

**VSR ~ 10th Question & Answer Session  
with Ven. Thubten Chodron  
Sunday, February 19, 2006**

VTC: So, what so you want to talk about? What's been happening for you this week as we're approaching the last two weeks of the retreat?

Retreatant: Well we had a meeting yesterday, a community meeting, a good one. A big discussion about our re-commitment to our [retreat] boundaries of body speech and mind, especially for these last two weeks of retreat.

VTC: Good, good. I think that's important, because from the viewpoint of three months we think we're almost over, but normally when you go on retreat— how many of you have a two-week retreat before? If you were going to be going to the start of a two-week retreat it would be like— “Wow! Two weeks! That's so long to go on retreat!” So if you have that idea, then that's very helpful. Look out for the mind that, it's very interesting, the mind that wants something new. Have you noticed this? The mind that wants something new... As soon as you look around the house and there's a new piece of paper somewhere; you know you go and read it right? “Oh, Something New!” The mind wanting something new.

So it's very easy towards the end of the retreat for the mind to start going, “Okay, well, I'll just finish this retreat and then— Something New! I'm going to do something new.” Then the mind starts planning whatever you're going to do at the end of retreat. “I'm going to go here, I'm going to go there, I'm going to talk to this person, talk to that person, I'm going to do this and that” and the mind gets very excited because there's Something New. Actually samsara is pretty old. (laughter) It's better to try to keep your mind here where your body is. Do what you're doing in the present moment because the present moment is the only time you have to practice the Dharma. You can't practice the Dharma in the past, and you can't practice the Dharma in the future. The only time you have to practice it is right now; you keep your mind here and practice. Forget about all the exciting new things that you're going to do. E.g. “Finally we can talk, we can leave the grounds, I'm so excited!!” It's just the same old samsara. Nothing new, the chocolate milkshake is going to taste like all the chocolate milkshakes you've tasted since before you came here, not new. Same peanut butter!

R: I'm not quite sure I've formulated the question, but I'm finding my mind doing exactly that... Then I go for that New thing, I think although it's silent, but I really find all this excitement now and I wonder why that is. Just because something is coming to an end, why do we do that? Then once I saw that and go for the thing I think is exciting, ninety percent of me knows ‘this is not going to change anything, you've done this in this lifetime and many other lifetimes...’ But I do it anyway, and then I feel really sad about it and I get depressed and I'm watching myself do it. How to break it?

VTC: This is the same question we've talked about the last two times, isn't it? The same thing we're watching ourselves do the same thing that we know is not going to bring any happiness and we just keep doing it! So, there are a few things that help. First of all, living in community really helps because when you are living with other people who keep a certain discipline you just can't go out and do your own trip. You can't just get in the car and go to

downtown Newport and go shopping. (laughter) Because we have regulations at the Abbey, you just don't get in the car and leave. So living in a community with other practitioners who have the discipline helps you contain that energy, because it's a group thing and when the whole group does it then it becomes very easy to do. So the community discipline. Then, taking precepts really helps. When you take a precept you're giving the Buddha your word. So even if it's not one of the five precepts or something, if there's something that you feel like you are just doing and you really want to stop then you can just take your own precept and you imagine the Buddha, do it in the presence of a Buddha image. For me, it's very powerful giving my word to a Buddha.

R: Yes but I have this amazing lawyer mind that talks me out of it...

VTC: Yes, we all do! Did you read that article about how the executioners justify their behavior? That's precisely why I had you read that. Isn't that interesting all the things that the executioners were doing, that's the same thing we do, isn't it?

R: It just keeps getting more and more subtle. When does it go; when do I stop?

VTC: Well I think this is why we keep on practicing. I think it's fascinating to look at that mind that gets excited. You can feel that little bit of excitement come on and I think this is exactly why we're hooked into email. There's something exciting about, "There's something for ME here." It used to be we'd go to the mailbox, but that was just once a day. But email, "It's something New!" Even though it's a headache and most of the emails are not so interesting, "it's Something New and there might be something really exciting in This New EMAIL!" [shouting] (laughter) "Let's see, because somebody wrote to ME!" It's so interesting to watch. Just sit there, feel that excited mind, feel it in your mind: what's the feeling in your mind, what's the feeling in your body, because there's also a physical component. How do I know when that excitement has arisen? What does it feel like? Just sit there with it and experience it. Okay, and at the same time watch how it's impermanent. Just how long can you be excited about going to Newport? (laughter) Or going to Seattle, or going to Boise? How excited can you get over Starbucks, how long is that excitement going to be? All the fantasies of when you first see your prince charming, "There he is, haven't seen him in so long—Finally! Or princess charming and you've played out this scene of coming together. Just watch that whole feeling in your body that feeling in your mind, watch how it arises and passes away, arises and passes away. It doesn't stay long.

New R: That's why you want to grasp at something else, to keep that tingle. You want to grab something else to get the next hit. This is really the drug addict mind. Something New. "Is there a note on my placemat at the table?" Even if it's just, "close the door quietly jerk," it's Something New, someone thought of ME. (laughter)

R: Before this retreat I really thought that excitement was happiness in some way, like oh yeah, I practice Buddhism basically to feel like this and then I started looking back and I've made so many bad decisions in what this mind has been offered. I was just looking because the last two sessions I was so restless and I was like— let's just think what seems like a good idea now. I was like, 'I don't really want to be here I want to practice Dharma, I want to go visit my friends...' The exact opposite of what I've been going through in the morning, maybe I should remember this. (laughter) I want to do something exciting, maybe I should do the opposite of what my teachers tell me. (laughter)

VTC: Get familiar with that exciting mind, don't slam it and get angry at it but study it, really study it and investigate it. E.g. 'What does it feel like in my body, what does it feel like in my mind, what causes that mind to come up? What was going on beforehand that produced the restlessness, that made this kind of excitement come up of looking forward to something?

What causes it and where does it lead? That's what you were doing, looking at the results of your decisions. It's interesting, this whole expression, "looking forward to" because that's this mind of creating some image of looking forward to.

I just thought of this right now, putting a few pieces together. I very much avoid that phrase, "looking forward to." Let me tell you why I don't use that expression because it will be a good one for you too. July of 1975, I go to my very first Dharma teaching. So Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa are leading a retreat outside of Los Angeles and I go. I'm sitting in the front and I'm sitting next to this other young woman, Teresa. We were about the same age and she had been to Kopan before and was telling me about it, and we became friends because we sat next to each other. We did a retreat together right after that course, for a week. And during that retreat I said, "I'm going to go to Kopan in the autumn for the course, and Teresa was going to go back there, and we wrote a little bit... and she said, "I really look forward to seeing you at Kopan, and when we're there before the course starts we'll go down to Katmandu and we'll go out to eat together, and I really look forward to seeing you."

A couple of months go by, I get on the flight, I go to Kopan, and the course starts and I'm waiting for Teresa to come. Teresa is not coming, and a bunch of people are waiting for Teresa, and she's not coming, and she's not coming and she's not coming. We're very concerned because nobody knows what happened to her... and last I heard was her saying, "I look forward to seeing you and we'll go out to eat." Then we heard there was some French guy living in Thailand who was a serial killer... Anyway, Teresa met him at a party. Of course, no one knew he was a serial killer, he invited her out to lunch the next day, poisoned her food, and they found her body in a Bangkok canal. And that's why Teresa never made it to Kopan. So that's why I'm always suspicious of this phrase, "I'm looking forward to", because that's what she wrote me and it never happened. All the teachings about death and impermanence that our teachers have given us, there it was. So really, better not to look forward to things, don't even use the expression because you're not sure. That might be a good antidote when the mind starts looking forward to something: remember Teresa, because if you remember Teresa it makes her death have some kind of meaning and worth.

R: I want to comment that in the first two months I was up and down emotionally very much. Two weeks ago I decided that I needed stability. I couldn't keep going up and down. I decided to do whatever I had to do to get stability. So now I'm sleeping rather well; I feel much, much better. My practice is stable. But it's interesting. Today I watched my mind. My mind was finding problems because it's boring in a way. After two weeks nothing is happening!

VTC: This is the same question. Watching how the mind says, "let's think of anything"—even suffering, even suffering! It's looking for something to suffer about because being peaceful is boring! Just the same old ego mind looking for a little bit of excitement. If it's not attachment—because we feel that we exist when we suffer. Those of us who have really powerful emotions—we EXIST when we suffer! There are three of us in this room, look at us sitting together... (laughter) When we suffer, we exist! I know it very well. It's the same thing that you were talking about.

New R: He doesn't know it because he's in himself, but he really looks different. I was used to him going up and down, up and down all the time. So for two weeks since his UFO dream,

I've been thinking, "Is that [R]?" All the time he's okay—no problem? That's not [R]!  
(laughter)

VTC: It's Vajrasattva magic. Good. Good for you!

R#2: His face is very expressive—you have a very expressive face. You can look so different. It's pretty obvious.

R#1: It's very good for me to see him like that, because it's like an analogy of the whole retreat and my own mind. The mind goes up and down and suddenly it settles down. For me, it was a bit disturbing to see [R] going up and down all the time. I could not control [him]. Now that he's stable, I feel really well when I see him. I think it's the same thing for all of us. I feel the same way; I feel that finally my mind has settled down. Maybe what's happening to [R] is happening to all of us. [To R] I think it's very nice what happened to you.

VTC: Now that your mind is calmer, use it to go deeper in your meditation. Hang out with Vajrasattva for a while.

New R: But there's a panic, I feel. There's this abyss that I'm on the edge of... If there's not *that* [familiar stuff] going on that I'm familiar with, then there's this panic. When I hit that panic, there's this tremula or whatever it is. That's when I find myself looking at it. I don't know what it is that I'm afraid of.

VTC: What I get the sense of, like you said, you're just starting to calm down because your mind is getting really peaceful. And then it's like, "ahhhh." Fear or panic or something. I think my philosophy is that you're right at the point where you're going to really make some kind of substantial change or see something quite clearly. And ego's scared shitless. So it gets scared and makes a story. Because we're right there when the mind's calm, practice is going well, we're understanding something. If we could just go a little bit further into that change... So it's like that point to really see it and hold the mind steady. When that exciting, tingly mind comes up, just sit there with it. Just sit and experience it, investigate it, research it, become familiar with it.

R: I was trying to play with that mind a little. In the factors that stimulate the arising of the disturbing attitudes there's 'predisposition' as one of them and emotional habit. I didn't really understand how those were different.

VTC: The one is like the seed in your mind-stream, the seed of the emotion. That's doesn't start getting taken out until Path of Seeing. Then there's just the habit, just the habit: You're done it before, you do it again; you've done it before, you do it again. So I think the habit is just the repeated action. Whereas the predisposition is like the mental factor, it's not manifest. It's in the state of a tendency, and it just needs a little bit of water and it will sprout and become manifest again.

R: The predisposition becomes manifest in the habit then.

VTC: No, the predisposition becomes manifest in the consciousness. It's like I'm not angry now but the predisposition, the seed of anger is still in my mind-stream. I'm not angry. The seed of anger is in me. All you need to do is look at me cross-eyed and then that seed of anger turns into full-blown anger. So the seed is what keeps the continuity of the afflictions when they're not in manifest state. The habit is just—'done it before.' Like certain emotional habits that we have.

There's a few of us, our distraction is anger; our distraction is suffering and anger and [shrill voice] "Ohhh, it's so hard!" You're rejected: "Aaaaaaa!" (laughter) When I was a kid my mother used to call me Sarah Burnhart. For the longest time I didn't know who she was. She

was an actress in the silent movies who was so dramatic. All these emotions: “So dramatic. Sarah Burnhart, you’re Sarah Burnhart. Look at how you’re acting!” It’s like, my mom’s right. So if you just have the habit of that—somebody doesn’t say hello to you in the morning. You have this habit of getting angry because you have a habit of interpreting everything like everybody’s rejecting you. Or you have a habit of interpreting everything like people aren’t respecting you. So then every time somebody does any small thing—“ooh, they’re not respecting me!” You have the habit of interpreting that way, the habit of getting upset. So some people, their habit maybe, ‘oh they’re not respecting me’ and they get depressed. Other people, ‘they’re not respecting me. I get angry.’ Other people, ‘they’re not respecting me. I’m going to go and eat a half-gallon of ice cream.’ Everybody has their own kind of habit.

R: So the habit is a way of framing something?

VTC: It’s like a way of framing it. When we say personality, we don’t have any solid, fixed personality, do we? But we have certain habits. If you think of people you know real well, you think you can predict them. Why do you think you can predict how they’re going to react, because they have certain habits and you’ve observed those habits. But of course, we don’t have a fixed personality, and our habits aren’t stable. That’s why change can happen. When you see certain emotional habits again and again, then you kind of know, ‘oh here I am. I’m running this video again.’

R: Some are completely complicated. I had one running off yesterday that was extremely complicated and dramatic. It was helpful because I think it was the first time in my life that I actually identified it as an emotional behavior pattern that had no basis in the reality but it had been triggered by something in the moment. Then this whole flood of past habituations and perceiving things and framing things came up. It had a story and the story was helpful for me because I know sometimes what situations press that button that bring those patterns up, but it’s built, it’s a structure. It’s got all these feeling tones around it, and stories and responses and themes, and threads.

VTC: Yes and it seems so real when you are in the middle of it, so you do it again and again and again and you’re miserable again and again and again, until you identify: “this is just a habit it’s not reality. I’m just playing the video again and I’ve seen this one. I’ve seen it again and again.” (laughter)

R: One question about something you just said: Did you say about the predispositions that we can only get rid of those on the Path of Seeing?

VTC: Yes. The seed of the affliction, those get weakened but they only get extricated from the mind completely on the Path of Seeing.

R: So with this purification, those same predispositions are getting weakened but...

VTC: But you have to stop the habit. It’s like you can see through the purification because when we create karma one of the karmic results is the tendency to do it again. When you do purification, and especially when you take a vow, it works against that particular karmic result of doing it again. You’ve got to stop doing it again, so that there is some space in your mind so that you can realize emptiness and then you use the realization of emptiness to uproot the seed from the mind altogether.

R: So, for instance, one experience I had previous to the retreat with purification, when I was basically working with resentment and anger... It was very strong because it was so clear to me: before the purification I felt like I was crawling out of my skin, after purification, it

was not there. So what is it you get rid of in terms of the mental factors or whatever? What is not there anymore?

VTC: What you're getting rid of when you're before the Path of Seeing, is you're weakening the karmic seeds so that when they ripen they will ripen later on. In other words, give you more of a chance to realize emptiness before they ripen. Or if they ripen, they'll be very small when they ripen, or they will last a short time instead of long. But you can't say that habit energy is totally finished, can you? So we're stopping the results of the karma from ripening, and then also through understanding our own mind so much better we'll be much more careful in the future in what we say and think and do and feel, because we don't want to create more negative karma. So the retreat has really acted as a mirror to help you to see how your mind works and to give you some practice; practicing the antidotes, so that you can stop yourself from creating more negative karma in the future.

But until we actually realize emptiness directly, the anger, all the defilements are still there. The seeds of them are still there, even though they get suppressed. The more you practice, the harder it becomes for the seed of anger, let's say, to go from being in a seed-state to a manifest-state. Or the harder it becomes for the seed of attachment to go from being in a seed-state to a manifest-state because when it's manifest then you're all attached in your mind and then you do actions. Then you accumulate karma. So by the practice you're doing now, not being so interested in these things, developing a new perspective on life, you're making it so some of these mental factors can stay in the seed-state longer. Which is why it's so important that when the retreat is over, you just don't run back and follow the excited mind. Because that's like a puppy who just got a new bath and then runs outside and jumps in the mud puddle again.

It's this whole thing of setting up new patterns in the mind. The more that you set up a pattern and habituate and familiarize yourself with a Dharma perspective, then the easier it becomes to keep that perspective in your life. At the beginning it's quite hard because you're not familiar. Attachment arises, anger arises, jealousy, pride. Our habit is just to follow them. With the retreat you're able to identify them. You've had some practice in opposing them. They come up in the mind, you're sitting there in the meditation session. So you have two choices: you can either follow the addiction or you do something about it. You can't get up and leave until the end of the session. So then you get some practice in working with the afflictions and becoming a doctor to your own mind. So you're getting some practice. It's like baseball players going to spring training and getting a good work-out in strengthening those muscles. If you just keep on with that and keep your practice up, keep going to the baseball training, then you're building some continuous energy to go in that direction. It becomes easier with time. But until you reach the Path of Seeing, never think, "I've gotten that one taken care of; it's not a big problem for me anymore." As soon as you think, "oh, I used to have that problem so bad, but it's not a problem for me anymore." As soon as you think that, oh boy, WHAMO! Some karma ripens and your mind just goes right back into the same old, same old.

R: So if you have a very, very strong emotional pattern, it's absolutely okay to use that as the negativity that you put into that power of regret on a weekly, monthly basis. Just keep at it?

VTC: Oh yeah. Every time I just flip out because X, Y, or Z, I want to purify all that.

R: So what keeps you going? I feel that sometimes it's so overwhelming, because all those afflictions are familiar. Then you take these retreats and go live in a monastery for a year and you recognize a few things, maybe a few afflictions. Then the second you're back in 'normal'

society or back into a situation, I can see the choice but (again) I didn't make it; I didn't make the right choice. I went back to the afflictions. I just feel like there's so much in terms of past lives, habituation, and karma—so much against us to actually change, to actually truly change.

VTC: We have from beginningless time karma and habit, and that's why it's so important when we have a precious human rebirth to really put ourselves in the optimum circumstances where we can practice. So if you see that if you go into certain circumstances and you regress, don't go into those circumstances. This is why I ordained, because I realized that I could not practice in the situation where I was living at in before because my afflictions were too strong. There was no way I could keep doing it. You have to really see what is a proper environment, because we are so swayed by our environment. What is a suitable environment that's going to support me in doing what is the most important thing in my life? If you decide this is the most important thing in your life. So then you look. We're so blown here and there and here and there because of everything that comes our way. First you decide what's most important; what do you value most in life? Then what's the situation, the physical situation that you need to put yourself in so that you'll get the support you need to do that. You have to make the mental change. So you need the support of it, unless you're a really strong practitioner. Unless you're very, very strong you just don't make it out where everything in the rest of society—society is going this way and you're trying to go upstream. You're one little person doing it. So sometimes you see that and you say, 'okay, I want to go upstream, I need to put myself in a certain environment. Oh, but then I have to give up certain things in that environment and I like those things and I really want them and they are very important too and I've got to be a balanced person, I don't want to be out of whack, an unbalanced person. What was it that was said to [a future visitor]?

R: A psychiatrist said, "of course you're going to a monastery it's just like your family of origin. I think the image was the medieval monastery, a grim, sterile, dark, cold—Renunciation. And I told him, "every Buddhist nun or monk I've met here and abroad have a sense of joy." We have this image of monastic life that is not true; [we forget that] you're on the path to Liberation!

VTC: Yes, but the mind goes "ohhh, it's too extreme. Maybe what he said it is like my family of origin and it is so sterile, dark, cold and unfriendly. I'll just be repeating old patterns."

R: Then the psychiatrist told him maybe he should choose "the tantric path"... (laughter) Which always seems to mean to people who don't know Buddhism, a consort, and "to really explore your passions that way!"

VTC: I mean it's just people going blah, blah, blah. This is society isn't it? But then we look at the mind that goes, "ohh can't I have samsara and nirvana at the same time, come on, it shouldn't be that hard! They say samsara and nirvana are of one taste. I want to practice the one taste vehicle." (laughter) That's what [R] was saying the other week, "I want nirvana but not that bad! I want to have a good time too, I want to be with my friends and go out to eat and I want to do this and I want to do that and I want some nirvana too!" We all have it; we're all this way.

R: That's one of the hooks that my ego gets to me every once in a while that tells me I'm 'the only one' that's having this. You know, get me isolated and boxed into a corner all by myself and that's when it can really have its way with me, rather than thinking that every sentient being is having the same dukkha. When I think of everybody sitting in the sessions and realizing everybody is working with their stuff and trying so hard it empowers me, it

inspires me. I say, “all right [self], lets try again.” But when the ego gets in there and says, “you’re the only one.” First level Bhumi already and there you are back in your little corner all by yourself suffering. (laughter)

VTC: Like she said, “it’s just so immense why even try; too huge why even try. It’s too hard, I can’t do it! We can do without emptiness to start with; I better go have some pancakes!” (laughter)

New R: You know, when I look at that, I look at what are the people doing that aren’t doing this; that’s a reality check. I mean think about it, which is easier? I mean, I think enlightenment seems really hard, but then when I think of the “real” world that I know, which is easier? This is easier than the suffering that I see in people who have no tools to deal with it. Sometimes they can see it, but they can’t so anything. That’s harder, very miserable.

VTC: Yes samsara is very hard.

R: I have been doing the meditation that you said and I felt that I opened up my heart a little bit and what I found there was just like this desperation. It wasn’t I felt desperate, it was I felt like my heart was hard because it didn’t want to remember the desperation, the witnessing of it or anything, and I was thinking about what [R] said when she led meditation this morning... She talked about mental images, but I don’t have any mental images. These are like emotional memories, maybe they’re just being re-stimulated. I didn’t even know why they were there and it was like I was protecting it. I didn’t want to feel that even though this time it wasn’t like sorrow that engulfs me, because my mind is a lot calmer. I’m a lot calmer so I could just look at it; it wasn’t emotional at all it was just like recognition of the complete unhappiness. It’s like we’re in-between one dukkha and the next, like a breath in between. I can look at it now; the first two months were brutal.

New R: To have the capacity to be able to look at it, I’m beginning to really appreciate that’s a huge step in the practice of Dharma. You’re not solving it, it’s not eliminated, it’s not going away, you’re being able to sit in the middle of it and look at it and say, “Oh, here we are again... Rejoice. It’s like a huge step instead of getting swept away in the torrent of the four great powers, overwhelmed by attachment and anger.

New R: In the first thirty years these emotions just flooded me, I’m not sure when it stopped but it was overwhelming, you couldn’t look at it you were just in the river. There were no tools to get outside of it. It’s very different, this is a lot easier there’s a lot more hope, it’s like a pattern, and it’s a path.

VTC: Yes, there’s something to do that works and I think that you can see this because you have some accumulation of merit. I think the accumulation of merit buoys the mind so that you can see these new levels of dukkha or different emotions that before would have just completely whacked you over. Now you can experience them in a different way.

R: Sometimes they take me right in. I remember years ago, maybe thirty years ago, my solution was I would cry and I would try to bottom out. If I’d just hit bottom, this would end. I did that for a while, but it didn’t work. I’m a great experimenter. (laughter) I’ll try things and see where they go. Even when I learned about meditation— before I had any instruction, I’d learned from books. I remember one summer every time I sat down to meditate for a whole summer pretty much daily, I would just cry the whole time, the whole summer. I never really thought it was a bad thing. It wasn’t in any book I ever read.

VTC: Some of us are criers; I’m a crier also. Very good. You cry then after a while you have to go drink some water. (laughter)

I thought we'd do Tsok together is week, so when the 5<sup>th</sup> rolls around it's not your debut. So you'll have one practice session of knowing what it's about. That's why I thought we'd do it together Thursday.

R: Are we doing anything on the Tibetan New Year? I had one idea. At the end of our session maybe we could all bring Long Life Prayers for our different teachers and say them all.

VTC: That's a nice thing to do. You all are quiet. What's happening, [R]?

R: Hum. I'm not looking for suffering. I have moments of feeling calm—not stomach aches and that stuff. I enjoy that. If that's all I get, that's okay. It's really spacious when I'm looking at things. I can see my own confusion. I'm not sure how much time I want to spend analyzing right now, just observing it and seeing if I can observe the observer almost. There's space, and I don't have to do anything. At the same time this thing is really going too fast. It's really going too fast. The days are just too fast. It feels like the wind is blowing through the meditation hall.

R#2: It is! (laughter)

VTC: You'd like to have more time?

R: I feel a contentment. It's okay not to feel irritated.

VTC: Yeah, you bet it's okay!

R: What happens when looking at that—I'm not sure I can explain it—but spaciousness. Weeks ago we talked about getting familiar with things, nearing death. I've been saying the Bodhicitta prayer countless times during the day. I've noticed that sometimes it'll have a certain feeling to it. I was looking at the feeling and where I feel it and so on. I'm just being kind of present. I don't have any insights. Actually I don't know what to say.

VTC: Sounds good. [R], what's happening with you?

R: Oh, probably the same thing as everybody else now. I've been trying to discriminate between not following a story but staying with an emotion; allowing, not pushing the emotion away. Saying, 'I don't need to go there' with the story but remembering to look into the emotion that's there to see where it's coming from. Sometimes I follow the stories and then sometimes I fall back into pushing away the sadness or anger or whatever. But just remembering that I want to sit with that.

VTC: Sit with that and if the mind starts with the story, you can take a step back and look at the story and how the story creates the emotion. Like you said, don't push the emotion away.

R#2: The story is so much self-cherishing—unbelievable self-cherishing.

VTC: And quite believable self-cherishing. We all have it. But we're looking at it for the first time and it seems unbelievable, doesn't it? But that's good. When you can see the story and see how it's a complete novel written by self-centeredness, then you can get some very powerful feeling inside of "did that in the past, I don't want to do it anymore." But you have to see it clearly. And you have to see how the emotions are coming from there too. The story, the emotions, the whole kit-and-kaboodle.

R: So not just tell myself, "Oh, you don't want to go there," like I remember you saying. Or sometimes I'll just say, "Oh, that's just a hallucination." But you're saying to explore it more?

VTC: It depends. If in your mind, you're convinced it's a hallucination, push the pause button and don't go there. If there's one part of your mind, that says, "but he did this and this and this and this and how I felt was really—there was some reason why I felt that way because he really did nah, nah, nah, nah." Then it can be very useful to look at that; don't go

right in the middle where this wave is crashing over you—where you’re totally involved in the story. But look at how the internal lawyer takes the story and builds the emotion out of the story. That can be a very interesting thing to explore because you’re looking at the cause of the emotion. It’s like she was saying. You have some big thing and you start looking: “well, how did I get here where I’m feeling blah.” You look at the story that you’ve been telling yourself for why you got there. And you start looking at that story and instead of being the lawyer that’s constructing the story and presenting it to the jury, you’re looking at it and saying, “is that true? Did he really do that? Was my reaction really sensible?” Instead of believing the story—it’s applying the thought training. But what the thought training is, it’s the cross-examination. The lawyer is going (blah-blah-blah) and the result [crying sounds], and then you cross-examine the story: “is that true? Did that really happen? Are you sure you were totally innocent? You didn’t contribute to that fight at all? Really, really?” So you’re bringing in the thought training at that point.

I found myself, personally speaking—some people can just identify and say anger, sadness, guilt and let it go. I can’t. I have to be able to look at it and see exactly why it’s the wrong conception. When I’m fully convinced it’s a wrong conception, then I can let it go. So, of course, the more I’ve cross-examined and applied thought training—because that’s what thought training is—then you begin to see, “oh the story I was making is just this hallucination again.” But at the beginning you’re not really convinced and if you just say, “oh, it’s just a hallucination.” Then you’re just stuffing everything. Makes some sense?

R: Then that training, that thought training, also helps in the future to see that pattern?

VTC: Oh, yeah. I find one of the most helpful things when I’m in the middle of “so-and- so did this-and-that and it wasn’t fair, it wasn’t fair. I trusted them so much. I loved them so much. I respected them so much and then they did that!” To just say, “yeah—and whose karma created the cause for that to happen to me? And what mind state was behind the creation of that karma? Oh, self-cherishing again!” [counter-argues] “But he. . . . !” [cross-examines] “Oh, are you sure it’s all his fault? Really? Really?” [in high-pitched voice] “Well, I did say one little thing. . . .” (laughter) “One little thing, really? Not two?” “Well, he deserved two—actually I did do two!”