

Training in the Four Factors Ripening the Minds of Others (lightly edited transcript)
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Part 1 of 2: What Does 'Ripening the Minds of Others' Mean? (2 Feb 1994)

'Ripening the minds of others' is like you have a green tomato and you need to ripen it, make it red so that it's tasty and delicious.

How do we ripen other people's minds? Sometimes they call it 'How to assemble disciples' or 'How to gather disciples', but it basically means how to ripen other people's minds. What they are specifically referring to is forming Dharma relationships with people. We want to ripen all sentient beings' minds, but not all our relationships come in the form of Dharma teacher and student, or even as Dharma friends. But when it says 'disciples', then it's talking about a teacher-student relationship.

It is difficult to find an English word that fits what we are talking about. Using the words 'master and disciple' don't quite fit, because we have all sorts of weird ideas about masters and disciples. When you say 'student and teacher', that doesn't really fit either, because it implies a similar kind of relationship that you have with your first grade teacher. But a relationship with a Dharma teacher is totally different from that with a college professor or a high school teacher. So when we say student-teacher, we don't really get what that relationship is. In a relationship with a spiritual mentor, many buttons get pushed, because if we do have issues with authority, they will all come up. Even if we consider somebody as our spiritual friend, we'll still have issues of authority. Issues of authority come up even with our regular old friends. Even with a cat, I have issues of authority [laughter]. They just keep coming up.

Part 2 of 2: Training in the Four Factors (7 Feb 1994)

If you look in the lamrim outline*, we're on the section just after the six far-reaching attitudes: The four factors ripening the minds of others, or the four ways of gathering students, or the four ways of helping to ripen other sentient beings' minds. These four can actually be included within the six far-reaching attitudes, but they're set apart here to show us very clearly the four things we should do if we want to lead others on the path to enlightenment. Of course, this is when we're in a position to start to teach others. When we're not yet in that position, then we adapt it to the position that we are in. There is something within each of these four that we can practice at our present level.

1. Being generous

The first factor is generosity. Not only does generosity directly benefit others, but especially if you're seeking to help lead them on the path and you want to ripen their mind, then they have to want to receive the teachings. To want to come to teachings, they have to think, "Well, the teacher is a nice person. Maybe there is something I can learn from them." One way you convince people that you're a nice person is by giving them things. This isn't bribing students to come to your talks. [laughter] But rather, our minds are very, very gross. If people are kind to us and people show us some kind of warmth and give us presents, we are immediately attracted to them. Whereas if somebody doesn't give us presents and they bite us instead, then we're not so attracted to them. [laughter]

By being a generous person, they come to like you. It makes them ready to listen to Dharma teachings from you. Also, I think generosity directly communicates to others that you want to give. If you give material things, it shows a good example to prospective people whom you can benefit. You are showing a good example of a quality that they might admire, which would, again, tend to make them want to

come for the teachings. But from the student's point of view, we shouldn't go around trying out all the teachers and see who gives us the most presents [laughter]. It's our responsibility to support the teachers and not the other way around. But when we're in that role [as a teacher], in order to benefit others, then it's a nice thing to do.

You can see how it works. If we were to adapt it to work relationships, if you want to ripen people's minds in the Dharma, one way to do it is just to be friendly. You give little sweets, little presents and things like that to people whom you work with. Then they come to like you, and they think you're a nice person because you do those things, and they wonder, "What are they doing that they are such a nice person?" Then you say, "It's Buddhism." [laughter] But it works because I've gotten feedback from people who have met some of you in different occasions, and they've said, "Wow, that person was so nice and so friendly that it made me think what they're doing must be something nice. Something good." So it made them interested in the Dharma. Being generous is one thing we can do that eases relationships and it makes people interested in what we're doing.

2. Speaking pleasantly

The second factor is speaking pleasantly, but what it means is teaching the Dharma, because teaching the Dharma is speaking pleasantly. It means teaching people the means to gain upper rebirths and to gain what we call 'definite goodness'. 'Definite goodness' is a technical term that I'm introducing now in case you hear it from other teachers later. It means liberation or enlightenment. It's called 'definite goodness' because when you have liberation or enlightenment, it's definite that you're liberated. You're no longer going to fall back into confusion.

Here, we are talking about teaching people the means to attain the two goals – upper rebirth and definite goodness. You teach them according to their interest and their disposition. This is why it's so important to be skilful, teaching in ways that people can understand. For example, how do we adapt this to a work situation? As mentioned before, first you give your colleagues sweets and goodies and you are a nice person. Again, it's not to butter them up, it's because you value the Dharma. Then you might talk with them about Dharma, but you don't have to use any Buddhist words to do it. You don't have to come in with a lot of Sanskrit terms and Pali terms and give them books in Chinese and Tibetan [laughter]. But you just speak about general Dharma things in very practical, normal language.

People may ask you what you did over the weekend. If you say, "Oh, I went to a retreat," and they ask you what this is about, then you tell them the content of the retreat. But again, you tell them the points that are easy for them to understand. This is what it means by guiding people according to their interest and disposition. This is being skilful. When you tell people about Buddhism, tell them about things that they're likely to understand and agree with. When people ask, "What is Buddhism all about?" don't start telling them about reincarnation. His Holiness is an excellent example. Look what he talks about at the public talks – kindness, gratitude, love and compassion, respecting others, world peace, universal responsibility. These are things that people relate to, especially people in our culture.

When you talk to your colleagues or your parents, tell them about these kinds of things and give them some of the books that they can read right away and understand, like His Holiness' book, 'Policy of Kindness'. And in that way, they'll say, "Oh wow, Buddhism, this is interesting," because it already agrees with what they believe and what they find valuable. And then after that, you can start introducing other ideas. Also, not only do they like to hear about things like loving-kindness and respect, because these resonate with what they believe, but they also see how important it is to develop these in their own minds. It gives them something to work with right away. This is being skillful, teaching according to others' interests and dispositions.

To be able to teach according to others' interests and dispositions, we really need to become Buddhas. A Buddha will be able to understand exactly people's level of mind, their previous karma, what kind of teachings are suitable for them, what kind of language, what kind of terminology, whether to teach them Theravada teachings or Mahayana teachings, whether to teach them tantra, which tantric practices, whether to teach them in a traditional way, whether to adapt it to the culture, and so on. In other words, to be able to be sensitive to where others are at and explain Dharma in a way that communicates with them.

Also, it's important to speak according to the laws of the country and to speak using very pleasant speech and pleasant expression. When you're explaining the Dharma, don't swear and use rough

language [laughter] and be very uncouth and things like that. This doesn't mean you have to be very formal and puritanical, but again, you teach according to what seems fitting and proper.

When we explain to people in our family or at work about the Dharma, we don't have to see ourselves as teachers. When we do that, we might create a distance with the other people and we might begin to feel quite awkward. Or we might get a little bit proud or mechanical. It is better to just see it as one human being sharing something we find valuable with another human being. But of course never push it on anybody.

Did I tell you what happened to me yesterday, speaking of pushing things onto people? This is kind of off the subject, but it is good to include here as an example of what never to do. [laughter] I was teaching in Phoenix on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The teachings were very well organized and well attended. Yesterday afternoon, I had a few small groups and personal interviews. There was one Christian pastor who had come to some of the teachings on Saturday afternoon when I did a workshop on 'Anger'. He asked to see me in a small group.

He and another pastor, his colleague, came to see me. I had thought it very nice that there was going to be an inter-religious dialogue. They came in with their Bibles. They said they had come to learn and they asked me about my experience, how I became a Buddhist. I told them about it. And then one of the pastors said, "And you know, science is just theory. They have all these theories. They can prove some of them, but not the rest. Buddhism – I don't know about. But this book, this Bible, from the first page to the last page, is proven fact."

And then he continued, "When I was in Los Angeles I talked to one Caucasian monk. I asked him how come he believes in Buddhism? It's superstition. Whereas this book is fact, from beginning to end. Jesus appeared on the earth. He died and he was buried. But he was resurrected and it was proven fact. I asked the monk how come he doesn't believe in it? And this monk didn't answer me."

Oh, I knew why this monk didn't answer him. [laughter] It was pretty heavy-duty, not at all what I had expected. Fortunately, I had to go to the airport. This is how we should not be, when we're talking to people about Buddhism. [laughter]

I find especially with Westerners, it is good when we give new ideas and things, to pose them as questions instead of as proven facts. To just pose questions and give people space to think about things. I remember the first teaching I attended, which was by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. What Rinpoche did was a very good example of teaching according to people's disposition. One of the first things he said was, "You don't have to believe anything I say." I felt so relieved to hear that, at my first Buddhist teaching. Then I could listen. So when we are explaining Dharma to people, to give it like a gift, "See if this helps you. See if this works for you." And pose it as questions and let them choose what to work with.

3. Giving encouragement

First we're generous, then we give them the teachings, which is another form of generosity. And then after we've given them teachings, we encourage them in the practice. We try and create opportunities for them to practice. Sometimes people may have the teachings, but they don't know how to get going, or they're lazy, or distracted, or insecure. So we provide conditions for them to practice. You can bring this about in a variety of ways. One way that I have noticed with Lama [Yeshe] and [Lama Zopa] Rinpoche is they would meditate with us. They are truly tuned in to Westerners. Most Tibetan lamas won't meditate with their students. They come in, do some prayers, give the teaching, and then dedicate the merits and leave. They assume you know how to meditate. Very few of them will actually sit there and lead you through the meditation, or sit and do a meditation session with you. One way to give Westerners some kind of encouragement, is to do sessions with them. That's why we have Nyung Nays, and we do the Chenrezig practice as a group, because that is one way to encourage people.

I remember another way I had to use to encourage somebody to practice. There was one young man in Singapore who had cancer. In the Buddhist tradition, if you save lives, it becomes the cause of prolonging your own life. If you kill, it becomes the karmic cause for a short life. That's why you'll see, especially at the Buddhist temples in China, lots of ponds and people come with fish and turtles and they put them in the pond. People buy the animals at the butcher's shop that were going to be killed, and take them to the temple to liberate.

One time I was in Tushita center in Delhi, sitting there eating something, and a chicken walks in. [laughter] And I said to myself, "What's this chicken doing here?" It was on the way to the butcher and Rinpoche bought it to save its life, so there it was. So there is this practice of saving life.

To get back to the original story, this young man had cancer and I told him to liberate animals, but he didn't do it. There was always one thing or another he had to do that was more important – work overtime or do something for his family. One day I said to him, "I want to liberate some animals. Will you help me to do it?" I didn't have a car and people there like to do things for the Sangha. So he came and we went together to get the animals and liberate them. We did this a few times. This was the only way I could get him to do what was good for him, which was to tell him I wanted to do it. [laughter]

This is one way of encouraging somebody to do something. We can think of different ways to give people encouragement. In the context of your work situation, if somebody is interested in going to teachings, offer to go with them. Pick them up. Bring them in. Introduce them to the other people in the group. Often when they first come, they're shy. They don't know anybody. It's a new situation. Tell them what happens in the group beforehand so they know what to expect. And when they come in, introduce them to people and give them prayer sheets and things like that. It is a way of encouraging somebody to practice, making people feel at ease.

4. Acting according to what one teaches, setting a good example

The last factor to help ripen other people's minds, is that we should practice according to what we teach. This is extremely important. We should set a good example without pretense. In other words, it is not a thing of you telling other people to get up early in the morning, and when they're around, you get up at five, but when they're not around, you get up at nine. Not like that. Or telling the people, "Well, here are the five precepts. It is very good if you practice them." But then you are off acting contrary to all five of the precepts. We should try as much as possible to practice what we teach. And be very honest about our own level and not put on airs about it.

Those are the four ways of ripening other people's minds. Are there any questions on that?

[Audience:] It seems to me that to think "I have the intention to teach this person the Dharma, therefore I'm going to give them something" is a bit artificial, seems like a plotting mind to me.

You don't want to get into that plotting stage. But rather, you're practicing the Dharma yourself and the first of the six far-reaching attitudes is generosity. By practicing generosity, and especially towards people like this, then it makes them feel welcome. It is not done with a conniving mind to try and trick them. It is done basically because you're practicing generosity.

[Audience: Inaudible]

That's a very good point. Sometimes when we feel ill at ease around somebody, one good way for us to conquer that feeling is to give them something. We make a connection. Good point.

That completes this section here.

*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>