

Contents (click on any heading to view text)

- Right Action
 - *Third type of Right Action: abandoning unwise sexual behavior*
 - Taking care of our body in a healthy way
 - Cultivating acceptance of our body
 - Futility of fulfilling sense-pleasure desires
 - *Answers to Questions*
- Right Livelihood
 - *Answers to Questions*

We talked about right speech and the first two types of right action.

Right speech means to say what is truthful and useful. It's speech spoken at the right moment and spoken with compassion. It also means avoiding lying, slanderous or divisive speech, harsh words, and idle talk.

Right Action

Right or Perfect Action is:

1) to abandon physically harming others, especially killing them, and to practice protecting life. We talked about releasing animals and saving lives.

2) to abandon stealing or taking what hasn't been given to us, and to practice material generosity, generosity of our service, protecting others from harm and generosity of the Dharma.

3) to abandon unwise sexual behavior.

Third type of Right Action: abandoning unwise sexual behavior

This includes any kind of sexual behavior that is damaging to self and others. The primary thing here is adultery, meaning that whether you're married or not, if you're in a committed relationship, going outside of that. Or if you're single, you go with somebody who is in a committed relationship. At a conference that the Western Buddhist teachers had with His Holiness, it was mentioned that Thich Nhat Hanh had said that he felt any kind of sexual contact where there was the possibility of a committed relationship was fine. But when it was just frivolous sex, then Thich Nhat Hanh considered it an unwise sexual behavior. His Holiness' response to this was, "Well, that's not the way it is traditionally defined in the scriptures". But the next day His Holiness came back and he said, "Well I was thinking about that and actually I think that's good. I think that's right". I thought it was quite interesting that he came around to that.

Taking care of our body in a healthy way

The corresponding action to avoiding unwise sexual behavior is to try and take care of our body and use it in a proper way. Not only to use it in a proper way sexually but also to take care of our body in a general way, to keep it healthy. This does not mean being attached to our body and fussing over our body. It means recognizing that our body is the vehicle through which we can practice the Dharma. And because we value Dharma practice, we value our health.

I mentioned previously one Western psychologist who was at a science conference with His Holiness described to His Holiness how Westerners often feel out of touch with their bodies and alienated from their bodies. His Holiness replied, "But you care so much about your health and your appearance and you exercise". He had a hard time putting those two things together. But actually I think in our society they go very much together, that somehow because people do not feel comfortable with their bodies, they go to the extreme of trying to make their body into the perfect body. Making it look the way they

think it should look (just like the models in the magazines), becoming obsessed with appearance and with exercise not in a healthy, respectful way, but in an obsessed, compulsive way.

Here, we're talking about taking care of the body in a healthy way, not out of attachment, not because, "Oh, I love my body". We don't have to go into this big thing about how the body is beautiful. We also don't have to go into this big thing of how the body is evil and sinful. In others words we completely drop that whole dichotomy. I think what often happens in a Western Christian culture is that you get this idea of "the body is evil", "the body is sinful", "sex is evil", "vanity is evil". We grow up with all that and in an effort to counteract that, we get into the extreme of fanatic exercise, obsession with beauty, all these trips relating to the body. And yet, we don't feel comfortable with the body. When you're really obsessed with one extreme, going to the opposite extreme doesn't necessarily balance it out. It could mean that you're equally obsessed.

What we're trying to do here is to completely drop all that false discrimination regarding the body. We do not say the body is especially beautiful and fantastic, because if you look at the inside of our body, it isn't beautiful and fantastic. We do not say the body is evil and useless either, because the body can be productive and it is the vehicle that supports our Dharma practice and enables us to be of service to others. I think this takes a good deal of contemplation and meditation. We need to look into it and really do some research, "What is my view about my body?" "What is my view about sexuality?" I'm not equating these two because there's much more to the body than sexuality. We want to recognize the preconceptions that we have in our mind and then look at some way to balance them out and drop them. We do not just go to the other extreme. Sometimes when you're really stuck, you try and deny it and go to the opposite extreme. What you want to do is drop both of the extremes.

Cultivating acceptance of our body

So I suggest it's really valuable to work on that in your meditation because it brings about much more acceptance of our body. I think the more we can accept our body, the happier we're going to be in our life. Especially because our body is going to age. All of us are aging. We're getting more wrinkles. We're getting closer to death. We're getting closer to having cancer and lung disease and kidney failure and everything else. If we don't die of one thing, we are going to die of another thing.

As Lee said when we did the 'Death and Dying' workshop together, "We all have a terminal diagnosis. We just don't know what it is yet". [Laughter] It's true! And the more we can recognize, "Yes, that is true. I don't need to freak out about it, and I don't need to ignore it and deny it either. I can accept that as a fact of my life, and use that to energize my practice," the more we can come to have a healthy view towards our body and its functions and what will happen to it. Then we become able to accept sickness and aging and death instead of freaking out about those.

I think a lot of our difficulty as we grow older, is making these transitions between having a young and healthy body to having a body that is getting sick a lot more because it's aging and a body that isn't so attractive. If we live that long that's what's going to happen to us. If we can make some peace about it, then when it happens, we're not going to freak out.

[In response to audience:] If I realize, for example, that my body may be healthy now but it has the potential to become unhealthy, then I tend to treasure my health more and say, "Let's use my body now as the basis for my Dharma practice. Let's do some real serious practice now while I'm healthy because when I get unhealthy it's going to be real difficult to practice. Let's really use the time and the advantage that my health provides right now."

The same thing with youth. While we have some youth, let's really engage in the practice because it's much easier to do it now than when you're really, really old and your eyes are failing and your ears are failing and you're often sleepy and it's harder to walk and things like that. If we recognize where we are now in relationship to the whole life cycle, then it energizes us to use the opportunity we have now for Dharma practice instead of using it just for having a good time and fulfilling our sense-pleasure desires.

Futility of fulfilling sense-pleasure desires

We could go around and fulfill all our sense-pleasure desires, but all that pleasure doesn't last, and as soon as it's over you cannot retrieve it. You have nothing to show for it.

Like the weather today was great and beautiful. Maybe you went to the beach. Maybe you took a walk

around Green Lake. Maybe you stayed out in the sun. It was great and you enjoyed it. But now it's all over. What do we have to show for it? Is there any lasting benefit from that pleasure that we experienced all day? In terms of karma, nothing. Complete zilch in terms of preparing for future lives, in terms of bringing us closer to liberation and enlightenment, in terms of cultivating positive states of mind and developing wisdom and loving-kindness. All that sense pleasure didn't do any of that for us. It just consumed a lot of time, gave us some temporal happiness. But none of that happiness is here right now.

They often compare sense pleasure to the happiness you experienced in your dream last night. Like your dream. Maybe you had this fantastic, super, incredible dream, you were with this incredible person. It was super deluxe but when you wake up, where's the dream? Gone, finished.

Living our life solely for the purpose of having sense pleasure leaves us with that same kind of emptiness as soon as it's over. I think that causes people to have a lot of regret at the time of death. At the time they die, they look over their whole life and say, "OK, I've spent my whole life. What did I do my whole life?" People go through this whole list of things they did but then the question is, "Well, what comes with me now that I'm dying? I did all that. I made it to the top of the corporate ladder. I got this incredible house. I was so famous. I won the trophy in roller-blading and I did this and that. I was the best artist and the best musician. I had all this pleasure and everybody loved me. I was so popular but now I'm dying. What of that comes with me?" That's when people develop a lot of regret and a lot of fear. Because it's really, really clear at the time of death that none of that stuff goes with us.

The only thing that goes with us when we die is our mental consciousness and the karmic imprints that we have accumulated from the actions that we've done our whole life. If all the actions we've done our whole life had just been done out of a selfish motivation for our own pleasure, then we have nothing to show. All the imprints that go with us are just the imprints of selfish pleasure. Whereas if we spent our life trying to generate constructive mental states and an attitude of kindness and concern for others, an attitude of selfless giving or generosity or ethics or whatever, and we do actions motivated by that, then when we die all these imprints and habitual tendencies go with us. There'll be a real sense of richness and fullness and accomplishment and a lack of fear.

Answers to Questions

Dharma practice as we get older

[In response to audience:] It's going to be of course unique to the individual. Some person may be just wild and all over the place in their youth. It was only when they got older that they started waking up and thinking about the meaning of life. So for that person it's a different situation. But in general, in terms of our physical capacity, when the body starts becoming more uncomfortable and starts losing its power, that in itself is one more thing that we have to deal with.

It was really interesting for me when I lead a course with one sociology professor for students of Chapman University in the winter. We've done it two winters now. She's in her sixties – a wonderful, very incredible woman. But I really notice (and she's also told me) that in the last two years, she has a hard time hearing. She comes to the morning meditations but she cannot hear us when we lead the meditations. Or she cannot hear the Dharma talk we're giving. How distressing that was to her! I recently received a letter from her telling me she got a hearing aid and how much better it was. I think it was a big psychological jump for her to actually get a hearing aid.

So we're talking about just those kinds of routine physical deterioration that can interfere with our Dharma practice. Of course with the mind, many people mature as they age and the Dharma becomes much more vital and vibrant to them.

Examples of unwise sexual behavior

[In response to audience:] For example, you know that you are HIV positive. You continued having sexual relationships without telling your partner and without practicing any kind of protection. Or you manipulate somebody else emotionally to get them to have sex or you use physical force. These acts are very damaging to others.

Responsibility and commitment in relationships

[In response to audience:] Both His Holiness and Thich Nhat Hanh emphasize very much this feeling of responsibility and commitment to other people. Not only in terms of intimate or sexual relationships but also in terms of relationships with people in general. To really look at people as treasures to uncover, not as tools to be used.

[Audience:] Is prostitution considered unwise sexual conduct?

Prostitution was not included under unwise sexual conduct. It's unwise sexual conduct only when somebody else had paid for the prostitute, but you took her instead. When Gen Lamrimpa said that, I nearly hit the ceiling! But obviously the social ethic at that time was completely different. The whole notion towards women was very different then than it is now. Also it may not have been that prostitutes were sold into it in slavery or forced into it by economic conditions.

[Audience:] What's the reason behind celibacy and how does this help direct one's energy towards the Dharma?

This happens on many, many levels. On one level, one's health improves. His Holiness also commented about this in the teachers' conference. He was saying that many people, after they become monastics and become celibate, that because the physical energy is retained, then also their health improves. So that could be one thing. For some people it may not work this way. It depends a lot on your mind.

Also, I just know that for myself, from my own personal experience, if I let my mind generate a lot of attachment – either emotional attachment to somebody or sexual attachment – then when I sit down to meditate, my mind much prefers to think about things I'm attached to – things that are wonderful, that bring a sense of security and pleasure. That's much nicer to think about than death and refuge and karma. [Laughter] My mind just goes off and it becomes very difficult to meditate. So on the level of distraction in your meditation, if you have more restraint in your break time and don't get involved in relationships, it becomes much easier to meditate. When people come on retreats, I ask them to be celibate, simply because it cuts out a lot of distraction in their minds.

It also cuts out a lot of the trips we do when we're relating to other people. You can see how your behavior changes when the mind is actively looking for interested and sexual relationships. Watch what your mind does when you meet somebody who is physically or emotionally attractive to you. You get into incredible amounts of all sorts of trips. After I took ordination, it became much, much clearer to me the kinds of trips we get on to when there's attraction involved with somebody else. Celibacy cuts out that stuff.

Another way in which it helps you direct your energy towards the Dharma is that, for example, if I had a husband and kids, it'd be really difficult to be giving Dharma teachings the way I am. You wouldn't have just Achala (the kitten) walking in and out of the room. You'd have my kids, you'd have my husband, you'd have my in-laws calling on the phone [laughter], and everything else. It will be much more difficult to find the time to do retreat, to go to teachings, etc because of the family commitment. Your family needs you. They want you. You want them. It becomes more difficult. So that's another reason for being celibate.

Sometimes people ask me, "If everybody ordains, doesn't that mean there won't be future generations to propagate the Dharma?" I don't see that danger happening yet. I've never seen everybody rushing to the monasteries to ordain so that we weren't going to have any future generations of Buddhists.

[Audience:] How does one practice within a couple relationship?

First of all, I would recommend, if you aren't already in a relationship (if you are already in one, then work with the person you're with), then I would advise looking for somebody who also has similar spiritual interest, who also wants to follow the Buddha's path more particularly. Somebody whom you can talk with about Buddhism and who encourages you in your practice. Somebody whom you can meditate with, who has some good discipline, who gets up in the morning so if you want to sleep in, that person kind of nudges you and says, "Come on, let's meditate." Don't get mad at them and start a fight!

[laughter]. Can you imagine that? You'll have to have Buddhist marriage counselors – "My husband woke me up and nags me to go meditate with him in the morning!" [laughter]

So you want to find somebody who really has an active interest in practice, an active interest in the kind of Buddhist values that you have. Somebody whom you can talk with about Buddhism, who encourages you in your practice, who understands that spiritual side of you.

This applies also to our friendships in general; I'm not just giving advice for how to find a spouse. Our Buddhist friends are so precious and so valuable because they understand that spiritual side of us and the accompanying values that we have – that the most important thing in our life isn't money and success and fame. The people who share those same kind of values are very precious to us. If you have a partner, I would recommend you go on retreats together. Or one of you go on retreat and one of you stay home so as to give the other person space. Really support each other in wanting to have quiet time alone or quiet time to go to class or to meditate.

Right Livelihood

The third one is livelihood. Perfect or right or brought to fruition livelihood. This has to do with how we earn our living, how we sustain our life and how we use our wealth. This is a very important thing because a good deal of our life revolves around how we earn a living and how we use our wealth. The job and career we choose is going to influence the circumstances we're in which in turn influences our own conditioning. That's why it's quite important to talk about livelihood and think deeply about it.

The basic thing is to try to not break precepts in one's way of making a livelihood. Not to break the five precepts of avoiding killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior, lying and intoxicants. Also not to do anything which encourages other people to act in destructive ways. These are the basic criteria. To have a job where you don't have to act unethically and where you don't have to encourage anybody else to.

Right livelihood includes not overcharging people. It includes not under-paying your employees. Paying employees correct wages is part of right livelihood. Falsifying work records, falsifying your timesheet, claiming that you worked more hours than you actually worked would be unethical. Stealing from your company. Making long distance calls on the company telephone bill when the company doesn't let you do that. These kinds of things would not be proper livelihood.

There are some specific occupations where it's strongly recommended that we not get engaged in. For example:

- being a butcher
- being a fisherperson, catching fish
- selling weapons
- being involved in the so-called defence industry which is the offence industry
- selling, distributing or serving alcohol or intoxicants. In the plane, they serve so much alcohol. I kept thinking of all the flight attendants and the karma that they're creating, and they don't realize what's going on. Some of them don't even know not to offer me alcohol. Some of them recognized and don't offer. [laughter]
- dealing in animal skins and furs because some beings were killed because of that.
- sooth-saying
- selling poisons, any kind of poisons that would destroy life. I remember one time I gave a talk on this subject and the person who drove me home decided to change after they recognized what they did was no good – either that they had a job in an insecticide company or they had just bought a whole bunch of insecticides, I can't quite remember.
- raising livestock for slaughter
- dealing in slaves
- being a hunter or soldier, anything that involves other beings dying or killing other beings
- usury, but of course now working in a bank is quite an accepted social thing. Probably at the time of the Buddha, people really cheated each other through usury.
- operating a gambling casino.
- prostitution or any kind of involvement in the pornography business – in today's society we would

include this in. I think pornography is something that is pretty exploitative.

So those kinds of livelihoods. “Wrong livelihood” also means doing your job with the wrong intention, even if you aren’t involved in any of the above wrong livelihoods. Like let’s say you’re a doctor and you really want more people to be sick so that you’ll get more patients and more money. That becomes wrong livelihood. Or if you’re a trader and you want there to be a war or an embargo or sanctions so that you can do more trading in the black market. Trading in itself and doing business is quite an okay livelihood but when you’re praying for other people to have misfortunes so that you can benefit from it, then it becomes a wrong livelihood.

Answers to Questions

Short-selling

[In response to audience:] What’s short-selling? [Audience speaks.] Stock market is beyond my realm of understanding. [Laughter] I’ll leave you guys to determine that, but anything that involves deceit or cheating is a wrong livelihood. Even if you do have a proper livelihood, using deceit or cheating in it makes it a wrong livelihood.

Lying in business

A question that I commonly get asked is what happens if our boss expects us to lie? When we do business, we’re expected to cheat the customer. I have one friend who used to work in Hong Kong for Levi Strauss as one of the chief executives. She’s a Buddhist, so I asked her this question. I said “How about this? How do you keep good ethics when you’re doing top-notch business like that?” She said actually keeping good ethics is the way to have a good business because if you cheat the customers, if you shortchange them in some way, if you deceive them, they’re not going to come back to you. Whereas if you’re straightforward and you don’t overcharge, they’re going to come back. So she was actually saying that this whole question really is quite irrelevant. There’s no real need to cheat, deceive and lie in business.

Killing to provide meat as food-aid

[In response to audience:] From a Buddhist viewpoint, that would still be unethical. The best thing is to try and get them something else to eat that doesn’t require killing a being. Also it’s been shown that to produce meat requires much more resources than to produce the equivalent amount of grain. So better to send grain instead. Also, the meat will spoil in the relief airplanes.

Abortion

[In response to audience:] This is a real difficult issue. When asked about it, His Holiness usually says it depends on the situation. But in general, abortion is included within taking life.

Divination/ Fortune-telling

[In response to audience:] Traditionally, fortune-telling, sooth-saying, and things like this are often seen as ways of cheating people or encouraging superstitious practice. “But the Tibetan lamas do divinations,” you would say. In the Chinese temples, you pray to Kuan Yin and you throw these sticks and it tells your fortune.

The standard answer for that is that this is done in order to benefit people. If you pray to Chenrezig and you throw the sticks, if your mind has enough faith, maybe the slip of paper that turns out from the sticks will help you to get some clarity in your mind. When the Tibetan lamas do the divinations, they invoke Palden Lhamo or Tara or one of the Buddhas who then speaks through the dice. It’s done for the benefit of sentient beings.

My own opinion is that there may be some practitioners who are really doing it for the benefit of others, and they really have some ability to give that kind of advice. There may be other practitioners where that’s not the case. So I think one needs to be very, very careful.

They say that if you go to a fortune-teller and the fortune-teller says, “Oh something really awful is going to happen in your life” or “You’re going to have a really bad rebirth. You’d better do a lot of purification because there’s some incredible negativity”, then you get really scared and you go right out and learn the purification practice and start doing it.

But if you come to Dharma class and you hear that the Buddha says in the scriptures, “Look at the karma you’ve created in your life. There’s a lot of negativity and that brings suffering,” then we say, “Oh Buddha’s just talking. That isn’t really the case.”

It’s really true, isn’t it? People often take what a channeller or fortune-teller or the I-Ching tells them much more seriously. They take that much more personally and seriously than what the Buddha’s teachings tell them. I think this happens because of our limited mental capacity. So I think sometimes this kind of fortune telling is done as a way to communicate with people who have that tendency and will only listen through that way.

Buddhist astrology

[In response to audience:] There’s a form of Buddhist astrology and there are certain Buddhists who practice it. Although His Holiness says that it’s good to keep that tradition alive, he himself doesn’t rely a whole lot on it. I think it depends a lot on one’s motivation, on one’s skill, on how one emphasizes things. Something is not right when one has a really important decision to make and one thinks, “Oh the Dharma teachings aren’t so important. Let’s look at the chart instead.”

“What are the criteria we use to make a decision?” To make a wise decision, first of all we should think about what is most ethical. Look at the ethical pros and cons. Look at the benefit for sentient beings. Look at the benefit for our Dharma practice. Use these kinds of criteria for making decisions. But instead of encouraging that, if an astrologer encourages you to use your chart and forget about ethics, forget about altruism, forget about your Dharma practice, then I think we’re getting really off balance. Or just using the dice or just using I-Ching.

I’m not negating any of those things because sometimes those things can be helpful. But it’s when you trust those things more than you trust the Buddha’s teachings, then something is not right.

More discussion on divination

[In response to audience:] It would depend on who you went to ask too, like if you’re a Buddhist practitioner but you seek from a non-Buddhist astrologer your long-term goals in life. Buddha gave you a goal to become enlightened – that’s pretty long-term! [Laughter]

I’ve had a great deal of difficulty because one of my teachers does a lot of divination. He throws dice to determine what to eat for lunch, who to ask to lunch, what airplane to take. Most of my teachers aren’t like that. Most of them use divination when, for example, somebody is sick and they want to know which doctor to go to or things like that. So I’ve had a great deal of difficulty with the teacher who uses the dice a lot.

Once I said to another teacher of mine, “When I go and ask for advice from my teacher, I trust his advice. I want his advice. I don’t want the dice’s advice. We’re trained to respect our teachers, and especially when we practice Vajrayana we’re trained to see our teacher as the Buddha. When we’re training our mind like that, then what do we need the dice for, because our teacher’s opinion should be something we really seek?”

This teacher said, “Yes that’s very, very true but most people will listen more if the teacher says it by throwing the dice first. If people think, ‘Oh, this came from the Buddha’, or ‘This came from Palden Lhamo,’ then they’ll listen to it more than if it came from their teacher.”

But for me personally, it’s the exact opposite. I trust my teachers’ personal advice more than the divinations because I really admire my teachers. But that’s my personality, my character. You’re getting this through my own personal filter.

[In response to audience:] I wouldn’t take out the dice or the sticks and use them to tell others what to

do. There are a few reasons why I don't do that. First of all I don't know how to, with any degree of accuracy. Second of all, I think with Westerners, people need to learn to take responsibility for their lives. For me to give them an answer that they then follow, would not necessarily help them even if it was good advice, because the important thing is for them to come to that decision themselves and take responsibility themselves. Because the danger (and here is also where I have some differences with the tradition) is that I feel that if you throw some dice and tell somebody, "Marry this person or do that," and if it doesn't work out, they may blame you and they may blame the Dharma. There's a likelihood that that could happen.

[Audience:] What are the factors to consider when people have decisions to make?

When I have decisions to make, first of all, I look at the *ethics involved in it*. I really look closely, "If I do this, will I be able to keep my precepts? If I do that, will I be able to keep my precepts? Will I be able to act ethically? Are there any ethical dangers in either of these choices?" So that's one of the first things I look at.

The second thing I look at is, "Which situation is going to be more *conducive for my practice*? Is there one situation where it feels like it will really encourage my practice, energize me and give me the time and the conditions to be able to practice well, or is that situation likely to inhibit or interfere with my practice?"

I also look at what are the *benefits to others*. This links up with the previous one. In other words, if I practice well, it will benefit others. So in the long-term if a situation is good for my practice, it will be beneficial for others.

Another factor: in an immediate sense, what is the short-term benefit for others? If I do this versus doing that, is there something that brings more direct benefit?

So I look at these different things and try and balance them out.

I think when we make decisions, sometimes what impedes us from making a wise decision is when we get really, really tight and think we have to make a very concrete decision right away for how we're going to live the rest of our life. But actually very often, with many of the situations where we are confused about what decision to make, we'll find that we don't have to make a real solid decision right away. It doesn't have to be a decision that we live out the rest of our lives. Sometimes we can make a decision to do something, but if we realize it isn't right, we can change lanes and do something else. We do not need to feel boxed in by our decision.

I think what is very important in making decisions is not just doing something because it's the easy way out; you're afraid of what somebody else is going to say if you don't do that. In other words letting our craving for approval and praise and support be the dominating criteria in making a decision. Then I think we will get into trouble. If we make a decision and do something just to please somebody, not because we really care about them with compassion, but simply because we want their approval and we don't want them to dislike us, then often we will feel very restless and dissatisfied afterwards.

[Audience:] Is running a pawnshop a right livelihood?

There're probably honest and dishonest ways of running a pawnshop. There're probably ways of running it where you really take advantage and milk people. And there're probably ways where you're just basically helping people.

[Audience:] What do we do when our livelihood contravenes our precepts?

I think there you have to think deeply. Many people may choose to keep the precepts and give up their job. Others may think, "Well, in the long term, keeping the job will benefit sentient beings. So I'll break the precept and do some purification." But there you have to be really careful and make sure that that's really the case. That it's going to happen. That it's not rationalization.

[Audience:] What does Buddhism say about having money? Is having money evil?

We often have this thinking that money is evil. Having money is bad. In Buddhism this is not the case at all. Buddhism doesn't say sex is evil and bad, in the same way it doesn't say money is evil and bad. It's our attitude towards all these things that's the key thing. The Buddha did say that there are certain advantages to ownership and to having things. One is that you can support yourself and your family. That's very practical. In order to practice Dharma you have to be able to support yourself. If you can't support yourself, then you become a burden to society. Also if you have a livelihood and you make money, it gives you the opportunity to use the money to serve others. To use it to give to charity, to give to people in need, to help Dharma projects and activities.

Having money also enables you not to have debts. Nowadays almost everybody has debts. It's the way people live, because for most people it's economically more viable to buy a house and take out a mortgage, and there you have a debt. But if you don't do that you wind up losing money. But we do not want to have unreasonably high debts. The Buddha also emphasized that it is important when you're spending, to really look at how much money you have and not spend beyond your means. So the point is not to get into unnecessary debts or live higher than one is capable of living.

Also the Buddha suggested that one uses one's income for four different purposes:

1) savings and investment

2) recreation and taxation. It's interesting that it says in the scriptures to give to guests and relatives and the King. Giving to the King is taxation. We don't have a King now. The IRS became the King.

[Laughter]

3) supporting yourself and your family

4) charity – donation to the needy and to religious organizations. This doesn't mean that you give only to Buddhist organizations. Don't discriminate, "Oh this is a Christian organization so I'm not going to give to it." If, for example, the organization is running a shelter or doing some relief effort and is not trying to proselytize (and drive people nuts), that's fine. So don't get this black and white mind that you shouldn't give to an organization that's not Buddhist.

[Audience:] What is the right livelihood for monastics?

Now the question may come up, "What about monastics? What is their livelihood? How do monastics earn a livelihood?" Well, right livelihood for monastics is doing their practice and keeping their precepts.

Monastics live by donation. At least theoretically they should. Nowadays it's a totally different ball game. I personally really advocate that for monastics, living by donations is a much better way. But the situation for many monastics in the West is, people won't support them so they have to go out and get a job. You also have the situation of people going around raising money for their monasteries. There's also something in there to be sensitive and careful about.

In general the monastic's job is to keep their precepts and do their practice. In that way, if people make donations to the monastics, they create a lot of positive potential. The monastics in turn are able to sustain their life and do their practice and create positive potential that way.

If monastics are not keeping their precepts and not doing their practice well but are instead collecting money to build big monasteries and to have nice living accommodations, then that's not very ethical. It's actually a sign of the degeneration of the Dharma when monastics start having extremely luxurious living quarters and are not practicing at all.

Breaking away from the Protestant work ethic and the conditioning of our society

[In response to audience:] So I think as Buddhists in the West, our real challenge in having a right livelihood is to break away from the Protestant work ethic and the conditioning of our society that sees our human value only in terms of our profession and career and financial income. I think that's one of the real big challenges for Buddhist practitioners because there's so much conditioning. If you have a high-status job, it means you're worthwhile as a human being. If you get a big paycheck, it means you're worthwhile as a human being.

You are working at a job; there's a layoff and you lose your job. All your self-esteem is gone, "I don't

have a job anymore. Who am I? I have to take unemployment benefits. That's living off the government. That's a disgrace". We get so psychologically tangled up, so upside down. I think we have to break ourselves from that kind of conditioning.

Or if you take a new job that enables you to have a right livelihood but you don't make as much money. Then very often we feel this incredible drop of self-confidence because we feel that in order to be successful, each new job should enable us to make more and more money.

We might have a lot of money that we invested in the stock market. The stock market goes down and we lose our investment. Then our sense of value as a human being, our sense of success as a human being plummets as well. I think these are the things that we really have to work with so much in our society because that comes from Martin Luther's values of work being in service of God. During that time, it was a very convenient way to combine capitalism and religion so that you could do both at the same time, because that's what the people needed to do at that time. But now I think we need to break out of that conditioning.

It's so difficult for us to break out of the conditioning. When those kinds of issues start coming up, we should remind ourselves that at the time of death our business card does not go with us. Whatever title we have, whatever career we have, whatever label we have does not go with us at the time of death. It is not the thing that is going to determine our next rebirth or whether we get enlightened or liberated. Similarly, our bank account doesn't go with us when we die. It stays here. All our relatives fight over it. We should remember that having a big bank account isn't the purpose of our life.

That's why we come to the Dharma, isn't it? Because we can see that there's some kind of empty feeling with the way we're living our life in society. That having possessions, having the American dream is not what brings happiness. That's why we come to Buddhism, because we have some kind of instinctive awareness about this. But then on another level, we have all this conditioning that says, "But... career, status, money, property – this is all value, this is meaning, this is success."

So we have two different sides of ourselves saying two different things, and we have to really look inside and resolve that. Really ask ourselves some very, very serious questions, like, "What is the meaning of my life? What is the value of my life? What is more meaningful in my life - developing a kind heart or developing a bank account? What is more meaningful in my life - developing wisdom or getting a lot of titles and professional recognition?"

I think we come to Buddhism because we know in our heart of hearts, that what is valuable is the kind of human being we are. And we can see that so clearly. When there're difficulties, what do we rely on? What solves our difficulties? It's not always the money and the status. It's who we are as a human being. When we want to help somebody, it's our presence as a human being that is the biggest gift, the biggest help. So to really break free of all that conditioning about: "I have to have all these things to be valuable". It's a major challenge for us. Very important challenge. The more we can lessen this conditioning on ourselves, then the more we're going to be peaceful and relaxed and happy. Definitely.

[Audience:] What kind of lifestyle do we need in order to be happy?

That's a thing to look at too. How often do we need to go to Hawaii? How nice a flat do we need to have in order to be satisfied? How many times a week do we need to go out to eat? So there's a lot of adjustments that can be made. We often get very habituated to a certain kind of lifestyle and we think we're going to be miserable if we have anything less than that. This is the real advantage of going to India. You see that you can be happy without all that.

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>