internal attitudes of attachment, anger and ignorance. If we look especially at anger – the anger that we have, the anger that wants to destroy things, get away from things, or distance ourselves from them – it is very much related to our

attachment. The more attachment we have, the more anger we have. The more we are clinging on to something, the more upset we get when we don't get it. The attachment comes from the ignorance, the ignorance that makes everything very solid.

We have to understand what this ignorance is. It is the source of the attachment, the source of the anger. These three together are what makes us create actions or karma. The karma determines what our next rebirth is going to be. The attachment at the time of death makes the karma ripen, because as we are dying, we are thinking: "I want this body. I don't want to separate from it." And when it seems like we have to separate from it, we freak out and grasp at another body.

So, it is that grasping at the time of death, that attachment that makes the karma ripens, that throws us into another body. We get this cyclic existence of going from one body to the next body, to the next body...

Because of the karma we have created under the influence of attachment, anger and ignorance, once we are in a body, we encounter a whole range of different experiences. Some of them are great and some of them are awful. But the great ones do not last long. The awful ones do not last long either but they do change into other awful ones. So, after you think about it, you think there has got to be another way.

Do you see how the ignorance is the source of all the undesirable experiences? This is a key point. If you don't see how ignorance is the source of all of these undesirable experiences in your life, there is no way to see how realizing emptiness is important. The ignorance creates the attachment and anger. It creates the karma. The ignorance creates the attachment that makes us grasp for another body at the time of death. It makes the karma ripen.

What is this ignorance and how does it create the attachment? How is it the basis for the whole experience? They use an analogy to illustrate ignorance. You go in a room that is very dimly lit, so you cannot see well. In a distant corner, there is something that is coiled and it is striped. In the dimness of the room, you see the thing that is coiled and striped, and you think it is a snake! You freak out and you get afraid. Your mind goes bonkers.

Ignorance is like the dimness in the mind. In other words, it is just dimness. It is a lack of awareness, a lack of clarity in the mind, and within that dimness, within that inability to see clearly, the mind also grasps at something and projects onto it what is not really there.

To go back to the analogy, you have the coiled, striped thing that is a rope. It is a coiled, striped rope. But because the mind cannot see it clearly, it says it is a snake. The mind is projecting something onto the rope that is not really there. But it believes what is projected and then gets frightened.

In a similar way, things arise dependently. But the mind is dim and does not see clearly. It cannot see this dependent existence. Instead what it does is, it projects independent existence (the complete opposite) on top of things. The mind says: "Ah! That is an independently existing thing, therefore it is a real big deal." And it freaks out when something happens to it. We make big deals out of everything. We make big deals out of ourselves. We make big deals out of our possessions, out of our problems, out of our emotions and out of our ideas. Everything becomes a big deal because we have projected a mode of existence onto everything when such a mode of existence does not exist in reality.

### **Wisdom realizing emptiness: the antidote to ignorance**

When we talk about emptiness, we are saying that things are empty of the fantasized ways of existence that we have projected onto them. To go back to the analogy, the rope is empty of being a snake. There is absolutely no snake there. The rope is empty of being a snake, but what we are doing is, we are not just imputing things like snakes and lamps, we are imputing a way of existence, an independent way of existence onto phenomena.

In actual fact, these things are empty of existing in the fantasized ways that we have projected onto them. When we realize emptiness, we are not creating some reality that was not existent before. This is a very important point. When we realize emptiness, we are just seeing what has always been there, which is the lack of all the garbage we have projected onto it. Realizing emptiness is not creating a reality somewhere. It is just perceiving the way things have always been. But we have not been able to

see that because we are so busy projecting things. When you are so busy projecting snake onto rope, you cannot see the rope.

Those of you who have kids will probably see it very clearly. The kids see something and they get afraid, and you know it is nothing to get afraid about. You know it is not even what they see, but they are so freaked out about it you cannot explain it to them. We could probably remember similar experiences from our childhood. It is the same thing with our mind. Our mind is so busy projecting independent or inherent existence on everything that we cannot see the emptiness that is there. We cannot see the dependent existence that is there.

I remember somebody asking Lama Yeshe: "Lama, how do you realize emptiness?" He replied: "Just realize that everything you are perceiving is a hallucination." Just realize that reality is all around you. That's all. You do not have to create anything. You do not have to do anything special. Just realize what is already there. Stop creating more stuff to put on top of it, which is basically what we are doing, the way our minds perceive things.

The tricky thing is that it is very difficult for us to identify this independent or inherent existence that we are projecting on top of things, because we have been doing this projection since beginningless time. We are not even aware that we are projecting. We are not even aware that our minds are tangled up in this mess. We just automatically believe that the way we perceive things is the way they exist.

It is like (if you could imagine) a baby coming out of the womb wearing sunglasses. They grow up into an adult thinking that everything is dark, because since the first time they have ever perceived anything, everything has been dark. So, they do not realize that what they perceive are not the way things exist, because they are so used to it.

It is the same way in terms of how we project an independent existence onto everything. We are so used to this projection that to us, everything appears to exist "from its own side". We do not even see it as a false perception on our part. We are just so completely used to it.

So the difficult thing is recognizing what this independent existence looks like, recognizing how things appear to us to be independently existing. There is no such thing as independent existence, but we are perceiving it. We are perceiving something that does not exist at all. That's why Lama said: "Just recognize, dear, that everything you see is a hallucination." What we see as the nature of something is not at all its true nature.

They use different examples to illustrate this to us. An object in a dream – it appears very real, but it is not. You can dream that somebody hit you with a baseball bat, but when you wake up, your body is not bruised because the dream object is not a real object. Or they use the example of a reflection in the mirror. Like with your cats or your dogs - they go and stand in front of the mirror and try and play with the cat or the dog inside the mirror. I think kids do that too when they do not know what a mirror is. It looks like there is a real face in there, it looks like there is a real animal, but it is actually empty of being an animal. There is only an appearance there.

In the same way, what we are perceiving are dependent objects. But they appear to us as independent, and we grasp onto them existing that way. From their side, they don't have an independent existence. There is no real thing there in the objects that we perceive.

So, we see this basic misconception – that with ignorance, we do not perceive things as they are. Instead, we project a way of existence on top of them that they do not have. This way of existence that we project is what gets us into so many problems. Making everything into a concrete, identifiable object is what makes us get angry, get attached and experience all the other problems that follow after that. Through ignorance, we make everything very solid.

I will give you a few examples of how we make things solid because it is very important that we recognize this in our life.

### **Example of a hundred-dollar bill**

Our whole way of relating to money is an excellent example of how we project things that are not there. If there is a hundred-dollar bill, we look at it and think: "A hundred dollar bill! This is something that is

very valuable,” especially when we have the label ‘mine’ attached to it. Remember last time we talked about what happens as soon as we give it the label ‘mine’? It all of a sudden becomes really important: “This is *my* hundred-dollar bill, and if you take my hundred-dollar bill, it is a big deal, because this is *my* hundred dollars. It is part of me. I am attached to it. It represents my success as a human being. It represents all the future happiness and everything I am going to buy, and you are taking that. This real thing you are taking from me. It makes me angry.” And, then, maybe I yell and scream, or maybe I throw something at you, or whatever.

So you see how we get the anger and attachment arising, simply because we view this hundred-dollar bill as so incredibly important. From the anger and attachment, we get the action or the karma that leaves the imprints on the mind. But if we go back and look at what is this hundred-dollar bill that we are so attached to and has all this meaning to us, it is simply paper and ink. It is nothing more than ink and paper. That is all.

But what our mind has done, is on top of this paper and ink, it has, with its concept, designated: “This is one object.” Our mind then imputed all this meaning onto it, for example, thinking: “This is the meaning of my life. This measures how successful I am as a human being.” Or we impute: “This is the cause of my happiness. This is what security is.” When we see a hundred-dollar bill, we do not just see paper and ink, we see success. We see security. We see meaning. We see purpose. We see all sorts of things.

But if we look, none of these things exist inside the hundred-dollar bill. All the hundred-dollar bills are, are paper and ink and a certain design. So, do you see a little bit how we project on top of it? We actually make ourselves tremendously miserable. It is very helpful if we could just see, “Yes, this paper and ink can, combined with the society and the way the society operates, enable us to do certain things because this paper and ink does have a certain function.”

Instead of just seeing it as it is – a relational thing, a dependent thing, something that has a value and an existence imputed on top of it – we see it as the meaning of our life; we see the value coming out from inside of it. This is what makes us so mixed up in relationship to it. It is merely our mind that is creating all the pain. That is all – completely in the mind.

I often get people who do retreats with me to think about the mind as the source of our happiness and pain. We start to look at some problem that we have in our life, and ask ourselves: “How was I perceiving it? How was I framing it? How was I interpreting it? What was my paradigm?”

When you start looking at these questions and recognize how your way of interpretation or your way of perceiving your paradigm creates your experience of the object, then you begin to see how things are rooted in the mind, not in the external world.

If you get into that meditation very deeply, it leads you into an understanding of emptiness. Understanding how the mind is creating, how the mind is projecting. If we look, there are so many areas in our lives where we get all tangled up because we confuse the dependently existent thing with the name and the label and the meaning that we have projected on top of it.

### **Example of manners**

Manners are another excellent way to see how things are dependently arising. When you go live in another culture, sometimes you are just so surprised at how rude people are. They are so rude and they do such funny things. The Tibetans slurp when they eat. They lick their bowl. On the other hand, we often hear that Americans are very loud. Once you live in other countries, you begin to recognize it is true. You go to an airport and you can always tell who the Americans are because you can hear their voices above everybody else’s. People say: “How rude these people are! They talk loud. There is no sense of propriety.”

As you go from culture to culture, think how we judge and evaluate other cultures and criticize them. And yet all this stuff about manners is something that is totally invented by our mind. There is nothing inherently rude about slurping. There is nothing inherently wrong with talking loudly.

There is nothing inherently impolite about trying to save face, for example. In an Asian culture, when you ask people questions, they may give you an answer which is not at all what is happening, but it is the polite answer to give. If you are aware, you know how to take the answer. If you are not aware, you take

it in another way and then you think these people are lying. Actually they are not lying. They are just being polite.

What I'm getting at, is this whole discrimination of manners – what's polite, what's impolite – is completely created by the mind. There is no objective reality to it at all.

But yet, look at how hung up we get about it. Look at how hung up we get about people's manners. If they do not say 'good-bye' to us, if they do not say 'thank-you' to us, if they do not look us in the eye when they are talking to us – we are so sensitive about these! We impute so much meaning, and yet it is just a cultural convention. There is no objective reality to it.

I am trying to show you why the realization of emptiness is something important. If you are able to look at the many experiences in your life and recognize how you experience a lot of difficulty because of this ignorant view that makes things more solid than they actually are, then we begin to see the value of understanding emptiness.

### Example of "my problem"

Here's another example. Look at what we consider as 'my problem'. Think of one problem you have. I'm sure everybody right away, in a snap of a finger, can think of a problem. You probably think of five or ten. You think: "My problem!" It comes up in your meditation session. It comes up when you are driving. It comes up when you are eating. "My problem!" And it appears to our mind as if it is this real big thing. It is really meaningful. This is very serious!

Let's say I have a problem with Achala [Ven. Chodron's cat]. Is my problem inside of Achala? Is the problem inside me? Is the problem somewhere in between Achala and me, in the space of this room, so that when you people come in, you are walking through *my* problem? Or when you pat Achala, you are touching my problem? Or when you look at me, you're looking at *my* problem? My problem appears so real and so existent, and yet when I start to look for the thing that is the problem, what is it? Where is it? It becomes very difficult to get a handle on what is the problem.

For example, the problem is that Achala cleans out my inbox. He goes on my desk in the morning and pulls all the papers out. And he always does this when I'm meditating. So that is *my* problem. Is the problem inside of Achala? Is the problem his paws? Is the problem the paper and the inbox? Is the problem the inbox? Is the problem this movement [of the paws]? Is the problem his mind? Well, what is his mind? It is just the thought going through his mind. Is this thought going through his mind a problem? When you start to look at what is the problem – *the* thing that is *the* problem – you can't find it. You begin to see that what we call 'problem' is just a whole bunch of different circumstances and we, with our mind, put a concept around them and gave them a label, and then thought that they were something more than just those different circumstances.

Once we gave it the label 'problem', it assumed another kind of reality in our mind than it had before. Before, it was just paws and paper and inbox, and this movement [of the paws]. That's all. But once we say 'problem', boy, then I have to go to a cat psychologist. (They have them too – somebody gave me an ad.)

It is very interesting when we start to look at things. We begin to see how our mind, through this grasping at inherent existence, makes a real big thing out of what is not a real big thing. We are projecting a type of existence and a whole bunch of meaning on to phenomena that they do not have.

### Example of "my anger"

It is the same as when we say: "I'm an angry person." Take one quality you do not like about yourself. If we think: "I'm an angry person. This is my identity. Oh, I'm such an angry person. I'm so awful. That's why nobody likes me. I'm always losing my temper. I'm so angry. I'm so angry. I'm so angry."

If you look at it, what is anger? What is our usual view of anger when we say: "I'm an angry person"? We have a feeling like there's this thing called anger that's right here, like this piece of lead – this is anger. And every once in a while, the anger comes to the surface – this is lead in the shape of a monster. "There's my anger!" And when we calm down, this monster made out of lead goes down a little bit. And, then, later it comes up again, and it goes down. When we think about our anger, it feels like that, doesn't it? As if there is a real thing called anger, and when we get angry, it is simply that this real thing has now

come to the surface, and there it is, spewing out its steam and fire all over the place. That is how we feel about our anger. When we say: "I'm such an angry person," we feel so awful, because it feels like a very solid, super-real thing.

Step back for a moment and check up: "What is anger?" All we can find, are some situations that occur sporadically, that have some similarities, some different mental events, different thoughts, different emotions. They are not occurring at the same time, so they are different mental events. But they have some similarity. One happened yesterday. One happened today. One happened tomorrow. The similarity is that they are distorting things and wanting to destroy or wanting to withdraw because they cannot bear them. But all we have are discreet mental events that have some similarity. That's all.

Anger is simply a label that is given on top of these mental events that have some similarity. If you think about your anger as being something that is merely labeled on top of a bunch of similar events, that gives you a totally different feeling about your anger, doesn't it? Compared to thinking of it as this leaden monster spewing fire that's always there. Do you see the difference? Do you have a different feeling in your mind when you think about anger in these two different ways? There is some difference, isn't there?

The first way, we are seeing the anger as some solid thing, some unitary thing that has its own essence. Seeing it that way, then it seems overwhelming to us – how are we ever going to get rid of it? But if we see anger as just a bunch of events with some similarity, then everything seems much lighter, doesn't it? Much, much lighter. We can see how the way we relate to our own emotions – making them so solid, grasping at inherent existence – creates so much problem.

## Questions and answers

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

The problem is your reaction of discomfort. But we don't feel like the problem is my reaction. We feel that the problem is what the other person is doing.

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

But then if we look, where is that bothered-ness coming from? Is it an independent entity?

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

The reason the feeling is there is because we haven't understood that it's not those things. There's something inside of us that's still grasping onto it being those things. But look at the whole dynamics of the thing. There are the paws, there is the inbox, there is the whole history of mothers and fathers back ad infinitum, there is the whole history of the paper, back ad infinitum, the whole history of the plastic of the inbox, and there is all this conditioning in me.

If I weren't sitting in the middle of my meditation, would I be as bothered? If I were standing next to Achala, I'd probably laugh and think it was really cute. It's only because I'm meditating and trying to concentrate that what he's doing is a problem.

So if you look at my response, you see how even my response is not a solid thing. My response is conditioned by all these different parts – by the time of day, by what I happen to be doing. If I were asleep, it's not a problem. My sleep is much more important. I'd just ignore what he's doing. So it's not that my being bothered is this big solid thing that has to be there as a reaction to what Achala is doing. But rather, depending on a whole bunch of different factors and on how I'm looking at the situation and interpreting it, then a certain emotion comes up.

If we're able to stop a little bit, and look at something as not one solid thing but look at it as a dependent arising of a whole lot of other things going on (none of which are a problem in and of themselves) then our mind relaxes a bit. And, maybe, we take away all that heaviness that's associated with the word 'problem'.

**[Audience:] How can we relate this to the experiences of the body, in particular, pain?**

Well, here, there are a few different layers that are going on. It's quite interesting. When you experience pain, one way is to see the pain as a sensation, and recognize how the mind creates so much suffering on top of the sensation by saying: "I don't like that sensation. Oh no, it's pain and I'm worried about it. Maybe I'm going to have cancer in my knee joint. Maybe I'm going to need surgery. My knees hurt, I'm going to have structural damage and I'm going to be on crutches. How am I going to afford my insurance? Who is going to pay for it? And then I'm going to be fired from my job." You know how the mind just takes off – on the basis of one physical sensation? Our mind can take it and run. Really run. And create all sorts of catastrophic scenes on the basis of one physical sensation.

You realize that so much of the suffering comes not from the physical sensation but from the mind as described above, as well as from the idea: "This is *my* body." It's very interesting when we start to look at it as *my* body. Something happens in our body and we think that we're going to die from it. The mind freaks out because this is *my* body. So much of that suffering is not physical suffering as much as it is the mind going bananas. It's mental suffering. And a lot of that mental suffering is coming simply because we're grasping onto this body with so much attachment, thinking that there's a real *mine* in it, there's a real possession to it.

If you go back and you're able to strip all those ideas away and just look at the physical pain and think: "This pain exists because the causes for it exist." It's very interesting when you can do that because then the pain doesn't appear to be this solid thing that is always existing, that has its own essence anymore. It's just that it exists because the causes exist. And as soon as the causes stop, then the pain is going to stop. There's a certain kind of lightness to it. It's not like it has its own *raison d'être*, something in it that makes it, "it". But it's just there because the causes are there. That's all.

Another way to look at it is we give it the label 'pain', but compared to something else, it may not be painful. And that's the thing. Sometimes when you start investigating the pain, if you can take away the label 'pain' and just have the sensation, then you may realize it's not so much pain. Or if it's unpleasant, to see that it's unpleasant in relationship to something else.

Or you might see that it has parts, because it is something that is changing from moment to moment to moment. There's a pain in this part. There's a pain here. There's a pain there. But when you try and isolate all the different pains in your knee, you can't figure out where they've all gone.

There are many different ways to examine and analyze the pain. We can begin to see how when we say 'pain', we project it as this unitary, solid and unchanging thing. Everything's made of lead, the way we see it, but when we start analyzing, then things become a little bit lighter. We see that it is only existing because the causes exist. And it's only existing because there are all these different parts, and my mind has looked at it as a whole and given it a label. Also, the value I associate it with, as being pain or pleasure, only exists in comparison to something else. It's like long and short. There's no inherently long and short. It's only long or short in comparison to something else.

When you are having some heavy-duty emotional experience or another, just step back and see... the whole trick is remembering to do this, because usually we never remember Dharma when we're in the middle of an emotional plunk.

But if you can actually remember when it's happening, that it's there simply because the causes for it exist, that gives you a whole different feeling about it, doesn't it? It's not something real that's permanent, that's solid, that has to exist. It's something that exists simply because the causes happen to be floating through the universe together. That's all. When the causes are finished, it finishes. Where did it go to once it finishes? Where is last year's anger? Where is last year's depression?

**[Audience:] Why do we still behave in the same old way although we understand this process of dependent arising?**

This is the difference between intellectual understanding and the experience in the heart. We have a little bit of intellectual understanding, and we think that we should be able to be perfect. Our problem is we think that if we understand something, it means that it exists in our heart. (It doesn't.) And then self-judgment jumps in. "You've heard this a hundred times. You know it's impermanent. How could you not

see it? It should go away. Something should change. How come it's not like this? I'm so bad." Those things exist simply because of causes too.

[In response to audience:] See, what's happening is you have the physical pain, eons of habit, a little bit of Dharma understanding, and you're expecting your little bit of Dharma understanding to overpower eons of habit without any effort. We have to build up the Dharma understanding slowly, slowly. Gradually, gradually.

[In response to audience:] There's the physical sensation, and on top of that, there are all these habits of ways of seeing things and ways of relating to things. There's the habit of 'This is *my* body!' And there's the habit of 'I don't like any bad sensation in my body', and there's the habit of fear of "I'm going to lose this body because of this pain."

There are all sorts of habits that create the tightness in the mind. What we have to do is to slowly enrich our Dharma understanding so as to try and lessen those habits gradually. That is all. But there is no 'I' in that whole thing. See, that is another thing. We are so sure there is an 'I' in that mass. We are so sure there is a 'my'. "My body!" The 'my' feels so strong. The 'my' that is possessing it, and the 'I' that is experiencing it – they both feel so strong. But again, if we start to look, can you find the 'my' that is possessing it? Can you find an 'I' that is feeling it? Where are you going to point to? There is just sensation. You cannot find a 'my' or 'I' in the whole mass. This is part of the problem – we think there is a real 'me' in there.

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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>