

Venerable Chodron – Q&A at Vajrasattva Retreat / Sravasti Abbey February 13, 2005

Venerable Thubten Chodron (VTC): Como esta usted? [a brief jovial exchange with the Mexican students and Venerable, in Espanol, including much laughter]. Are you doing well? Just in case any of you aren't, I thought I would read something. I got a letter from Bo...*(Note: Bo is in prison, but not doing retreat with us, but Venerable has been writing with him for several years and this was their first visit)*...written the day after I visited him there and thought I'd read a paragraph from it, just in case some of you feel similarly. Not that you should feel this way, but just in case you do.

[Venerable reading from Bo's letter]: "Now if I may just touch on a couple of things. First, monkey mind has come back with a vengeance. After talking with you last night, there have been only about 2,850,000 things bouncing around this big half-empty head of mine. Our discussion and your questions have me asking myself many things. I'm sort of scratching the surface and seeing just how parts of me and my life and what I believe in are antithetical to other parts and beliefs. Wow! It's like I'm a walking, talking, breathing, two-legged dichotomy. I have some serious attachment issues that I will have to come to terms with at some point in the future if I can; things that I sort of figured that were / are good, positive things maybe aren't so good, but I must think more about it ."

Retreatant (R): 2,850,000 things. That sounds about right.

VTC: Has anybody felt like this at some point during the retreat? Not only so many things bouncing around inside, but as Bo was saying a "walking, talking, breathing, two-legged dichotomy" – have you felt at all like that during the retreat? Many things that he thought were clear, now he realizes aren't so clear. And he sees that he has different beliefs that don't agree and different parts of himself that don't agree – that are in fact complete opposite to one another. Have any of you felt like that during the retreat; that you had parts of yourself that just didn't agree with each other, that you thought you held some belief but you recognized that you held the opposite belief too?

R: In my mind I am recalling many things about events but ... in my body or my heart, I think there is a conflict between one thing I am processing in my mind and another in my feelings. I can more or less manage this situation. But if I'm tired, sometimes all of the ..

VTC: So what you're saying is that sometimes things come up while you're doing the purification, that you're looking back and trying to understand, and the rational part of your mind is explaining it one way and it sounds good, but inside you don't feel totally comfortable with it?

R: My mind makes many reasons up, it is very smart. It's incredible, because some events are related to other aspects in my life; before I didn't see this relationship. When I'm meditating my mind makes good sense, but when I go outside of the meditation hall, all of these explanations my mind makes up are not enough to help me. I am tired, feeling crazy to be thinking about this.

VTC: Sometimes we think about different rationalizations; our mind is basically making up excuses. I find that I can usually tell when I am doing this, because something doesn't feel right. I can have the whole legal case made out, the lawyer inside my mind

makes a nice legal argument about it, but inside I don't feel good. Then I know that I'm not being honest, that I have some more responsibility in this than I'm owning up to.

Other times you try and figure something out and you go around and around and around, then you turn it this way and that way – you still can't figure it out to where it makes any sense. If you keep on pushing, trying to figure it out, you just drive yourself nuts. We also have to know when our minds are just not clear, that we don't have the proper understanding at this point. Let's stop trying to figure this out, step back and do something else with the mind. It's not like we can figure everything out just because we want to figure it out at this moment. Is that making some sense? So we kind of have to know how to deal skillfully with our minds.

Another thing that you said about seeing different threads of your life that actually relate to each other, maybe some kind of habitual behavior or habitual emotional neediness or habitual way of understanding things, projecting things – then when you see those relationships between these different things that can be very helpful. Because we see how a certain pattern has been playing out in our lives and that we have taken that pattern to be true; to be reality, when all it is, is just some disturbing attitude running the show again and again.

R: One last thing. We are doing sessions with regret six times a day. At the end of the day, I feel my mind and body are (unclear on tape), because I am focusing on things to generate regret and I don't have time to counteract this feeling of regret. Sometimes I don't know how to get a balance.

VTC: You need to make sure you are getting the correct feeling of regret. The feeling of regret is meant to make you feel free and feel clear afterwards. If you are feeling guilty and heavy afterwards, then you haven't generated regret. You've generated guilt. With regret, there's a sense of relief: "Ok, I've been able to be honest, I've been able to see what happened and now, I let it go". In the Seven Limb Prayer, the third power is confession and especially regret; the fourth one is rejoicing. So, I think you have to balance the regret with doing some rejoicing at your own and at other's virtues. Like the prayer that comes after the 35 Buddhas, the first part is regret and confession, the second part is rejoicing, the third part is dedication. So, be sure to do enough rejoicing. So that you don't feel like everything you have done in your life is a disaster. That's not the correct conclusion to come to from this retreat (laughter).

R: You just shared though, that if you are being with the regret correctly; it's not like it goes away that quickly, right? You do carry it; it's that it gets less, right?

VTC: Yes, sometimes, if you are doing the purification practice with the light and nectar coming through then the regret doesn't always hang around afterwards, because you really feel that, through the light, nectar and bliss, you're letting go of this negative karma. So sometimes, the regret doesn't hang around. Sometimes, when you are just owning up to a big booboo for the first time, then, that regret hangs around a long time, because it's like, Oh, my god....I was blind for a long time. But then sometimes, after you have been able to recognize that, then with the light and nectar, it helps to let it go.

R: In that regard, it seems like when I cycle back through things, maybe from a different angle, and the same remembrance comes back up, not necessarily because it has a real strong charge, it just happens to be in there. Do we go back and continue with that, do we cycle back through it again...like the Lam Rim...in some ways they are gone, but

in other ways...maybe there's still some aspect or...some...maybe not that specific event, but whatever feelings are related to that...

VTC: If there's some lingering something, it's good to keep doing the purification. You may do it in a different style. Instead of the light streaming down into you, you may put Vajrasattva in the situation and purify the environment and everybody in it. So depending upon what's coming up, you use the practice in a slightly different way. I think it's very helpful in this practice to notice habits and repeated behaviors. They always advise us to look at our heaviest affliction: ignorance, anger or attachment – which one is the biggest one for you? That doesn't mean you don't have the other two. You certainly have to purify the actions done under the influence of the other two. But, it's helpful sometimes to ask yourself, “Which is the biggest (ignorance, anger and attachment), what's the big one for me?” [Venerable takes a poll asking which of the three is the biggest]. This can be helpful to reflect upon.

You know those donkeys that have rings in their noses so that they can be lead around? Don't give the ring in your nose to just anybody. Sometimes with attachment, we give the rope with the hook in our nose to whoever looks good at a certain time. And because of attachment we let that person take us here and there and everywhere, just because we're so attached to them or to what they represent – maybe they represent sex, or money or status, etc. We give them the ring in our nose and they lead us around.

Or sometimes anger is our big thing, and we're just like a porcupine – anybody who comes near we shoot out our quills. They don't have to do anything but look at us and the quills come out. {Venerable asks the Mexican students if they understand the word “porcupine”. They proceed to teach her the Spanish for porcupine. [It is very jovial]. Or other times we might have ignorance. We rationalize things. We know something is a negative action but we rationalize it, saying actually it was very good. Or sometimes we just don't think about the results of our actions, we're impulsive, we just do them and don't think. Then afterwards we're in a big problem and we say “How did I get here?”

It's very helpful to look at our habits. When you're seeing the things to purify, regret is one step but also go back and think “If I were Vajrasattva or if Vajrasattva were in this situation, how would he have felt or thought or acted?” So something is coming up about a quarrel you had with someone and you feel regret about what you said, but you're also angry – and if you were Vajrasattva, or if a bodhisattva were there and the other person were doing whatever they were doing that really made you mad, if you were a bodhisattva how would perceive this situation? That way you come to the meditations on equanimity, love, compassion, patience, renunciation. If you try and think sometimes, if a bodhisattva were in that situation what would their feeling be inside? Then you return to the Lam Rim and try to deliberately cultivate that more realistic thought. That also moves you beyond the regret into having a solution when that kind of situation comes up again. .

R: I have a little bit of insight that is related to habits, it seems really strong, very empowering; and that is, that a lot of times...as a generalization, we have certain tendencies, we're kind of programmed a certain way, based on habits and I often rationalize my behavior based on those strong tendencies. And in doing the regret and in thinking about how could this be different? Even though habits are strong, it opens up the possibility that I can do this differently. It will require more discipline, but I can do this. Rather than a lot of times I just say, well, that's how I am, I'm a this, or a that. And

I justify what I am doing and never give it a thought that I could reprogram in some ways, I don't know how much of it will take effect.

VTC: Yes.

R: But at least I feel like part of this practice is... I left one session and it was kind of funny but I felt like I could be de-materialized and re-materialized whether it was a habit or something else. I kind of went to some Star Trek kind of thing, where you disappear from one side and then re-appear on the other.

VTC: Yes! Yes!

R: I could do that with a particular tendency.

VTC: Yes. Exactly; to hold onto the idea that I am just that kind of person or that's just my personality or that's just the way I have always done things, that's (excuse my French) Bullshit. (laughter). That's just making up excuses. (Discussion of the word, bullshit in Spanish – with more laughter). We often just lock ourselves into an identity of who we are, that we have constructed and we think that's who we are and all we can be. The whole purpose of this practice is to blow that up, to smithereens. That's the whole power of tantra; to get us out of being locked into: This is just me. This is all I can do. This is just who I am. I'm kind of like this. This has always been a fault; there's nothing much I can do about it. I just have an angry temperament. I just tend to get taken advantage of. It's just me. And developing a whole identity out of that and that identity is one of the biggest prisons that we put ourselves into. You don't need the government to arrest you and put you into a prison. We do it to ourselves, by creating these kinds of identities. Then we totally lose our self confidence and we forget or never even think that we could be different; because we are so enmeshed in this image. And yet this image... first of all, it's a hallucination.

Lama Yeshe used to look at us all the time and say, Oh dear... (we'd ask him about taking drugs)... Who needs to take drugs? You are hallucinating all the time anyway. He'd look at us and say, "who you think you are is just one big hallucination. It doesn't exist". And that's exactly it. How we talk to ourselves, what we think about ourselves, we've made it all up. And then we believe it and then we act it out, so we can convince other people that we're like that. And then we sit and have what Bryan Taylor, another inmate calls, a 'pity party.' We just create this image of what Lama called 'poor quality view'; poor me, poor me, and we have a pity party. When Bryan wrote that he threw himself a pity party, I said, "That's exactly what I do". Isn't that a great expression – to throw a pity party for yourself? We do it all the time don't we – poor me, poor me, I'm just such an angry person there's nothing to do about it, poor me. I'm just this kind of person, I always have bad romantic relationship, they never work out, poor me. Oh, I'm just this kind of person, I can never get the kind of job I like. People never respect my qualities, poor me. And we sit there and completely believe these thoughts and completely believe that's who we are. Then we act that way, trying to convince everybody else. "I'm such a wreck, you better take care of me and be nice to me."

Someone was talking at the Medicine Buddha retreat last weekend about self pity; that it's a way of not taking responsibility for ourselves. Because I'm such a pitiful thing, you have to take care of me. We go through our lives like that and all this inner human beauty, all this incredible potential, all this Buddha nature gets stifled, drowned by the ocean of self-pity. It's important to remember that we can be different and to try and take active steps to make our selves different – that's what real practice is. And that's when

we start to really, really change. When we are sincerely committed to try and make ourselves different. Because we know the image we were creating before was stupid and it causes us suffering and it limits our potential and we have a feeling for the purpose and meaning of our lives and our own Buddha nature. We want to be able to start letting that goodness out, instead of just keeping on with our old habits.

R: I was thinking the practice of Vajrasattva helps you to be responsible for your actions of the past, present and future. And it's really nice because you have control of the situation. Because, when you feel that usual "poor me", it's like, well, poor me and I don't know why these things happened to me. I am just a poor guy that suffered these hatreds. With this practice, you really see the causes. When F. and I were in Mexico, getting ready to come here, she told me that she felt like she was preparing to die by coming here. I didn't say anything to her, but I thought, oh, come on, you are exaggerating. But I think with this practice, it is like when we die, people say we review our lives. And this is like that, a review to recognize the stupid things we do, due to our narrow habits. Another thing, when I usually do the death meditation, when I am reviewing my past, I found it is very different (than this practice) because in that situation, I never felt bad, because I put the emphasis on the good things I had been able to develop with my practice. So, I feel good and if I die now or tomorrow, I thought, well, at least I have 15 years of Buddhist practice, trying to be a good person. But with this practice, it's totally different. You see especially the bad stuff; the same patterns that have been causing problems to you and those around you. It's a very different feeling; and a very different meaning in your heart.

VTC: Well said. I think all of us can relate because there is one way of looking back on our lives and seeing the good things. OK, that's good, now I die; especially when we meditate, we can visualize such a nice, wonderful death. But then, you are right; this practice makes us see the other side of ourselves and the repeated mistakes. It makes us think about karma and the results that we'll experience, because all those things are the causes for results that we'll experience in the future. Then, we begin to take responsibility for our lives. Part of the beauty of this practice is that by doing the life review now, it gives us a chance to clean up some of the big things, so if we were to die right away, we wouldn't have all of these appear to us at once and there's nothing to do about it. And, if we live a long time, at least we have done a chunk of house cleaning already, so that if we make future mistakes, we will be able to clean them up faster. It's like, we've cleaned it now so if more dirt comes in, it won't be as filthy as it was before. We know how to clean; it gives us some hope. Could you imagine getting to the day before your death and all of a sudden all of this hitting you. And there's no time then to do any purification or to think through the situation or to make amends or free yourself from the anger or to apologize or to forgive. There's no time. Your body is too weak; you can't do it. So, to be able to do it now is really quite an excellent way to prepare for death.

R: So, F. wasn't exaggerating.

VTC: No, she wasn't. And also, when we come to this effort of changing ourselves, especially some of our big habits, the ones that are so old that we never even think of changing them; but then to think, well, why not? Why can't I change? Why not? Then we really are dying; that old image, personality that we hung onto, we are letting it die. We are freeing ourselves from that bad habit. Sometimes just letting go of

the anger, grief, bitterness can be a way of dying because that self-image that feeds on that emotion, that is so limited, dies. We're free again. And especially to give us space to say, I don't really have to be like that. It reminds me of the young man in the retreat in Tonalli, Mexico. Even though it was a silent retreat, in breaks, he was playing checkers and baseball and playing chess and juggling and everything. I had to send in a note to ask him to calm down. I mean, I didn't point him out, just in general...but he got the message. And at the end of the retreat, when we were doing the go-around, he talked about the note and its affect on him, how he finally understood why he got kicked out of so many schools when he was younger. What he got was that he didn't have to keep doing that the rest of his life. He understood why it happened in the past. He owned his responsibility and I think he began to see that he doesn't need to go through his whole life being somebody who causes trouble so that others have to ask him to leave. I think that was a remarkable thing for him to wake up to. So, whatever our "poor me" thing is; how we think the world has been unfair to us, whatever pattern we have...maybe I don't have to be that person.

So whatever it is in our lives; we all have different ones...this is one of the things with the prisoners--they sit in their cells and start to think about this. What Bo said when I visited him this time, that he remembers very clearly, because he was 32 and got a 20 year sentence; and when they took him back to the jail and he heard the door slam shut and the key turn; he thought, everything I have been doing in my life until now ... something has been WRONG to get me into this place...so I have to do something different. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure it out. Actually, you need to be brighter than a rocket scientist because some of them don't get it either; to figure out, if we're stuck in something where we are miserable and causing other people misery, we don't have to keep doing it.

If we repeatedly get to the same to a place in our lives...like Elizabeth Taylor has had eight husbands...can you imagine? At some point, we have to face-why? What's happening to me about relationships that I have gotten married so many times; to be able to say, OK, what's my share in this and how can I do things differently? And then to start practicing and being creative; using the Lam Rim and Thought Transformation to make ourselves into a different person; and that different person is going to be a bodhisattva. That different person is going to be Vajrasattva. So when Vajrasattva is dissolving into you at the end of the practice; whether you visualize yourself as Vajrasattva or not, your mind and Vajrasattva's mind become completely inseparable.

Think in that moment, what does it feel like to be Vajrasattva? And give yourself some space; let go of the identity, the solid feeling of ME. What would it be like to be Vajrasattva? And we all have different patterns; sometimes we realize we don't speak up enough and that becoming Vajrasattva for us means speaking up and daring to say what's true in a situation where people don't want to hear it. And sometimes we realize that we speak up too much and what we say makes a mess; we have to learn to be quiet. It's not like there's one thing that's good for every situation or that there's one thing that's good for every person. But what are the situations when I have to be brave enough to say something when something is unfair or something isn't right and I'm too scared to say it, so I don't say anything and I let a bad situation go on and people, including myself get hurt? There are situations like that where we have to speak up. And there other situations where we're blabbering all the time and what we say just makes a mess, because what

we're saying isn't worthwhile. And what are those situations where I need to be quiet, step back, be more patient, listen and observe? This all fits in with the far-reaching attitudes of ethical discipline, generosity, patience and the whole Lam Rim. Figuring out how to love our life properly is Lam Rim and Thought Transformation. Don't think of the far-reaching attitude of generosity or ethical discipline as some intellectual thing and say: "Ok, well I'm being generous when I go and offer some pecans to the Buddha". Just in my life how do I be generous and how do I give with respect instead of just, "Here". How do I really value people? It's all in the teachings and it's learning to apply those teachings to our lives. You might want to do some reading on the far-reaching attitudes too and really think about how they apply to your life.

R: There are times when I feel nothing is happening. And there are other meditations where it clicks and it is like, "oh this is how it happens. This is how it works." It might just be one little piece of a huge puzzle. I found the term "existing since beginningless time" helps give me a great understanding, and has helped a lot in these meditations. I have done these meditations before in the past but now I'm doing them and this term "existing since beginningless time" has a different feel to it- it pushes beyond what it was before.

I can see my meditations are like going into a tunnel; I just go and go with no end in to the tunnel. I can start to understand that I created all those negative harmful actions. But, I'm also going to lift all of those negative actions. Thank you for your response last week, in regards to how to purify others' negative actions. It has helped me to pardon people and touch my work with that. I understand that other people have done these actions to me and I've fallen victim, but I've also done it to them. In this way I can understand more how I've created the causes. Seeing that I've existed since beginningless time helps me understand that I haven't just existed this lifetime. And if I keep thinking I'm only in this lifetime, I'm not going to be able surpass and reach out and accomplish those goals, it is only this lifetime. Going through the ten destructive actions one by one, and at first it was hard to accept that I have committed these... but then understanding that I have existed since beginningless time it is easier to look back accept that I have committed these. I can realize this when I go to purify certain actions.

I can understand that some exist due to causes and conditions. And there are others that I cannot understand how they exist due to causes and conditions and I make it solid. Example: sexual misconduct. When I see a prostitute conducting that kind of action, I can see that it was causes and conditions that brought her to do this. I don't grow an aversion to the person I can start to see the actions that led up to it. A talk that you gave said don't criticize the, person look at the action.(TAPE 1 ENDS HERE. THERE IS A GAP. I RECALLED THE BEST I COULD BASED ON NOTES, BUT NOTES ARE UNCLEAR. (*2*) MARKS BEGINNING OF TAPE 2) But in other times it is harder to separate the two (person from action). What are techniques to help separate the two?

VTC: Yes, with extremes such as the example of the prostitute it is easy to separate the person from the causes and conditions, but, if it is close to home, our mind jumps in and judges. Looking at it through karma can help us stop our judging. For example: if you see yourself judging or ridiculing someone, note that it is due to karma that I am ridiculing. The mental factor in speech could be: without mindfulness or without consciousness (I shouldn't say it, but I do). This creates recklessness or ridiculing tendency in the future. (*2*) There is the thought: "If I trash you I'll be good." So, if you

start picking it apart you'll see other things, but it involves looking here (points inwards), more, so it is a little bit harder.

R: This is the last question. If I have committed all of these negative harmful actions and suffer their results, does that also mean we have done all of the positive constructive actions as well?

VTC: We haven't done all of the positive constructive actions, because some positive constructive actions are done by Aryas and Bodhisattvas... we haven't done those yet. But, within the positive actions of ordinary beings, who haven't entered a path, we've probably done all of those. They say we've done everything in samsara- the good and the bad. But when it comes to what Aryas do or what those do, when they have reached a point on the path where they are irreversible, we haven't gotten to that point yet. Maybe we've gotten to the point just before the irreversible and then we have reversed (much laughter).

R: I have a question about karma too. I'm trying to think of how to ask this. It has to do with mental illness. So, if someone hits me then I can work on the fact that I have probably hit people in the past. But, for example, my mother was mentally ill when I was little. So I am trying to think of what the causes of that might be. It had huge impact on myself, my brother and my sister, and has been really painful to look at. But, what is the karma for that – that is like hitting someone and then getting hit?

VTC: Ok, so what's the karma that causes one to be mentally ill, and what is the karma, the action that causes one to be born into a family with a parent that is mentally ill?

R: Yes, and they would be different. I keep bumping into it....

VTC: Well, they say only a Buddha understands all the intricacies of karma, so I'm going to use the excuse of ignorance here and say I don't know. But, if you just think about it, like what being born in a family where there is mental illness or even having mental illness, I'm just guessing here, but something that would make sense to me. Let's say somebody who tortured prisoners; who was torturing prisoners to try and get them to confess. So, they torture them mentally. You know they would do mental or even physical torture to play with the person's mind. Causing somebody else such incredible distress or causing somebody else to freak-out because of being tortured, then it seems to me, and again this is just my guess, that that would be an example of the kind of action that would make one be born mentally unstable.

Or let's say having a grudge against somebody and then tormenting them. In the community, threatening lawsuits, making threats against them, you know just playing with their minds so that it disrupts their whole family. Then, maybe that could be a cause for being reborn in a family where there is mental illness and all that disruption due to it. These are just guesses of mine but something that would make sense. You know you torment somebody mentally so that they become unstable. And we see people who do it don't we? You know.

R: Venerable, just a simple question when it describes the visualization of the five pointed vajra, what does that physically look like?

VTC: Sometimes the vajra has one spoke in the middle and then on each side you have 4 other spokes. It's just a single vajra.

R: I have a question. As I was saying the other day, I have certain kinds of fears and I don't know what the causes are. But what I have been doing is trying to purify the

things that make me afraid. For example, movies, thoughts; with the movies, I try to remember what kind of movies cause me that kind of fear. I think I don't what kind of causes created so much fear in me of violence. But I just say (in meditation), I don't know what has caused this, but please I want to purify this. Is that OK?

VTC: Yes. I think that's fine. Sometimes, when you're very afraid of something, (you can say) I don't know what made me afraid, but whatever it was, I want to purify it because I want to get over this fear. Or just think of whatever it is in the movies that you are afraid of and think, I may have done that to someone in a previous life. Or, I may have done it to somebody and that's why I am afraid of it being done to me. Or, I might have had a lot of malicious thought towards others and malicious thought creates fear. When I have malicious thoughts towards others, I am making others afraid and I am projecting all my negativity outwards, so I also assume that others have those kind of malicious thoughts towards me and I become paranoid because of that; and fearful. You can make it a little bit more refined in that way and think of specific things.

R: Thank you.

VTC: There might be some things that are not a person doing them to you. Like maybe you are afraid of being in a Tsunami in a future life. And it's not like, I hit someone and they hit me back. But being in a Tsunami is an environmental result. Being in a fire is too. Living in a place where the crops go bad is an environmental result. So, if you study about karma, it talks about the different environments that we get born into because of different actions we have done.

R: Everything that has been shared tonight is ringing so true. The piece that I am exploring is how much my body has, for my entire life, held all of my self-cherishing. F (another retreatant) has been kind enough to do Shiatsu (body work) on me for the past two weeks. And there isn't any place in my body where she hasn't found something locked, knotted, over-extended and tangled. There's chronic pain in my body that I have totally de-sensitized myself to for most of my life, and what you had said last time that we should watch the way we move our body. When she works on me, I can see how the self-cherishing, self-hate, self-doubt and the self-pity has manifested in this body, which has no place to be not sore. And as she has been working on it, I'll go into the next session, and somehow energetically she has made a space in my body, and I can see how all the self-cherishing attitude has manifested and has basically filled my body with physical manifestations of self-cherishing. The defensiveness, the prickliness, the confusion, my entire life since I was a child, this underlying nervousness, this low level anxiousness that fight or flight thing that is subterranean; as she is working on me, this stuff is coming up and opening up the thinking that has manifested this chronic pain in my body.

I feel like I am a laboratory for myself, and I have this wonderful physician who is untying my body, there is something going on in this body that is opening up this space. And then the visualization and the mantra keep giving me the compassion to keep going, because the self-hate is so engraved in my body that the mantra, the bliss and the nectar, after she opens up the energy in the body, they can give me space to be easy with the fact that my body has held this self-loathing, in the form of these knots, tangles and blocked places. So, there has been this fascinating insight that is coming as a result of these twenty minute Shiatsu treatments that are just blowing me away! And I can see that my body is also under the control of disturbing attitudes; I'm getting that part. They are

intertwined and interconnected. This body is a vessel for this mind that is under the control of disturbing attitudes- of course it would be influenced and it would hold that in its own way. Just feeling that there is this unlocking- I got a key now. This key that she has given me, it has been really quite powerful.

VTC: That is nice. Will you work on the rest of us too? (Much laughter.) Can we make appointments with you? I want to be next. Thanks for sharing that.

R: The thing is that the self-cherishing mind wanted to go in there and make it possible that whatever was being released, was dangerous and fearful, and I wanted to get into the whole victim part on why my body was like this because of all the things that happened to me – get into the pity party, rather than using it as a form of liberation. My mind wanted to hook into its essence, which was self-pity and self-flagellation, self-denigrating – even with something that powerful, the self-cherishing attitude wanted to kick in and sabotage it.

VTC: But it didn't succeed.

R: There's a space now in my mind between the self-cherishing and this dependent arising sentient being that I've never experienced before.

VTC: But the mind has an outcome in the body; when the mind is tight, the body gets tight. By releasing some of the things in the body, then Vajrasattva and some of the bliss and nectar could come in. So then I said, we all want to come.

R: The month before I came here, when I would do treatments on people, someone would come in very dense, full of some kind of destructive emotion. The Vajrasattva mantra came into the treatments almost by itself and completely transformed my thoughts and feelings to be able to help that person – it came spontaneously by itself.

VTC: Yup, that happens.

R: For me this retreat has taught me to transform. For example, while I wash the dishes; sometimes when I wash dishes in my home I am always upset with people because they don't help or I wonder, why am I always the one having to wash the dishes. But here I transform the task, because it is offering service to the Buddhas. This is the thing that I can offer in this moment and it changes my whole way of thinking. Another example, when I can't understand what others are saying, I think maybe they are talking about me – I am trying to be more patient about that. This retreat is helping me to transform.

VTC: Because it's right there in action, in your life. I've noticed that with all of you doing your chores – I always seem to be going through where ever somebody happens to be working and you're all so good-natured. When I'm messing around in the kitchen and you're trying to clean up, everybody is just so good-natured. Or I'm walking through the room while you're vacuuming and it doesn't matter that I'm tracking something in. People are really being good-natured about everything. That's exactly what you're talking about, making what you're doing an action of service.

R: I need to do that – I think it would be very helpful for me and for my home and for others.

VTC: That complaining mind is such a drag, “Why do I have to do that? How come they're always asking me to do something? It's not fair. They're getting on my case again.” That's just no fun at all.

[Some chatting & laughter about the wild turkey that came and pecked loudly on the glass door in the middle of several of the morning sessions and got everyone's attention]

VTC: Sometime after the retreat started, I went through the donor list and I wrote down the names of everybody who made donations especially for the Vajrasattva retreat. The Abbey receives many general donations, but some people when they heard about the retreat, made donations specifically to be used for food or maintenance for the retreat. There were 31 people – isn't that amazing! So I thought I would give this list to you and you can read it out in session from time to time in order to dedicate for these people. It is very important when people make donations for our practice that we dedicate for them. It is due to their kindness that we are having food and the bare necessities to keep our bodies alive.

[Some mention of others that might have contributed but their names are not on the list because they gave as part of a pooled donation. We will make sure to add their names to the list.]

VTC: It's always a good thing to remember that we're able to be alive due to the kindness of others and to dedicate for them.

[There was an exchange of appreciations between Venerable and the group. Venerable talked briefly of how much she is enjoying the space in the cabin for doing retreat and that she's found a number of locations for another retreat cabin to be built as she takes walks during her breaks.]