

## The Eightfold Noble Path: Right Concentration & Right Effort – part one

(lightly edited transcript)

by Ven. Thubten Chodron ©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle, 18 Jul 94.

### Contents (click on any heading to view text)

- **Right Concentration**
  - *Five Hindrances to Developing Concentration*
    - Sense Desire
      - *Antidote to Sense Desire*
    - Ill-will
      - *Antidote to Ill-will*
    - Sloth and Laziness
      - *Antidotes to Sloth and Laziness*
    - Restlessness and Worry
      - *Antidotes to Restlessness and Worry*
    - Doubt
      - *Antidotes to Doubt*
  - *Five Antidotes to hindrances*
    - Displacement
    - Thinking of the disadvantages of that particular thought pattern that you're having.
    - Paying no attention
    - Allowing the thoughts to settle
    - "Repressing" them
- **Right Effort**
  - *4 Kinds of Effort*
- **Concluding meditation**

---

We've been doing the Eightfold Noble Path. It's called "noble" because this is the path perfected by the noble ones or the aryas. The aryas are those who have direct, non-conceptual perception of reality or emptiness. So this is the path they follow to become aryas and this is the path they perfect as aryas. When we say the "Four Noble Truths," it's actually four facts seen as true by the noble ones, seen as true by these aryas who have direct perception of emptiness.

We've talked about how the eight can be classified into three which are ethics, concentration and wisdom.

#### A) Ethics:

- (1) Right Speech
- (2) Right Livelihood
- (3) Right Action

#### B) Concentration

- (4) Right Mindfulness
- (5) Right Concentration
  
- (6) Right Effort (can kind of go between concentration and wisdom)

#### C) Wisdom

- (7) Right View
- (8) Right Realization.

So tonight I'm hoping to talk about Right Concentration & Right Effort.

---

## Right Concentration

This is also called samadhi, or “ting nge dzin” in Tibetan which means “single-pointedness of mind”. Buddhaghosa defined it as “the centering of the consciousness and its concomitants, evenly and completely on a single point.” The mental consciousness and the mental factors that arise together with that particular mental consciousness – those are the concomitants – are evenly and completely focused on a single point, and that gives you incredible flexibility of mind. The mind is no longer like a monkey jumping from one thing to another but it has some control.

The practice of samadhi, or concentration, isn't specifically a Buddhist practice. It's also done by people of other religions. I know the Hindus do it, maybe the Christians do. I'm sure others do as well. And it was interesting because His Holiness brought this up at the Western Buddhist Teachers' Conference: that not every practice a Buddhist does is necessarily a practice only done by Buddhists. For example, this one on samadhi is something that could be done by other religions.

But what makes this a particularly Buddhist practice is the motivation and the other states of mind under which this practice is done. The difference between a Buddhist practicing samadhi and a non-Buddhist practicing samadhi is that the Buddhist is, first of all, doing it with refuge – entrusting their spiritual guidance to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – and therefore having the goal of liberation or enlightenment.

When the mind has that kind of motivation, is determined to be free of cyclic existence, and is aimed at liberation and enlightenment, then the practice of samadhi becomes a liberating factor. But without the refuge, without the determination to be free, without the motivation for liberation or enlightenment, then it's just regular, old samadhi and it doesn't necessarily even free you from cyclic existence. They say that we've all reached these very high states of samadhi before, and we've even been born in the form and formless realms and remained in blissful concentration for aeons. But because we didn't have the determination to be free and we never bothered to check out the nature of reality, we never realized emptiness and thus we never purified our ignorance, anger and attachment. And so when the karma to be born in these higher states ended, then again we fell down into lower realms of existence.

That's why it's so important to do this practice of concentration with refuge and with the proper motivation: with the determination to be free, or the altruistic intention to become a Buddha. The practice of concentration makes the mind a very fine and receptive instrument which can then be used to understand all the other elements of the Path. We can see that when we try and meditate on love, it's very difficult to stay on love because the mind starts doing your shopping list, starts planning your vacation and all sorts of other things. Or we try and meditate on emptiness and we just think of the emptiness of the refrigerator because the mind cannot stay on the right kind of emptiness. This is why concentration is important. It gives us some control over our mind so that when we use that same mind to investigate the nature of reality or to meditate on the kindness of others or the suffering of others, we can actually get somewhere in those meditations.

In the section “calm-abiding”, we talked about the five hindrances. Here, under the Eightfold Noble Path, it talks about another set of five obstructions. There's some overlap but there's some difference, so don't get confused if it doesn't match the other set of five exactly. It is quite interesting to go through these because I think if we look, we'll find that we know them quite well.

### Five Hindrances to Developing Concentration

#### (a) Sense Desire

The first of these five hindrances or obscurations is sense desire. The mind is looking for happiness and sense pleasure. The mind, when you're sitting there, thinks about your partner, thinks about your holiday, thinks about frozen yogurt, thinks about how you'd much rather have ice cream and how would it go with peach pie, and what you're going to spend your pay check on etc. Also, when you're trying to meditate, the mind starts humming and singing. Have you had that happen? You're meditating and then your favorite music starts going through your mind? That's sense desire at work.

The mind's going outwards, looking for happiness from an external object, which is an entirely fruitless pursuit. We've been doing it since beginningless time, looking for happiness from external things. And look where we are now. We're in the same place we still were a few hundred million lifetimes ago. We

haven't really gotten anywhere. We've enjoyed a lot of sense pleasure but it hasn't gotten us anywhere because they say that all that pleasure is like last night's dream, there and then finished.

So the sense pleasure is a big obscuration to our meditation, and an obscuration even to Dharma practice to start with. It's one of the big things that keeps you from getting to teachings, especially in the summer when it's so nice to take a walk or go swimming. So you can see the sense pleasure just pulls us completely away from Dharma practice.

#### Antidote to Sense Desire

The way to combat that is meditating on impermanence, meditating on death--sobering the mind up by looking at the fact that none of these things can bring us lasting happiness. In our meditation we think of all these wonderful things we got in the past and then just ask ourselves, "What does it do for me now?" I'm sure we all had an incredible amount of pleasure in the past. So we go through and remember those things and say, "What does it really do for me? It doesn't have the ability to bring lasting happiness."

So when we check using our own wisdom, then very naturally the attachment decreases. Now some of you looked a little bit pained ...it's like, "I don't really want to give those things up. Come on, it made me happy. What else is going to give me happiness if I don't get it from that?" And that's the whole thing, to really look at our life and ask ourselves if it does give us happiness.

There's nothing wrong with being happy. That's the whole purpose of the Path. We should be happy. But let's see if following the sense pleasures gives us happiness or if it just makes us completely berserk and dissatisfied: always wanting more, always wanting better. Let's check out where real happiness comes from.

#### **(b) Ill-will**

Then the second of the hindrances is ill-will. If we're not sitting there desiring this and that and the other thing, then we're often sitting there saying, "I don't like this and get me away from that. That guy harmed me and I want to retaliate." We spend a lot of time in our meditation planning very efficiently how to get our revenge, how to tell somebody off, how to let them know that we're the boss around here, how to hurt their feelings because they hurt our feelings – whatever it is. And so just look at that mental factor of ill-will, that mind that's so tight, that's so tied in knots, that's angry.

Sometimes we're angry at specific people. Maybe we don't like our colleague or we don't like the cat or we don't like something else. Sometimes the ill-will is much more amorphous. It's this kind of ill-will against society, ill-will about the military industrial complex, ill-will toward the consumer mentality, ill-will towards how we're being brainwashed by the advertisements. And so we can have an incredible amount of amorphous, generalized hatred or anger, and resentment towards different elements of society in general. That often also keeps us incredibly bound and makes the mind very tight, very unhappy.

Then we can spend a tremendous amount of time in our meditation complaining. That's one of my favorite things. It's awful but I'm kind of addicted. This is wrong, that's wrong! So we can complain about people, about society, about the government, about the people in the factories, about Mars. We complain about anything there is to complain about and it doesn't get us anywhere.

#### Antidote to Ill-will

I'm not saying you should stuff that hatred down or stuff that feeling of despair down, but rather pull it up and look at it and recognize that it's useless. Also, try doing some meditation, *seeing the kindness of others* and the value that we've received from others, the benefit that others have given to us, how our whole life is dependent on them, how everything we have in our life all come about due to the efforts of others. So although society certainly has a lot of room for improvement, if we only look at that, then we totally miss out on the other side of society where we've experienced so much good fortune and kindness.

Like His Holiness was saying when he taught in Seattle, "You know if one person is murdered in Seattle, because that gets to the front-page news, but all the people in the city who were helped that day, that doesn't get put in the newspaper." If we look around at the activities in the city, the predominant thing we'll see is people helping people. So if we focus on that, then this ill-will really decreases.

### **(c) Sloth and Laziness**

The mind that just wants to lie down, go to sleep and enjoy. This lazy mind that says, “My back hurts, my knees hurt, I’d better go lie down. I shouldn’t meditate or it’ll do me some big structural damage. I should go lie down.” The mind that says, “Oh I went to teachings all weekend. I need a break tonight. I’m really exhausted from sitting in that chair and listening to teachings all weekend. I really need to sleep tonight”.

#### Antidotes to Sloth and Laziness

The Buddha gave different remedies for this, in a progressive order.

The first thing to do when you have laziness come up is just *try and ignore those thoughts*. They pop into the mind but just don’t feed them energy. Ignore them. Let them go.

If that doesn’t work, then do some recitation, chant some mantra, recite the scriptures, recite the Heart Sutra. This often helps us, it gets us “unlazy” because we’re *chanting* and the chanting gives us a certain amount of energy. Especially if you chant out loud and you chant with a melody, it can energize you and help you overcome that laziness.

If that doesn’t work, then pull your ears and rub your limbs with the palms of your hands. Give yourself a massage. Kind of hit yourself, slap your cheeks and pull your ears. *Get the circulation in the body going*.

If that doesn’t work, then get up, splash water on your face, look around in all the directions and look up at the sky. *Stretch the mind out*, look at far distances, get the cold water on your face. Sometimes if you’re doing a retreat you might have some cold water next to you, then you can be really lazy and you don’t even have to get up to get the cold water. You can just sit there and splash it.

If that doesn’t work, then you can *develop an inner perception of light*. You can visualize a very bright light and imagine that it fills your body and mind.

Or you can do the *breathing meditation*, exhaling the dark, heavy mind in the form of smoke and inhaling a bright, alert mind in the form of light and feeling that light fill your body and mind.

If that isn’t doing the trick, then walk around – not with your senses and looking at every beautiful thing around, but try and control your senses – really get up and walk and move the body. Maybe do some *walking meditation*.

Or you can lie down and go to sleep. But when you wake up, make a very *strong determination* to use your life wisely and not just continually give way to the sleepy, lazy mind. So it’s not just lying down and sleeping and saying, “Oh good, now I’ve got my way!” but really knowing, “Okay, now it’s time to rest,” but when you get up, say, “Now I’m going to be bright and alert and I’m not going to just keep giving in to the mind that is quite lazy.” So those are some ways to handle the laziness.

### **(d) Restlessness and Worry**

The fourth obscuration or hindrance here is restlessness and worry. The body cannot sit still. There’s incredible restless energy. The mind is full of apprehension or anxiety, “What about this, what about that? What happens if...?” Or making travel plans – “If I take the plane on this day, then how am I going to get the train there ... I’ve got to fax this person ... my visa doesn’t last this long.” And so the mind just gets completely wrapped up, very restless, very worried.

Or the mind might get worried: “Oh what happens if I lose my job?” and “How much money am I going to make?” and “How much do I have saved away?” or “Oh no my relationship isn’t so good. Maybe I should break up. No I don’t feel like..., no maybe I should..., what am I going to do, I’m going to be so lonely but other friends will tell me that I’m happy, they thought I should break up with him ....” So the mind that is just full of restlessness, full of worry, cannot stay on anything.

This can also be a mind with lots and lots of expectations. Thinking about what you want to have, what you’re hoping for, what you’re wishing for. It can also be a mind that’s pushing you, a mind that has these incredible, unrealistic expectations. “I’ve got to sit here and meditate and attain enlightenment.” I think I told you the story about this one monk from Holland. He had gone into retreat and he said, “I

have incredible faith in my teacher. I'm going to go into retreat and I am going to meditate and attain enlightenment." A few months later Lama told him to stop retreat and open a business.

As soon as you sit down with your practice, you have very fanciful expectations of everything you're going to attain. You're putting yourself in for a real setback. Because the mind is just basically geared up towards squeezing yourself into an image of who you aren't again. So instead of being the chief CEO image, we're going to be the chief sit-on-the-meditation-cushion image... all that pushing, all that expectation just makes the mind very restless, very worried, very anxious.

It can also be a mind that is overly concerned with ethics. In other words, it's not a mind that's balanced regarding our ethical conduct, but rather, the mind is saying, "Oh I walked across this lawn and maybe I've stepped on some ants and what can I do? I have to go from here to there and the lawn was in the middle. I might have stepped on these ants though I didn't see them, and I'm going to go to hell because I created this negative karma!" So this mind is kind of overly concerned with ethics in an unrealistic way. That can also make the mind very tight. That usually isn't our problem. Our problem is usually not enough concern. But it can be that sometimes we just get this very anxious mind.

So all this anxiety, apprehension, worry, and restlessness – all these are a big hindrance.

#### Antidotes to Restlessness and Worry

You can do a few different things to counter restlessness and worry.

One of them is when you sit down to meditate, say to yourself: "Do I have this time free?" "I've decided I'm going to meditate, for (however long it is – 15 minutes, 2 hours)." "Do I really have this time free?" You look. "Yes I do. The world's not going to collapse. Everything else can wait. Yes, I have this time free so I don't need to worry about everything I'm going to do afterwards. Because I've already thought about it and decided it can wait. So now I can just *free my mind* from that *and concentrate*."

If that doesn't work and the restlessness keeps coming up, then you can try focusing on the breath and here maybe *focus particularly on the out-breath*. You're also focusing on the in-breath, you have to breathe in, but when you're breathing out really feel, "Okay I'm letting go of that energy." It's like you're really letting it go as you exhale, and that should help *calm down the anxiety*.

It can also be helpful sometimes to *write down* the different thoughts that are going on when we're anxious and then look back over them and ask ourselves how realistic they are if we're just worried and anxious about things that are on the moon somewhere, things that we don't really need to be worried and anxious about.

And sometimes there's restless energy in the body. This happens very often at the beginning of practice. I know for me, when I first began practicing, it was impossible to sit still, totally impossible. And it took, I think, well over a year, maybe even a year and a half, 2 years of just very steady practice before, kind of very gradually, I noticed that I could sit longer. And I think there's an actual change that happens physically in terms of your energy that enables you to sit longer. So if you have that kind of thing, it might be very helpful to do some yoga or stretching exercises before you sit.

His Holiness always says, "If you can do something about a situation, then there's no need to worry because you can do something about it. If you cannot do anything, then there's no need to worry also". So that also can be very helpful to think about.

#### **(e) Doubt**

Sometimes we have lots of doubts come up about the Buddha's teachings. Or sometimes we have doubts about our own capability: "Can I follow the Path? Can I really do this? Something's wrong with me. I'm sure everybody else has the Buddha potential, but not me." So our doubts can come in many shapes and forms.

#### Antidotes to Doubt

It was quite interesting that last night Geshela said we should recognize that we cannot expect to understand the Buddha's teachings all at once. It is a gradual path, so to recognize that it's only natural when doubts come. It's very natural that we may not find immediate clear answers to our questions, but if we can *give our mind some space and have some faith and trust* in the Buddha that because he said

some things that really rang true to us, therefore maybe we'll understand these other things someday. And that kind of faith can give us the ability to continue even when the mind is plagued with doubts.

Also, when you have doubts *ask questions*. This is really what Dharma friends are for. This is why I encourage all of you to hang out together and talk about Dharma. When you have doubts, you can go to your friends and they can help you with it. Or go to your teachers or read books. Try and get some answers. But then also recognize, as I said before, that there may be some things that we're not going to be able to resolve right away. And we might have to sit there with the doubt for some time and just keep coming back to it over a period of time.

One of the big doubts that Westerners often have at the beginning of practice is about rebirth: "Does it exist? I cannot see it." You can read something about it, think about it, talk about it, but you might realize at a certain point that you're just kind of stuck. So then just put it on the back burner. His Holiness at the Teachers' Conference this year said he thinks a person can take refuge even without believing in rebirth. If there are other things in the Buddha's teachings that make sense to you, that are useful to your life, then emphasize those and practice those and slowly, over a period of time, the whole rebirth issue might become clearer and clearer.

I've really seen with my own practice that there are some things that at the beginning seem impossible to understand. I had so much doubt about them. I would keep coming back to them every so often, basically because one of my teachers would raise them again in teachings. And then I'd start thinking about them and sometimes I'd get a little bit on it. It isn't that all the doubt would go away but some little something would sink in. So be willing to work with your doubts this way over a period of time. Have some flexibility.

And I think here also is where a long-term motivation like bodhicitta is so important, because if you really want to become enlightened, if you have this very strong feeling to work for the benefit of others, then that motivation will carry you over the periods when you have a lot of doubt. I think it is important that you know this, because you will go through times in your practice when you have lots of doubts. I remember once I was sitting there and thinking, "How do I know the Buddha exists?" And you go through this sometimes. But if you really have this kind of long-term determination and some kind of spaciousness in your mind, then that carries you through.

And as you do the practice, as you get some taste from the practice, then that resolves your doubts because you're getting some experience – not hallelujah-I-see-lights experience, but you become a little bit less angry, a little bit more calm, you begin to see that the teachings work.

I was thinking too, that sometimes it's a matter of karma from previous lives, because some people enter the Dharma practice, they practice a little bit and then at a certain point they just go bust. "I'm not going to come back to this! I'm going to Hare Krishna." Or "I'm going to do something else." Sometimes they're super-enthusiastic and then they just drop everything cold and go do something else. That can happen sometimes partly because of the way the mind is working – not having that long-term motivation, and not having that spaciousness – but also *because of a lack of positive potential and merit from previous lives*. This is another reason why we should *exert some effort* to create that kind of positive potential in our mindstreams because that does serve to carry us through when doubts arise in this life or future lives.

I think one very important thing we can do when doubts arise is just to give ourselves some time, because often the doubts are all: "Oh I've been meditating for a whole month now and I don't have samadhi!" and "I have been practicing Dharma for seven years and I still cannot concentrate!" Remember Geshela mentioned that generating bodhicitta may take not just a few years but a few lifetimes? If we have this kind of *long-term perspective*, then we'll be able to carry ourselves through.

Sometimes the doubt just makes us act really crazy; it makes us just give up everything completely or it makes us just flit from one thing to another. "I've been doing this meditation and I haven't gotten anywhere. I do that one and I don't get anywhere." And so we flit around from meditation to meditation, from teacher to teacher, from group to group, from tradition to tradition. No wonder there's doubt in the mind, because we never stick with anything. In that way, doubt can be a really big obstacle, but it's very natural to have it. If you don't have doubts then something's probably wrong.

And then sometimes we not only have doubts in the Buddha's teachings but we begin to doubt our own capability. "Can I do it? I can't!" "I can't concentrate! I'm too old!" "I'm too young!" "I'm too fat!" "I'm too thin!" – just all sorts of doubts about our own capability. When this comes up, it's *very helpful to contemplate the precious human life and all the conditions that we have going for us*. It's also helpful to remember that we do have *the Buddha nature* and that even if we wanted that to be taken away, it can't be. We're stuck with our Buddha nature. We have the potential to become a Buddha whether we want to or not. Just remember that. If you look in *Open Heart, Clear Mind* there's a chapter that describes Buddha nature, so that might help answer some of your questions too.

### **Five Antidotes to Hindrances**

Under concentration, there are five different antidotes that the Buddha gave to deal with some of these unwanted thoughts of ignorance, anger, attachment, anxiety, restlessness and all the various thoughts that we have.

#### **(i) Displacement**

In other words, switch your mind from concentrating on that to concentrating on something else. If your mind is going around and around in circles about everything you have to do, maybe just chant some mantra instead. If your mind is going around and around about how this person said that and they did this and it all happened ten years ago and you're never going to forgive them, then maybe switch your mind and do some visualization or do some meditation on love. So it's very consciously recognizing that you're having afflicted [Note: 'afflicted' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'deluded'] thoughts and you are going to *move the focus of your attention to something else*. The analogy is taking a bigger peg and using it to displace or hammer out a smaller peg that's in the hole.

So this first one is displacing it, consciously shifting your mind to another topic that's going to be more beneficial to think about. And that may actually act as an antidote to the one that's getting in the way.

#### **(ii) Thinking of the disadvantages of that particular thought pattern that you're having.**

If you're having a lot of attachment come up, think of the disadvantages of attachment. What are the disadvantages of attachment?

**[Audience:] It distracts us from our practice. It creates negative karma. It causes distress. It causes more craving. It causes more obsession.**

So really think about these disadvantages. Or think about the disadvantages of anger when your mind is getting upset and holding on to a grudge. What are the disadvantages of anger?

**[Audience:] It doesn't feel good. It harms others. It harms ourselves. It's very bad for the health.**

So if you have some kind of thought pattern that you're stuck on, then think about the disadvantages of it in this way. That helps you to drop it and to not give it energy.

The Buddha described our having attachment as being a well-dressed person carrying a carcass around his neck. It's a "nice" image, isn't it? Now that's the disadvantage of attachment. This image of a well-dressed person with a carcass around his neck is disgusting. "Why do I need to carry this around?!" You toss it away. So similarly, if you're a nice person but your mind gets plagued by the attachment, the resentment, the self preoccupation, those are like carcasses around the neck. When you look at the disadvantages, it's like looking at how disgusting the carcass is, and then it's easy to just say, "Hoo! Who needs this?!" and just let go of it.

#### **(iii) Paying no attention**

This is like shutting your eyes so you don't see something. When you go to the movies and they're going to play a violent scene, some people open their eyes then, but those of us who don't like that close our eyes. So when there's something quite unpleasant or ugly, you close your eyes. It's the same thing here in ignoring those thoughts. You recognize that this just isn't getting you anywhere and so you do not feed it. You recognize that until you have the proper tools to be able to think this through clearly, it's better not to think about it – better just to leave it on hold because all you'll do is make it worse and get yourself all tangled up.

Sometimes when we have a hard time we think, "Well wait, I have this problem, shouldn't I think about

it? Are you telling me to ignore my problems? Then I'll go into denial again." We're already in denial. We deny the whole nature of cyclic existence. We deny the reality of emptiness. We're already in denial; don't worry about going into it.

I remember one time one of my friends was having a lot of problems with her practice. There were a lot of doubts about things with her teachers and her mind was all tangled up. So she went to another teacher, told him the whole problem, and he said, "Don't think about it". [Friend:] "Don't think about it? This is my problem. I've got to think about it otherwise I'm going into denial! I can't do this!" [Ven. Chodron:] But then if you really think about it, you'll see that the way we think about problems is very often totally unproductive. If we have a choice between thinking about our problems in an unproductive way that creates more distress, and just not thinking about it because we don't have the tools to handle it, then actually it's better not to think about it.

[In response to audience:] I think it's not so much telling ourselves, "Don't think about it. Don't think about it" as just not feeding the energy – not paying it attention. Just like pushing the "Pause" button, I'm going to take a break. Do something else, think about something else.

#### **(iv) Allowing the thoughts to settle**

The analogy here is like a person who is running, and then they realize that they don't need to run, they can walk. And then they realize, well, they don't really need to walk, they can sit down. And then they realize, well, they don't really need to exert that much effort to sit down, they can lie down. So somehow just like the body, there is a gradual settling down of the thoughts. Give your mind some space. Just let it settle and know that your thoughts will settle down, that it's impossible for them to keep going and going.

I find it very interesting that when I'm doing a retreat, I'm more likely to have certain kinds of afflictions [Note: 'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'] during certain sessions. Sometimes people find that in the day they have more attachment, or during the daytime they have more anger and in the evening time they have more attachment, something like that. I find that in the morning sessions, I tend to have more anger coming up. It's very interesting. I will notice the anger coming up, and I know from past experience that as soon as I get off my cushion the anger will be totally gone. So then I think, "Well let's just short-circuit it a little bit and pretend I got up early and left it there, and then continue with my practice". [Laughter] So this is letting the thoughts settle, letting them go down.

[In response to audience:] In all of these you have to play around and see which ones work better for you. What I find very helpful is to come to the breath, not so much on the in-breath or the out-breath, but on this peaceful feeling that we sometimes find in the breath. Just concentrate on the peaceful flow of the air. Even if we're doing a visualization, we can keep with the visualization but try and tune our mind more to the peaceful feeling of the breath. And then that allows the thoughts to settle. So you can kind of play around with it. See what works for you.

Or sometimes what I'll do is I'll just sit there and say, "OK I'm just going to feel this." Instead of going through all the thoughts, I just try and remain with that awareness of "How does the anxiety feel in my body? How does it feel in my mind?" And I'll just sit there and watch the different feelings and then gradually the energy just kind of fades away and it settles down. What doesn't let it settle is if I'm anxious and I keep thinking about the thing about which I'm anxious. But if I just pay attention to what it feels like to be anxious, then slowly that kind of energy settles.

#### **(v) "Repressing" them**

I don't think it's necessarily the same as psychological repressing, but the analogy is like a stronger person that holds a weaker person down. So in this case if your mind's just going totally, totally bonkers, it might just take a little bit of self-discipline to say to yourself, "Look, this is totally useless! I'm just going to drop this completely because I'm not getting anywhere." You generate a very strong thought of, "OK I'm going to drop it!" Often that can work.

So that's all about concentration, in brief form.

Actually we need effort in all of them. Sometimes they put effort with concentration; sometimes they put it with wisdom. Actually we need it also for the ethics. Effort is a mind that takes delight in doing what is virtuous. Effort does not mean pushing. This is a really big thing – really important. It means taking delight. That sounds nice, doesn't it? Training the mind to take delight in virtue.

So if we hear the word 'effort' or 'enthusiasm' and we're thinking of delight instead of pushing, then we understand what it's all about. It's interesting talking with Sally, who does all the cooking for Geshela. Talk about stress! She's turning out all these marvelous meals all the time, but she was saying this morning how it was such a discovery for her this particular time, that she could work really hard and be very joyful for it. Usually she works hard and if she has to do this kind of thing, she gets very stressed out and nervous and anxious ... but it was so nice cooking for Geshela because she realized she could work hard and just be very happy and be very joyful. So part of effort is also knowing your limits, knowing when to take a time out, when to take a rest.

### 4 Kinds of Effort

#### **a. To take delight or make effort to prevent negative states of mind from arising and to purify the negative karma that has been created in the past.**

This is the preventative measure one and also the purification one. We've talked about purification a lot; I won't go into it a whole lot now. The effort involves really cleaning up things from the past, purifying and making determinations and in that way, preventing new negative thoughts and actions from arising. So that's a real chief function of purification: that by purifying the energy in the past, it helps you to break the habit so that it doesn't arise again in the future.

#### **b. To abandon negative states if they arise and not create more in the future.**

The first kind of effort talks about preventing negative states of mind from arising. Here, it's saying that if negative states of mind have already arisen, then we apply the antidotes to them. To do that, we need to study and learn the antidotes, e.g. the five hindrances and the five different ways of handling them. Knowing the antidotes, practicing and remembering them, and using them to abandon negative states if they arise. In that way you avoid creating more in the future.

So "From now on, whenever a negative state of mind arises, I'll try to remedy it, and make some kind of determination to try and avoid it in the future." If you have a particularly strong defilement, work very consistently with that, familiarize your mind with the antidotes and apply them.

I hope one thing you got from this weekend with Geshela (because he kept mentioning it), is that this all takes time. Sally made a very interesting comment to me this morning as she sat listening to some of the questions (Sally has been practicing Dharma a long time). She remembered, "Oh yes, I remember when that was my burning question and that's what I was stuck on". And hearing other people ask those questions now helped her realize that it actually does take time to get an understanding of things. But having that space and her having put in the effort all that time, she's able to recognize the progress that has been made: "Yes, it takes time." "Yes, that used to be my burning question and now it's okay, I have that resolved. I have another burning question now but that one will get resolved at some point too."

#### **c. To generate virtuous states not already generated.**

We try and generate the positive attitudes that we haven't already generated – generosity, patience, ethics, gratitude, kindness and so on.

And rejoice also in your past virtue. So just as in the first one of these, we would look over the past and purify the negative karma, in this one, we look over the past and take delight in the positive things that we've done. This is a very, very important part of the Path – rejoicing in our own and others' virtues and good qualities – but we often skip over it. We like to focus on the negative, but it's really quite important to do this – look over what we've done in the past and feel a sense of rejoicing over it. Even the fact that we have this perfect human rebirth and that we're here – let's rejoice about it!

#### **d. To maintain virtuous states once they've arisen.**

So when some spirit of generosity crops up, hold on to it! [Laughter] Or when some feeling of kindness

comes into your heart, don't let it flit away, put forth effort to maintain it, develop it more and more, and create more and more of these kinds of thoughts and attitudes in the future.

So the effort goes in all of these different directions. If you sit and think about these four, it's quite interesting because the first two are more concerned with the negative things and letting those go and the last two are more concerned with the positive ones and increasing those. The first and the third one are dealing more with the past: what's happened in the past, and either rejoicing or purifying and seeing what we can get from the past to occur in the present. And the second and the fourth are dealing more with the future and where we can go from here: how to hold on to virtuous states or how to free ourselves of present negative ones and how to keep doing this in the future.

You'll find that as we go through these, it might seem like it's just a lot of the same material set in different ways. It is, but there's a purpose for that because each time we hear it in a different way, we get a new way of thinking about it. And if we take it home and really mull over it, then new comprehensions occur.

[In response to audience] This is very, very true. Even in the guidelines for refuge, the Buddha really stressed the importance of choosing wise friends and not hanging out with people who bring out your negative qualities or whose negative behavior you tend to follow. It's very important. That's why spiritual friendship is so important and the people that you share the teachings with are very precious people because they understand that part of you; they value that part of you. They aren't going to sit there and say, "You're using your holiday to do what? You're going on a retreat? Come on!" These are people who are really going to value you and encourage you in your process of self-discovery and so those people are very precious.

### Concluding meditation

So let's sit quietly. Maybe during this meditation think of one of the hindrances – sense-desire, ill-will, sloth and laziness, restlessness and worry, doubt – and maybe ask yourself, "Which is the one that comes up most for me and what are the antidotes I can use to handle it?" And maybe think of how to use the five antidotes to concentration to handle that – displacing it to another thing, thinking of the disadvantages, ignoring the thoughts, letting the thoughts settle and telling yourself to let go of it.

---

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>