

The Six Paramitas

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe



KHENPO NGAWANG DHAMCHOE

The Six Paramitas

Copyright © 2023 by Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	1
Definition of Perfection	2
The number of types of perfection	2
The Perfection of Generosity	3
DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY	3
Knowing the quality of motivation	4
Working towards the right motivation	5
GENEROSITY ITSELF	5
Obstacles to generosity	5
Antidotes to obstacles	11
How to perform the perfection of generosity	28
BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY	31
Temporary benefits of generosity	31
Ultimate benefits of generosity	35
The Perfection of Moral Conduct	36
DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF MORAL CONDUCT	36
MORAL CONDUCT ITSELF	37
Obstacles to Mahayana moral conduct	37
Antidotes to the obstacles	43
First antidote: discipline	53
Second antidote: committing virtuous deeds	58
Third antidote: moral conduct to help other sentient beings	59
How to perform the correct moral conduct	61
BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF MORAL CONDUCT	62

Temporary benefits	62
Ultimate benefits	67
ON VOWS	67
Other Buddhist schools' vows	74
Monastic vows	76
Bodhisattva vows	76
The Perfection of Patience	78
DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE	78
PATIENCE ITSELF	79
Obstacle to Patience: anger	79
Antidote to anger	85
Specific methods of antidote	88
How to perform the correct patience	104
BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE	105
Temporary benefits	105
Ultimate benefit	107
The Perfection of Diligence	109
DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF DILIGENCE	109
DILIGENCE ITSELF	113
Obstacle to enthusiasm: laziness	113
Antidotes to the cause	115
Antidotes to the result	127
How to perform the correct diligence	134
BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF DILIGENCE	135
Temporary benefits	135
Ultimate benefit of diligence	138
The Perfection of Meditative Contemplation	140
DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF MEDITA-	
TIVE CONTEMPLATION	140
MEDITATIVE CONTEMPLATION ITSELF	141
Obstacles to meditation	142
Disadvantages of the wandering mind	145
Antidotes to the cause	154

Antidote to the result	165
How to practise the perfection of meditation	176
BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF MEDITATIVE CONTEMPLATION	177
Temporary benefits	177
Ultimate benefit	179
The Perfection of Wisdom	180
DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM	180
WISDOM ITSELF	181
Incorrect wisdom	181
Antidotes to incorrect wisdom	188

Preface



The Six Paramitas is one of four booklets that serve as readings for the second year of The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course. They concern another of the main traditions of Buddhism, the Mahayana tradition. The Mahayana accepts the main teachings of the Theravada tradition, but in addition, proposes the path of the bodhisattva striving to become a fully awakened Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings. There are four booklets in The Mahayana series – *Buddha Nature*, *Parting From the Four Attachments*, *The Two Truths* and *The Six Paramitas*.

These booklets are based on the recorded teachings of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe is one of the most highly qualified Tibetan Buddhist Sakya lamas in Australia. He is highly respected in Australia and internationally for his profound knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, the clarity and inspirational qualities of his teachings, and his understanding of the western mind.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has been a monk since 1971. At the age of nine, he entered the Sakya Monastery in Bir, India, and remained there for 10 years. When Khenpo was 19, the principal of Sakya College in Dehradun, His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche, asked the Sakya Monastery to send senior monks to join the Sakya College. Sakya College is one of the most famous Tibetan philosophical institutes in India. It was established by His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin and His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe was chosen to join the Sakya College. He studied there for just over 10 years, from 1979 to 1990. In his sixth year he was nominated as the Discipline Master. This was a challenging role, as some of the monks, including his peers, were older than him. In Khenpo's seventh year he was appointed a Teacher's Assistant, and in the eighth year he studied for the degree of Kacho Pa – the equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts, requiring intensive study. In Khenpo's ninth and tenth years he studied for the degree of Loppon, equivalent to a PhD degree. At the same time, he taught and conducted examinations at the college.

In 1994 His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin appointed Khenpo as Resident Teacher at Sakya Tharpa Ling, a Buddhist centre in Sydney, following the passing of the 14th Gyalsay Tulku Rinpoche. In 2002, His Holiness bestowed on him the title of 'khenpo', or abbot, in recognition of his teaching ability. The bestowal of the term 'khenpo' recognises something considered rare and precious. His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin recognised Khenpo's special qualities and deep understanding of Buddhist philosophies, both in sutra and tantra, and held an Enthronement Ceremony in the Bir Monastery Northern India, promoting Khenpo from the term Loppon to Khenpo in March 2002.

The term 'khenpo' has at least three meanings in Tibetan Buddhism: a scholar who has completed an extensive course of study in sutra and tantra,

a senior lama who can give ordinations, and the head of a monastery. The khenpos have been the main channels for keeping the purity of Buddha's teachings alive from generation to generation within the Tibetan monastic tradition.

Since 2017 Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has lived and taught at Kamalashila Tibetan Buddhist Centre near Tilba on the South Coast of New South Wales, although he travels to many countries to spread the Dharma.

From 2017 to 2019, Khenpo taught the first component of the Seven Year Complete Path for senior students which was coordinated by the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu under the strict guidance of, and within the program developed by, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin.

In 2019, Khenpo began to develop The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course, a three-year program teaching the main concepts and practices of the three main traditions of Buddhism – Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The inaugural program began in 2022.

There are many to thank for *The Mahayana Booklets* but first and foremost we would like to thank Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe for his precious teachings which he has given so generously and diligently to his students over so many years. They have greatly helped his students to understand and to apply the Dharma in their lives to such good effect. These Booklets were prepared over three years and with many hours of work by transcribers and editors. The best gift of appreciation we can give our teacher in return is to try these methods and to practise the Dharma.

*May the precious Dharma continue down through the ages
to guide countless beings on the Path.*

*Carole Kayrooz Emeritus Professor and Lael Morrisey,
November 2022*

Acknowledgements

We have many to thank for their work on *The Mahayana Booklets*, a series based on teachings by Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe.

The Six Paramitas is one of the booklets in the series. It was prepared over several years and with many hours of work by transcribers and editors. *The Six Paramitas* was transcribed by Suzanne Tulloch, Tjenka Murray, Ann Kelly, Chiaki Ajioka, Natalie Jones, Penny Moody, Katherine Bellchambers and Vasi Alvanos and edited by Chiaki Ajioka, Carole Kayrooz and Robert Garran.

Lael Morrissey and Ulladulla Printing and Signage prepared the layout and design.

Introduction

The Six Paramitas (or Perfections) are the key practices of Mahayana Buddhism. A bodhisattva embodies wisdom and compassion and they do this by practising the Six Paramitas. It is said that the root of the Path is compassion, the Path itself is bodhicitta and completion of the Path is the Six Paramitas. In order to complete the Buddhadharmā it is very important to practise the Six Paramitas or Six Perfections. Every sadhana (Buddhist meditation) must contain the Six Paramitas in some form, even when they are not specifically mentioned.

Each of the Six Paramitas is taught because, as we say in Tibetan, something that is complex needs to be explained separately, although in meditation practices one should combine them all. For example, if you explain to someone how to make a cup of tea, you need to explain how to boil water, put the tea bag into a cup and add sugar, honey or milk and so on. But when making a cup of tea, if you put a tea bag in a cup and pour hot water in another cup, and put milk in a separate cup, you are not going to get the cup of tea. Likewise, it is important that you should learn the Six Paramitas individually but, in practice, you should know how to put them together. First I will discuss two points: the definition of perfection and why there are Six Perfections.

Definition of Perfection

Perfection in the Buddhist context means that it is a method that helps to free us from both samsara and nirvana – or takes us beyond the samsaric nirvana. All the perfections are combinations of two things: great compassion and wisdom. If you miss one of the two, you cannot have a perfection. If you practise generosity out of compassion but without wisdom, your generosity is not the perfection of generosity. Likewise, if you practise generosity out of wisdom but without compassion, your generosity is not the perfection of generosity. You need to have both great compassion and wisdom for your generosity to be the perfection of generosity. Wisdom frees you from samsara and compassion helps you to go beyond samsaric nirvana so that you can help others become free from samsara.

The motivation for practising the Six Perfections is all important and often not visible. If you give something to someone, the giving itself may not show the difference. For example, four people may give the same thing to the same person but each has a different intention: one person gives for a short-term benefit to oneself; the second person gives to free themselves from samsara; the third person gives so as not to be reborn in the lower realms; and the fourth person gives to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. So, even if they are giving same thing, their motivations are vastly different. In other words, we need to focus not so much on the object but on training our mind to have the right motivation. The method that frees us both from samsara and nirvana is the perfection.

The number of types of perfection

There are countless perfections but we sum up into six – generosity, ethical discipline or moral conduct, patience, diligence or joyous effort, meditation and wisdom. The basis for the six divisions is that these six are very unique methods that lead one to buddhahood. No other methods can help one accomplish buddhahood.

The Perfection of Generosity

Perfection of Generosity consists of three topics: 1. definition of the Perfection of Generosity; 2. the Perfection of Generosity itself; 3. and benefits of practising the Perfection of Generosity.

DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY

The general definition of generosity is giving something to benefit others. The Perfection of Generosity, on the other hand, is giving something in order to attain for yourself the non-abiding state for the sake of other sentient beings. In our normal culture, we tend to think that, if you are giving money, food or clothes, that very object is generosity. But in Buddhism, we say that, when giving, the object is just a method and real generosity is the heart, or mind, that decided to give someone something to help. In other words, generosity is not about the object but about your intention.

To make generosity perfect, three things are required: preliminary intention, main action and conclusion. Preliminary intention is your motivation. First, motivation always requires two things: to know its quality, and to train the mind to acquire the quality. The motivation of the Perfection of Generosity is to think: 'I am giving this to this person to free him or her from temporary suffering and also to ultimately attain buddhahood'. Second, the main action (or object given) of the Perfection of Generosity is giving an object not only to satisfy the person's desire mind but so that the object becomes the Path for the person in future to attain buddhahood. And third, the conclusion is to dedicate one's joy or satisfaction from giving towards

enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Knowing the quality of motivation

It is important to always have a larger vision beyond the present action. For example, you may offer a bowl of rice to someone. It is a small offering, but if offered in the right way, the bowl of rice has the power to take you to the enlightened state. It is like a small seed – if planted in the right way, it can grow to bear large fruit. Materialistic-minded people may think that offering only a small amount earns only small merit and a large amount earns greater merit. If someone gives a truckload of money and another gives only one dollar, there is a huge difference in the amount. But if the person who offers one dollar did so with a bodhicitta mind, and the other person offers a truckload of money to make themselves famous and to be reported on the front page of a newspaper, the first person's motivation is far superior to that of the second person's. The second person may be proud today but may get depressed the next day because he or she does not have another truckload of money to give.

So, it is not the object but the mind that is important. I cannot repeat this enough. Every time you practice generosity, remember these three things: what intention is required, what we should remember when we are giving and what we need at the conclusion. Try to get your mind as close as possible to these: to reach the highway you may have to go through many roads that are confusing and in poor condition. That is the most difficult part. But once you reach the highway, once you have acquired this mindset as a habit, there will be no difficulties. A lot of people give up before reaching the highway because the roads are so confusing and there are many uncertainties. You need to stay close to your teacher and seek guidance. Do not look to yourself but consult your teacher, like seeking the way from a more experienced person.

Working towards the right motivation

So, first we must have an idea of the Perfection of Generosity. Next, we must have to work towards practising it. It is like learning art or computer – an expert can explain how to draw or how to use the computer, but then we must practise according to the instructions. Repeat it again and again. You will not be wasting your time because you have the intention to make yourself perfect, and this perfection is not for mundane reason but for attaining buddhahood for the sake of sentient beings. Every second you spend making effort is priceless. We are doing something you have never done in the past, so it is important to recognise the value of what you are doing. Then it brings such joy and comfort to you, and gives you energy to practise the Dharma. Like moving your body stimulates the blood, if you keep doing the right way it stimulates your motivation and inspiration.

GENEROSITY ITSELF

The second topic is generosity itself and there are three sub-topics: first, we need to know the obstacle of generosity; second, the antidotes to overcome this obstacle; and third, we need to know how to practise generosity correctly.

Obstacles to generosity

The obstacle to generosity is stinginess or miserliness which stops us from practising generosity. Stinginess makes us think 'If I give, my share will get less or run out'. This becomes an obstacle to warmth of heart. If we give, we often only give what we do not need or do not have space to store. In general, the Dharma acts like a mirror: if you look into a mirror, you see your real self; when we listen to the Dharma, we see ourselves clearly. Like when you wear makeup, if you do not look into the mirror you do not know which part of your face needs correcting. The mirror reflects yourself clearly, not to discourage you by showing your ugliness but to show you where you can make yourself more beautiful: so, to increase your warmth of heart see the

beauty of your mind in the Dharma and try to improve it.

There are three ways we can improve our practice of giving: if we are not giving at all, try to give; try to make our giving perfect; and finally, when we do give, make sure it helps us to attain buddhahood.

Disadvantages of stinginess – in this life

There are two types of disadvantages of stinginess: in this life and in future lives. In this life, a stingy person is easy to be despised by other people including one's family, friends and work colleagues. If one shares, everyone is a friend of the person, but if one is holding onto something and not sharing, people say bad things about the person. Loss of others' good opinion is one disadvantage in this life.

Aryadeva stated that when you make wealth, it is for you to use and enjoy it. If you give to others, you may not get immediate results but in future it may bring some benefit, so you are not wasting it by using it yourself or to benefit other sentient beings. Karma, as Chandrakirti says in his *Madhyamakāvātāra*, is so subtle and deep that the ordinary mind cannot possibly understand it except at a very gross level. Chandrakirti says that the result of the karma we have committed is experienced in three times: the fastest result is experienced in this lifetime; the second is experienced soon after our death, in our next life; and the slowest result shows in the indefinite future – which may be thousands of lifetimes later. Whatever karma you have committed, if you do not purify or do something about it, it does not disappear but remains dormant until the right conditions are met for it to ripen, which could be one thousand eons later. It will be like grass seeds in a grassland, where some grass grow from seeds that were dropped last year, but some seeds may be thousands of years old because they have not met the right conditions to germinate. So, what we are experiencing right now is not necessarily the result of what we did this morning or yesterday, or even in our last life, but can be the result of what we did thousands of lifetimes ago.

When you offer your wealth to someone, you may have expectations to see the result immediately, and be discouraged if you do not see it. Karma says that you are not guaranteed to see the result right away, but if you do the right thing, sooner or later it will have a result. In terms of the fastest ripening,

it is very rare to see a result of either right or wrong karma to ripen in this lifetime: the object needs to be extraordinary, such as seeing someone as the real Buddha and offering everything to the Buddha – something powerful like that. Similarly, if you do a wrong thing you do not need to die to experience what we call hell realms; in this very life, you can experience hell realms. But it is very, very rare to experience the result in this life: your deed has to be extraordinarily powerful. The second and third kinds of timing are common. So, if you give something to others, do not expect that you will get something in return immediately. Your generosity will not be wasted.

I have said in the past that when you practise generosity, you are looking at two kinds of result: one immediate and one in the future. About the immediate result, when you give something from your heart, do not wait for the other person's response, which is uncertain – you do not know if you are going to get a response or not – but instead rely on your own feeling. Just feel that you have an opportunity to help somebody, which not everyone has, and you are grateful. If you rely on your own feeling, you instantly have joy. That is an immediate kind of result that comes. Then in the future your good karma will ripen. We say that joy comes from giving, which is very true.

I recently met one of my colleague monks who told me that in the monastery, he was not taught to help others. Instead he was taught how to perform rituals, how to use the drum, how to offer tormas and so on. These are good traditions, but he did not learn how to go out and help the poor. On this occasion, he went out from his monastery to raise funds to build his own retreat centre in India. Some people gave him extra money to help poor people. So, he went to the poor village near the place where he planned to build the retreat centre. When he went to the village, he saw a Christian school, a Muslim school and a Hindu school, but no Buddhist school. It was a very poor area in remote India. So, he bought simple things like books, pencils and the like and gave them to those people. When the people received them, they gave him the most beautiful smile. What he gave were simple things, yet seeing their smile gave him such joy: his heart was deeply touched. The experience was so powerful, it made him think he did something good for those people. Because his intention was pure, happiness came very quickly.

But if you go out and give to make you famous or to prove you are rich and important, there is no guarantee you will get these results. Giving is not about material objects but about your heart and mind. When you do something noble from your heart and mind, it logically makes you happy, because the very mind that wants to give is a kind mind. If a kind mind does not bring you happiness, what else is going to bring you happiness? It is important to think 'I am giving not because I think I will get a response but because my heart tells me it is valuable to others. With material things, if you use them, they bring happiness to you; if you give them away to others, they bring happiness to you now and in future. But if you do not use them for yourself or give to others, your belongings are just wasted – sitting in the garage or in your cupboard, doing nothing. Not only that, they cause you suffering as you worry about someone taking them. Many of us put so much effort in building wealth, but in the end that very wealth which we believed would make us secure, becomes the source of insecurity. How many of us go through these emotions?

Stinginess does not help us. Instead, it brings us so much stress, so much concern, so much worry, which is opposite of what generosity brings us. Aryadeva in his *Four Hundred Stanzas of the Middle Way* states these things. The *Diamond Sutra* also says that foolish people suffer while accumulating wealth: they work very hard to earn more and more, but then they do not have opportunities to utilise what they have earned, while someone else is going to enjoy it. If you do not use your wealth in a proper way, that very wealth will become the cause of your suffering. That is the disadvantage of stingy mind.

It is important that you offer your wealth not just for the sake of giving it but with knowledge that it will benefit the people or the organisation, not just for a short-term satisfaction but in the long term. It is a smart investment. If you invest in the right way, due to interdependent origination – everything you experience is a result of causes and conditions – it is not simply that the object is gone from you, but you are planting a seed in your mind, which will ripen in the future and you will be able to harvest the results. You will have larger crop in the future. It is not right to have expectations like this, but it is

important to understand the view that when you create a cause it always has multiple results.

When some people seem to get wealth easily, people say they are lucky. But it is not luck. These people must have practised generosity in their past lives. Other people may try very hard to make wealth but because they did not create the cause in the past, they only get small results for their efforts. So, generosity is like putting your wealth in the bank. Whenever you need it, you can withdraw – when you need it, it comes to you.

Buddha himself stated that one must practise generosity because generosity plants a seed which will multiply. If you do not use it but keep it for yourself, like the bees which collect honey and when there is enough honey, greedy humans come and take it away. Likewise, you go out working hard, accumulating wealth, then one day you die and your honey goes to someone else. That is the disadvantage of stinginess in this life – if you do not use what you have while you have the opportunity.

While you live, whatever you have in your life, you are the owner of it. So, you can decide to give this or use that, it is your heart and mind that decides to use it to benefit others. That is the best way. The second-best way is, 'I do not have courage to give everything because I need them all, but I put in my will that I give this to this person after my death'. You are still making the decision to give after your death. The worst way is when you do not give while you have the chance, do not leave anything in your will. After you die, someone else is going to take your wealth, and because your mind is aware of this, it becomes attached and creates more negative karma. These are the disadvantages of stinginess in this life.

Disadvantage of stinginess in future life

The disadvantage of stinginess in future life is that, as stated in one sutra, it is the main cause or seed to be reborn in the hungry ghost realm. Hungry ghost realm is a state of the mind. For instance, two people are sitting at a dining table. Both have the same opportunity to have the same amount of food, but one who has a hungry ghost mind sees the food inedible, even though it is sitting right in front of them. It is not the problem of the food but of the mind. Our modern world is very much like the hungry ghost realm:

people cannot eat this or cannot drink that because of allergies even though they are hungry. It is like humans living in the form of hungry ghost. Western medicine says you have allergy for this and that, and you believe it, which makes it worse. I am not saying that you should not listen to medicine, but you need to train your mind gradually. Of course, if you think, “now I have the Dharma I can eat everything”, then next day you have allergic reactions and you will sue me for the damage! What I am saying is that you need to train to believe in yourself, have confidence in yourself because there is no fixed disease as such. Everything is curable, everything is changeable through wisdom, through compassion.

Once you are in the hungry ghost realm, you may be there many lifetimes and you never know when you are returning to the human realm, because in that environment, there is no opportunity to do virtuous deeds and it is very difficult to hear any word of the Dharma. So, while one has the human form and the opportunity to make decisions, one needs to do the right thing – use one’s wisdom mind to make clear, helpful and beneficial decisions.

Even if one is lucky enough to avoid being born a hungry ghost but born as a human, one may be born in extreme poverty due to karma. A stingy person has very little joy in his or her mind: even if one is surrounded by wealth, inwardly one does not have joy or happiness. We can see this in some wealthy people – they are very well off but very unhappy. Their wealth gives them nothing but worries. If you do not use your wealth in the right way the very wealth you believed to make you happy becomes the cause of so much suffering. These are the future disadvantages of stinginess.

This also applies even if you have some courage to give: if you give wrong things it will have little result. It is like planting a seed in poor soil: nothing may grow. Even if something grows it will not result in good crop. So, these are the disadvantages of not giving or giving wrong things.

Giving that does not lead to enlightenment

Now, another problem that can occur with giving is when you give in a virtuous way to help the recipient but only to bring happiness for yourself in this life or to attain your own liberation. This kind of giving would be proper giving but not excellent giving. Because your motivation is limited to your

own benefit, the result is also limited. This means that once the result ripens you cannot expect more. Giving for worldly purpose and for the purposes of self-liberation is like planting a banana tree. Each banana tree only bears fruit once and the tree becomes useless. Similarly, if you give something for a mundane purpose, once the result ripens you cannot expect another result; if you give something for your own liberation, once you are liberated, there is no more benefit.

In summary, the disadvantages of not giving are suffering both in this and future lives. The disadvantages of giving wrong things is that you are not helping others or yourself. And, if you give right things but for your own purpose, the result does not lead to enlightenment.

Antidotes to obstacles

Know the cause of stinginess

How do we overcome stinginess? What are the antidotes for stinginess? There are three points: first, we need to know the cause of stinginess. The cause of stinginess is a strong attachment to one's belongings – attached so tightly that one does not want to use them oneself or share with others but instead clings to them. We need to reduce this attachment. To do that, we must recognise our own attachment, then, we need to practise or meditate on that.

Again, Śāntideva said, it is good to look at the disadvantages of wealth. It is hard to make wealth – you need to get out early in the morning, come home late in the evening, working the whole day dealing with many people. Physically and mentally, you go through hardship and stress. This is one type of suffering.

Now luckily or unluckily you have accumulated a certain amount of wealth. Then you need to protect the wealth you have made, to secure it – buying insurance and the like to protect your house, your possessions... you worry. That is another suffering. Then in your old age, you are worried that other people want your possessions – your children want this, your brother wants that, your sister, your cousin... everyone wants, not you, but your wealth. So,

you suffer in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. That is the problem we have in this 21st century. On a small scale, the problem among your family may be causing discord. On a larger scale, the problem may become the cause of a war between countries. All problems come from wealth. Think about it. Wealth is the prime cause of conflicts.

Many of you find it difficult to cope with stress so you come to meditation. In the beginning, you feel a little relaxed. But when you want to meditate more, your mind cannot stop wandering off, back to your old habit, of your job, your wealth, your activities and so on. One of the main obstacles of not succeeding in your meditation is attachment to your possessions, your activities, your tasks, your family and the like. Most suffering in the world comes from attachment – ninety-nine per cent of it. Other problems relating to anger, jealousy, arrogance, are powerful, but the major part of our problems come from attachment.

So, attachment comes from material possessions which we value so much that they cause ninety per cent of the obstacles in meditation. We need to understand that these objects are really not worth much. But if we want to make the right use of material possessions, as Nagarjuna said, the best way is to appreciate what you have. If you appreciate whatever you have – a little or more – it will make you happy. If you do not have appreciation, no matter how much you have, nothing will make you happy. So, this is the suffering of clinging and attachment. Another problem is that not having wealth brings us the suffering of poverty, which is one type of suffering. Then, because we are not comfortable with poverty, we make some wealth. But a little bit of wealth is not enough. We may get more and become well off, but we are still not satisfied. This is the suffering of dissatisfaction.

Attachment, not wealth, is the cause of suffering

I am not saying that wealth is the cause of suffering. Wealth only plays a small part in suffering. The cause of suffering is negative, non-virtuous mind. Without non-virtuous mind, there is no suffering. Likewise, happiness is the result of virtuous mind. Without it, there is no happiness. From this point of view, wealth or material things are neither virtuous or non-virtuous. They are neutral. Neutral phenomena cannot cause happiness or unhappiness. What

produces suffering is our attachment, our clinging mind, because attachment or clinging mind is non-virtuous mind. There is no need to abandon wealth. What we need to do is abandon our clinging to wealth. Because wealth is neutral, it can be used either to our advantage or disadvantage. With a virtuous mind wealth can be used to benefit so many beings. That way, neutral things become virtuous objects. Neutral things can be helpful or harmful.

There is an ancient story about a king who ruled all the four continents and half of the Tushita realms. But he was not satisfied with what he had, and wanted to rule a bigger area. As a result of his greed, he became an ordinary being. That is an ancient story, but if we look at history, the Mongolian emperor or Roman emperor ruled so much of Europe or Asia, but they were not satisfied and kept expanding until they collapsed. We see the same things today – some countries have large space, best things, yet want more. One day they are going to collapse. That is nature.

One thing that really causes you to run out your luck is your greedy mind. Wealth that comes from virtues is a healthy wealth. If you do the right things to accumulate your wealth, you can use it in healthy ways. But if your wealth is a result of greed, such as deceiving others, ripping off people or by other dishonest means, you may become rich but sooner or later it will collapse. No matter how rich you are, you have nothing to be proud of, because you know it comes from unethical means. That is the reason why so many wealthy people are unhappy. If your wealth is earned ethically, you can enjoy it and be content with your life. So, whether you enjoy your wealth or not depends if it was created ethically or unethically.

The cause of stinginess is attachment. If we let our attachment increase, we become stingier, leading to so many disadvantages in this life and in future lives. We need to curtail our stingy mind. The antidote for stinginess is generosity. Because stinginess is a form of disease, to cure this disease we need medicine, which is generosity. It is important to see the Dharma always in this light: negative mental conditions such as stinginess, attachment or anger must be seen as diseases of the mind. When we are physically sick, we do not need to get a new body. We need to work on this sick body, taking medicine and so on to make it healthy again. Likewise, if we are stingy,

we do not try to delete the stingy mind but turn this attachment into non-attachment, turning stinginess into generosity. We are not changing our mind itself – leave the mind as it is, but we change the flavour, the attitude, of the mind. That is what the Buddhist practices are all about – to change our attitude, change the personality of our mind.

Generosity for ordained person and sangha

The treatment for stinginess is generosity. There are three types of generosity depending on the person who practises it: an ordained person, sangha and an enlightened being. We will discuss the first two here. The first is an ordained person and sangha. I think this category of sangha can include the full-time practitioner who may be a householder.

First, generosity of the ordained person or full-time practitioner. I often hear that people ask why there are many Christian charities but there are few Buddhist charities. In one sense this is true. When we talk about charities, we are caught up in material goods, not about the mind. Charity can be in many forms. Christians do so much material charity, helping poor people, giving shelters, education and such. These are great things. When people ask why Buddhists do not do the same, they do not think about how many centuries Buddhism has been enriching people's mind through teachings. It is charity. If you look at mind and body, the mind is more important than the body. How often Buddhist teachers give the Dharma to everyone without discrimination? That is generosity. Yet, people tend to value material things more than spiritual advice. In poor countries, material things are very important as charitable gifts, but in rich countries Buddhist organisations teach how to enrich the mind, which is much needed. The Dalai Lama goes out all over the world giving his advice. In old times more people suffered from poverty; in the modern world I think more people are suffering from spiritual poverty.

Giving fearlessness

The main practice of generosity for monks and nuns is giving fearlessness, giving loving kindness, giving the Dharma. I also include householders who are full-time practitioners. Fearlessness is to encourage someone, who is creating negative karma that will bring suffering in this and future lives, not to

commit such negative karma. Loving kindness is to go out to unhappy people to encourage them to do virtuous things, nice things for others – instead of watching television or go for a walk on the beach. Recently, someone told me that buying expensive clothes made her happy only for a short time, but making a little effort to be nice to someone made her happy for her to remember for the rest of her life. Without spending a dollar – just be nice to someone will bring this happiness. This brings up the issue of our culture which puts so much value on money and material things. And when we realise that they do not provide us happiness, we get depressed. For this reason, Buddhism contributes so much by making people realise what really matters is one's mind, not material things. This is giving loving kindness. Another thing to give is the Dharma, that is, giving wisdom and compassion. These are the main tasks of the monks, nuns and full-time practitioners. Think what you can give – less fear, more kindness, more wisdom.

Not being caught up with material things

Ordained people can also give material things – small things like pen, paper or leftover food, which does not require much effort on their part. What they are giving spiritually is more valuable than material things. The main job of monks and nuns is to improve their ethical life, to improve their meditation. It will take a long time, so right now they can do small things. But the whole purpose of their life is to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Once they reach buddhahood, they can help countless sentient beings. Just think about Buddha Shakyamuni as one person. Since he reached enlightenment, countless beings have benefited; how many beings became free from samsara in India after he had turned the wheel of the Dharma? How many beings gained buddhahood in other parts of the world?

Now in the 21st century when the Buddhadharma has come to the West, how many people in the West have benefitted? All these people benefited from so many teachings – the Buddha gave many types of teachings – Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana – all came from Shakyamuni Buddha after he turned the wheel of Dharma in Varanasi. Just imagine that if one of us reached that state, he or she would have the capability to help countless sentient beings. Our goal is temporary, and what we can do is very limited, but in the end, we can do

limitless good. So, monks and nuns and full-time practitioners should not be distracted by material things – it is very important to focus on spiritual help. Buddha himself did many different things before he reached buddhahood – he was born many times as a king, as a minister, as a householder, as a business person and so on. He went through these lives as a normal samsaric being and helped people in different ways. But once he reached enlightenment, he helped all sentient beings. The supreme help was turning the wheel of the Dharma.

There are stories about the Buddha. After he left his palace to become a monk, he reached a stupa not far from the palace. He was with his attendant on a horse cart. On reaching there he cut his hair and became a monk. The cart was beautifully decorated with precious jewels because he was a prince. He returned the cart to the palace instead of giving it to the poor people. So, some people could not understand why he returned the cart to the palace which did not need all these precious objects, and criticised the Buddha for not giving them to the poor. Another story is when he was meditating with the five sages – five heretic meditators – for six years without eating except one grain a day. At the end of sixth year he was skin and bones. He thought that was not the Path to gain enlightenment. So, he came out and went to Naraja River, not far from Bodhgaya. Then one young lady offered him the essence of one hundred cows' milk as porridge in a golden bowl. The Buddha drank it, and when he drank it his sickly complexion returned to normal. Then he returned the golden bowl to the lady, but she refused to take it back, saying that she had offered it to him so it was his. When he heard this, he threw the bowl into the river. People again criticized him for wasting it rather than giving it to the poor.

The Buddha said that the rich people's wealth belongs to the rich people. It means that, if he gave these precious ornaments to those poor people, they could sell them and benefit themselves temporarily. But it would become like a loan which they would have to pay back. Imagine if you are running a business but not very well, then the bank gave you a loan of three million dollars. It would be a surprise, and you would be happy. But because you were not good at business, you would lose the three million dollars and be left

with a burden of repayment for the rest of your life. That was why Buddha sent the cart back to the palace. Same with the golden bowl. Had he given it to the poor, it would be a benefit in short term but a burden in a long term. As Buddha said, giving something that is more than the recipient can handle, would turn into a burden. In the same way, ordained persons and full-time practitioners should not waste time giving or making wealth, or running charity, but spend more time listening to the Dharma, contemplating and meditating. What one does for small benefit for a short term becomes an obstacle to gaining buddhahood to help countless sentient beings. Spiritual growth is much more important than generosity with material things.

Live ethical life, have clear mind, be respected

A successful ordained person is someone who lives a very ethical life, spends a large amount of time in meditation, and has great wisdom as to what to adopt and what to abandon. Such person is capable of instructing others who are less capable and confused. If you are confused yourself, how can you help others? You would make others more confused too. The only person who can be helpful to others is someone who has a clear mind: 'what I am doing truly helps me', 'these things make me truly happy' or 'what I am doing will benefit me in the future'. With a clear mind one is able to give valid reasons for what one is doing. That person is the right person to instruct or supervise others. These qualities come as one lives ethically with a less deluded mind. When such a person meditates, the clarity of mind allows one to experience what is real, and out of that experience, one gains knowledge, that is wisdom. We need to know our roles. Once we know our roles, there is no complication: just by playing our role we make our lives useful, and are able to contribute to our society. We contribute to our family too: every family member has a role – as a parent, as a child and so on. If everyone played his or her role, there should be no complications. Problems arise when we do not play our roles, or do not know what our roles are, resulting in confusion. The monk's primary role consists of living ethically, meditating and developing wisdom.

Another role of the monk or nun is to be respectable – the quality of one of the three qualities of the Triple Gem. A monk is not worthy of respect only because he puts on monk's robe: he needs to lead an exemplary life, different

from those of ordinary people, and think, speak and act more nobly than other people. Also, his intention should be greater than that of others. When people think he or she is much nobler than they are, respect comes naturally. In Asian culture, people respect those in robes. Of course, they benefit others which is a good thing, but real respect comes from personal qualities that others see as worthy of respect. An ordained person needs to produce these qualities. If the person is distracted with making material wealth from lay people's sponsorship and so on, that is not a good karma.

Generosity for the householder

Next topic is a lay person's practice of generosity. There are two things to consider – how to practise generosity and the method of practising generosity. First, how to practise giving. As mentioned earlier, we have such attachment to our material wealth that is the cause of our stinginess. When you are stingy, it is very difficult to give. In order to break the ice, start with giving something – do not worry whether it is a right object or not. If you do not have an attitude to give, make a start with just giving anything – useful or useless. You can even go into the bush, collect one stone and give it to ants – ants are sentient beings. This exercise is about appearance and reality. We live in a world based on appearance. Appearance is deceptive. For example, it appears that the more we keep our wealth the more secure and happier we are. That is our perception, and that is why there is so much stinginess out there. In reality, wealth does not bring you what you expect. On the other hand, if you give a stone or wood and imagine that you are giving it to this insect, regardless of whether the insect knows it or accepts it. This idea of generosity suddenly gives you some pleasure. That is reality.

Once you know that giving brings you pleasure, it motivates you to give more to gain more opportunity to see the reality. So, first train your mind by pretending to give something and feel the pleasure. Once you are comfortable with it, look around to see who needs what, and give small things. Do not expect that your gift will be appreciated. Do not be arrogant. The moment arrogance arises, it causes suffering. The moment you have expectations, you get disappointed. You need to recognise these as obstacles and do not let these negative experiences happen. Come back to this mind: 'I want to give

to see a miracle. I didn't think I would be happy, but now I feel the happiness. It is a miracle'. Miracle means an unusual thing happening to you. But this particular miracle is something you can train to be your normal experience.

You can then increase it. Whenever you give, do not think that you are helping someone but rather think: 'this person is giving me an opportunity to practise generosity. Without this person I would not have the opportunity to give and I would not have this joy'. This joy does not merely come from your giving. It is a combination of three things: your intention to help, the person receiving and the object you are giving. If any one of the three is missing, there will be no joy. Once you are comfortable, the next step is to give something useful. Eventually, you will be able to give something that brings you close to attaining buddhahood. Do not rush. Develop yourself gradually by first giving some unnecessary things, then give more necessary things, and finally give something so valuable that would lead you to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Practising generosity

The householder is someone who is not engaged in monastic life. I will discuss how to practice generosity, and the method to improve practice of generosity.

There are three stages in practising generosity. The first is when one has a problem with giving; the second is even if one has the courage to give something, one gives wrong things; and the third is giving right things but it does not help one attain buddhahood.

Having problem with giving

Someone who has difficulty in giving needs to train to give something, regardless of what to give. Start with simple things – like a bowl of rice, a plate of vegetables, or even a glass of water – anything that keeps one in training. When training, give not just to your loved ones or friend. Train as often as possible. The reason is that generosity is the first stage in training one's mind. The second level of training, ethical discipline is the result of generosity, so if one does not have the cause to step up, one cannot progress. In that sense, generosity is of first and foremost importance.

Many of us think, due to our laziness, we can make a shortcut so we can

fast-track our progress towards enlightenment. This thinking is not logical. If our expectation to reach our goal fast, why are we not there yet? The correct way is to study the Buddhadharma. Sakya Pandita's *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* is based on Maitreya Buddha's *Mahayanasutralamkara*, in which Maitreya explains exactly what the Buddha said. So, this is a valid teaching that cuts a lot of unnecessary things and gets to the point. One cannot skip these trainings of the mind to make progress, and the first training is giving.

There is a story of a person who, due to stinginess, would be frightened whenever someone asked for something, like some people dislike people begging from them. An enlightened being manifested and helped this person, through a blessing, and changed the person's mind to want to give something. The moment the person gave, the action instantly gave this person such joy. This kind of mind training is so important. If you do not have the intention to give, do not wait until you feel like giving something. Just keep doing, keep doing, until one day the feeling comes to you.

I say this because in western society people are so preoccupied with their feelings. They say, 'I'd do it if I felt like it'. Following our feeling is sometimes healthy, but feeling alone never puts us in the right direction. So, follow what the Buddha said. Start with giving simple things. Once you are used to giving, and the more you see the benefit, then one day you may like to offer more valuable things, even your own life. This may sound strange, but think this way: when you meet someone in the street, you do not know anything about that person, so you do not feel like giving the person anything. Eventually, however, you get to know the person, who becomes your lover or good friend who is very kind to you. From the Dharmic point of view, someone who we have never met before has been very kind to us in your previous lives, providing what we needed as a parent or a close friend, not just once but many times. This was real but we have forgotten them due to our defilements. We will be able to see this once we completely cleanse our mind, and the cleanser is loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta. There is no other agent to wash our mind.

From our practice point of view, sentient beings are so important; without them, it is impossible for us to practise loving kindness, compassion and

bodhicitta. This is a logic we need to think again and again. The more we think about it, the more we understand the value of other sentient beings. When we understand the value of other sentient beings, we do not have a problem giving things to them. Why is it easier to give to our loved ones than giving to a stranger? It is because we see the value in our loved ones. So, we need to train our mind by thinking of the value. If we keep thinking, then we can feel the value of sentient beings. That is how to progress in loving kindness.

Śāntideva in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*) says that beginners should not give more than they can afford. A common problem is that, when we are excited and give everything, then later, sometimes years later, we regret it. In the beginning, we practised such generosity, but in the end, we feel bad about ourselves. We should not follow our excited mind that does not tell us the truth. Instead, we should follow the logic, the reason. Feelings often mislead us while logic and reason are reliable. It is like getting a new job. We get so excited and things look wonderful, but after weeks or months, we start complaining how bad the job is. So, start with giving simple things. Rather than following feelings or excitement, we need to train our mind to be stable.

This also applies to sharing jobs like washing dishes in a retreat situation, to make things easy for others or to make others comfortable. Do these without expectation but know that you are making others feel comfortable. If you expect something from others, like praise, you never know if you will get it or not. Just think that you are doing something valuable, joyful and purposeful. Recognising this makes you happy. When you train your mind this way, you will always be happy whenever you are helping others.

Not giving right things

When we give, it is very important to know what are the right things and what are the wrong things to give. To know what is right or wrong, we need wisdom. With wisdom, we can discern if something we intend to give will help the person to be happy temporarily or to have a higher rebirth or gain liberation ultimately. In that case, we should give. On the other hand, what we intend to give may satisfy the person but will cause him or her to remain

in samsara for a long time, or to be born in lower realms, or to create trouble in his or her life in future – such as drugs, or alcohol, or money that can be misused – then we should not give. Such gift would only cause harm. There is a list of thirty-two items you should not give, and thirty-two items that help others. You should recognise them (see *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* p.420).

Giving right things

Right giving can cause the person to be reborn in higher realms or help him or her to attain Sravakabuddha or Pratyekabuddha state. But as Mahayana practitioners our aim is not just giving to someone to attain worldly success or self-liberation, but to take them beyond samsara and self-liberation, that is buddhahood. For example, if someone is struggling to get food, which is causing obstacles to practising the Dharma, giving food will help him or her to the Path to gain buddhahood. Or, providing a retreat place to someone whose goal is the Mahayana Path will help the person. It is important that you offer something you can afford. Offering something that make you stressed will turn generosity into something negative. Giving what you can afford will bring you joy. You will also become part of the person's practice. This kind of giving causes you to attain buddhahood; giving a lunch to someone costs you nothing, but that can become a seed to attain buddhahood in someone's life. This way, you can make a valuable contribution.

It is your mind that matters. Price is irrelevant. For example, we think that a large piece of diamond is much more valuable than a small piece of wood. But if the piece of wood has a good provenance, people want it and it may fetch more money than the diamond. The value, therefore, does not exist in the material but in people's concept. If you are in the desert and thirsty, a glass of water is more valuable than a bucket full of diamonds. It is the humans that create the value of things. A glass of water costs nothing, but if you offer it in a right way, it may contribute to someone's Dharma practice to attain buddhahood.

The Buddha said "Do not be harsh on yourself. Be smart. If you are smart, every single moment will contribute to your attaining buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. If you are harsh on yourself and think 'I need to perfect my meditation', 'I need to perfect my understanding' and so on,

everything is 'I, I, I', you do not get anywhere. All you have is a mountain of 'I's. Think, instead, of 'you, you, you', then you will have huge success."

All great things come from helping others and wishing others' benefit. This is the logic we need to remember and adopt. We are changing our habit: the existing system, our habit, has trapped us in samsara. It does not work. So, we learn and adopt a new system that has worked in the past. This system is the Dharma. Try to give things that really contribute to attaining buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. This type of giving must contain three things: first, have compassion and think that you are giving something to free this person from suffering and the cause of suffering; second, such giving brings joy when you see what you are doing is a great benefit to others. When you are interested, you will find it easy to do, so it is a joyful effort. And third, out of compassion and joyful effort, you do whatever you can as an offering to sentient beings.

So, the three stages of training are: if you have problem with giving, just give anything; once you are comfortable, try to give the right thing, a good thing; then you feel good, and try to give something that causes you to attain buddhahood.

Training in mental action of generosity

There are two types of action in training in giving: mental action and physical action. First, we need to train ourselves in mental action. Chandrakirti says that, when a beggar asks you for something, you may not be inspired to give, but just think that this is an opportunity for you to perfect your generosity. Next time you are asked, try to think again that it is an opportunity for you. If you keep repeating, you will get used to it, and one day it will become reality and you are inspired to give.

You may think that such a way of thinking may sound good, but you are not inspired to practise. If so, think about all the past buddhas and bodhisattvas. They all trained according to what Sakya Pandita explained here; they kept training when people asked for something, and eventually they perfected generosity. Tell yourself that you are following the same technique. You may not feel generous now, but if you keep training, it will happen in the future. It is like starting a gym or yoga class: you may not feel what the instructors

promise you, but as you follow the instruction week after week, you will see the results as the instructor said. Then, you will be self-motivated. Same thing happens in spiritual progress: you are not motivated at first. That is why your teacher or senior student practitioners always encourage you to keep going, whether you like or not. Then one day, you will see the benefit and become motivated, and you will become a more independent practitioner.

That is the reason you need to be close to your teacher – someone who instructs you, someone who inspires you. Without such an environment, it is difficult to make a start and progress. Likewise, when someone asks you to give, think that this person is giving you an opportunity to attain bodhisattva and buddhahood. When you do tell yourself again and again, you will start thinking of the benefit, that this person is helping you to plant a seed for future progress. The more you think about it, the more you realise that you need sentient beings in order for you to practise generosity. It is like when you start a business, the success of your business depends on the customer. No matter how smart you are, without the customer you cannot be successful in your business. It is same with Dharma practice. Sitting on a cushion and thinking of bodhicitta will not make you enlightened. You need sentient beings to practise generosity and other qualities. Sentient beings are the essential ingredients in the recipe for attaining buddhahood. So, you need to value others.

If our partner says something nice to you, that makes us feel happy. That is because we value the person. This person who makes us happy was once a complete stranger. We have met and established the close relationship. So, why can we not establish that relationship with all sentient beings? It is because our mind is choosy; we only choose one or two to be friends. But if we stop being choosy and think all sentient beings are the same, we can make friends with everyone. The Dharma says we are capable of making friends with every sentient being.

Many great masters have respect for all beings. The XVI Karmapa, for instance, when he went to a zoo, all the birds would fly to him. If you sincerely have a respect for others and be kind to them, even animals can feel that. Even those animals you have never seen before would come close to you because

you have just the right intention. Wild animals have their own wisdom. Trusting others and believing in others is very important. If you ask buddhas for help yet you do not believe in them, even if they try to help, you will not be able to receive their help. You need to allow others to give you opportunities for your progress.

When someone asks you for help, support or other things, it is good to think that the person may be an emanation of a bodhisattva. Many bodhisattva emanations take ordinary forms and appear to test your practice and generosity. You may think you are good with something, but you cannot prove yourself unless tested; when someone annoys you, how tolerant you are is a test of your patience; when someone disturbs your mind, how calm you remain is a test of your meditation; when someone makes you unhappy, how much you still love the person is a test of your loving kindness. Real tests come from others, when they behave opposite to what you expect. In that sense, everyone out there, whether they have the intention to help us or not, are our real teachers: they teach us how to improve our practice, teach us whether or not we are doing meditation correctly, etc. They may not be in the form of teachers, but they teach us in different ways. If you have a wisdom mind, everyone is helping you; none of them actually cause you obstacles. But if you do not have the right wisdom, even someone helping you becomes your obstacle to practising the Path.

A Mahayana sutra says that, when you see beings, think that they are buddhas. That makes it easy to give. Give as offerings. For us with ordinary mind, it is easy to make an offering of candles and flowers to the Buddha's statue, but it is not easy to offer to ordinary beings. In reality, offering to sentient beings is more valuable than offering to a statue, because sentient beings are the cause for us to attain buddhahood. We need to understand this logic first, then keep training our mind. Sentient beings help us cultivate bodhicitta.

Training our mind to think that a person is an emanation of Buddha is very beneficial. Even just not having negative thoughts towards others has a tremendous benefit to us. This being, a person, may not be a buddha yet, but he or she has the potential to attain buddhahood. Also, from our point of

view, he or she is helping us to attain buddhahood. So, training our mind in these ways is most valuable.

Training in the action of generosity: the recipient

The training in actual giving is explained in three aspects: training in relation to the recipient, training in relation to time and training in relation to object – what we give. First, with regards to the recipient. Some of us feel comfortable with making an offering to the Buddha but are uncomfortable with offering to other beings. In other words, we discriminate who to give to in our mind. The Perfection of Generosity does not discriminate. We need to train our mind. Discriminating who to give is a common practice in society. But because we are Mahayana practitioners we should not discriminate; our loved ones and strangers are all important without exception. So, even when we are giving something to one person, we should consider in our mind that we are giving this to all sentient beings, rather than just one person. This is a training of our mind, to give everyone what he or she needs.

In our samsaric culture, we treat people according to our likes and dislikes. That discriminating mind is an obstacle to the Mahayana Path. We need to train our mind to consider every being as equal, every being as having the right to receive what we give. We need to say this to ourselves again and again. Then, one day we will have the courage to give something to the person we dislike. This solves a problem for us: the person did something to harm us in the past. The action ended there, but we have held a grudge against the person, constantly thinking about what he or she did to us. So, the moment we have the courage to give something he or she needs, the hurt we have held so long disappears. It is a huge relief to our minds.

If you do not have the courage to reach out to people you have problems with, just include them mentally. When you do refuge, include them; when you practise loving kindness, include them. One day, you will have enough courage to go out and help them. So, first prepare your mind. The more you feel comfortable thinking about it, one day you can put your kind thoughts into action. This is the training in regards to the recipient.

Training in the action of generosity: time

Next is training in regards to time. We tend to be selective about the timing

of giving: some of us may like to do good things on our birthday, for example. Again, as Mahayana practitioners, we should not wait for a special day – every day is a special day. A ‘special day’ is something that we have created; it does not exist in reality. The only time or day that is special is when we do something valuable. In other words, we can make every second valuable, a special time. It is up to us. We need to train our mind to think this way.

We do not need to physically go out and give something to someone. Even just sitting and meditating, we can think that ‘the reason I am meditating is to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings’. We are sitting here, sacrificing or giving our time for the sake of other sentient beings. We can do this any time without selecting time. We need to train our mind.

Training in the action of generosity: object to give

With training in object to give, you can begin with something simple, such as a glass of water. Gradually, you can upgrade what you give – a lunch or breakfast – whatever you can afford. The important point to remember, when giving, is that the definition of generosity is giving something to help other beings, and the definition of the Perfection of Generosity is giving someone the benefit to free him or her from samsara and nirvana, something that leads to the non-abiding nirvana. As I discussed earlier, what makes generosity perfect is when it consists of: bodhicitta as preliminary; wisdom and compassion as the main action; and dedication that the giving is for the sake of all sentient beings. Whatever you give, keep in mind that you are doing this practice for the sake of all sentient beings.

Also, whatever you give, think that if you have more, you can give more, to offer to every being. To keep wishing this way is the training of your mind. Do not underestimate the power of giving. We may think that a glass of water has no value, but it is the first step, in that a glass of water is better than not giving anything.

Furthermore, not giving is better than criticising or complaining about the person. And even criticising someone is better than robbing him or her. Further, even robbing the person is better than harming him or her. The point, as a Mahayana practitioner, is to make sure you do not become someone’s enemy. It is about how to be a good human being. What makes

you a good human being is not about education or good family and so on, but not to disturb anyone but try your best to help as much as you can. Being a good human being is the foundation if you want to gain self-liberation or attain buddhahood.

Generosity makes you a good person by not causing trouble but making friends with everyone. The Dalai Lama is an excellent example. The Chinese Communist Government treats him as their enemy, but he does not harbour ill feelings towards them. He treats them as friends.

We do not have control over others' view of us. But what we do have control over is our view of others. So, from our point of view, we try to train ourselves to see every being as equally important. If we live with that view, we can be good human beings. To be good human beings is up to us. What makes us good human beings is our wisdom mind, our compassion, our loving kindness. Generosity is a combination of all these three; it is not just one act of giving but when practised correctly, it contains all these qualities. That is the reason generosity is so important that the Buddha introduced it at the beginning of our Dharma Path.

How to perform the perfection of generosity

Four qualities to achieve

The Perfection of Generosity requires four qualities and abandonment of seven attachments. Understanding these helps us to identify the Perfection of Generosity.

The first quality is that, when we give, it is completely free from stinginess. Just give unconditionally. The second quality is the absence of the conceptual notion that 'I am giving' or 'I'm the giver' which means attaching a label to the giving. The third quality is that, in order not to be attached to the deed, the giving should be based on the understanding of emptiness – selflessness of the person and selflessness of phenomena. That means we have no concept of 'I' as the giver, the object as what we are giving, or the person who is receiving. The giving action should be in the emptiness of our wisdom mind. There is no "baggage" – no condition, no identity – completely free. This is the

best giving: no hidden agenda, not even a slight expectation. That makes the object a pure gift. Then, the fourth is what we are giving. Temporarily it fulfils the person's wish, and ultimately it causes our attaining buddhahood. When we perfect generosity, that leads us to the second perfection, then to the next, and eventually to the perfect buddhahood. These qualities are at an advanced stage; we are not there yet. But we must have some reference right now to know what the perfect generosity is and what is not.

Seven attachments to abandon

We also need to abandon seven attachments in order to make our generosity perfect. First, attachment to things we give to others. We discussed four types of generosity: material gift, fearlessness gift, loving kindness gift and Dharma gift. Attachment to the gift means, for example, for a teacher to think 'I am a teacher, I have a lot of the Dharma to give you' is attachment to the Dharma he or she gives. Similarly, telling someone 'I'm here giving you a lot of support when you're lonely, when you're scared. I'm here to make you feel comfortable' is attachment to our kindness. When we have attachment, it is not giving. It is a kind of business; it is like saying 'I am selling this kindness to you, so you have to pay back to me'. That is not giving. Giving should be letting go of what we give. One good way of training our mind is when we offer fruit or flower to the shrine. Whether or not we are truly offering that flower or this fruit or chocolate to the Buddha is tested when someone takes it in front of us. If we get upset, then we are not really offering but still thinking they are my flowers, my chocolate etc. Tibetans say, 'once you place a tormo on the shrine, then that belongs to the Buddha, not to you. So, it doesn't matter if someone takes it away'. We cannot do this test ourselves; others test us how good, proper or perfect our practice is.

Second is attachment to procrastination or laziness. 'I'm so tired, I can't do it now' or 'I don't have money now, so I'll wait till I get money'. We tend to delay everything. If we have a lot of time, delaying would not be a problem. But life is short; it comes and goes like lightning at night. We should abandon this attachment to delaying.

The third attachment is premature satisfaction, thinking that the small amount – of material things, loving kindness, Dharma or fearlessness – is

enough. Instead of being comfortable with giving only small things, we should never be satisfied and must continue to improve ourselves. Otherwise we will not grow or progress.

The fourth attachment is expectation for return. Again, if we expect a return, we are not really giving. Wrong giving can be from two reasons: one is not giving genuinely to help others, and the other is giving in expectation of getting more from the recipient. This kind of giving causes us suffering instead of joy, because when the recipient does not respond in the way we expect, we suffer. In such a case, the Buddha says, we are the ones hurting ourselves, not the other person who does not respond the way we expect.

There is no need to expect returns from your generosity. Because of interdependent origination, when you give something that will definitely have a result. But the result does not need to come from the recipient; there will be two kinds of result: generosity causes a lot of joy, which is one result; also, you are creating a cause for this life or future life, so you will have a result. Cause and result will never betray each other: that is the law of karma. Whatever cause you create, whether you like it or not, the result will come to you. So, you should abandon expectations for your giving.

The fifth is attachment to the result. Again, the law of cause and effect says that if you practise generosity, you will be wealthy in your next life; if you practise loving kindness, you will be happy in your next life; if you practise the Dharma, you will have wisdom in your next life. Then you have attachment to the result. The disadvantage of attachment to the result is that, while you are doing this practice you are not going to enjoy it.

That is the reason why many unskilled practitioners, when they meditate, chant mantras or do practice, thinking of the result of their practices and rushing themselves and stressing out. They are not enjoying every moment, thinking what their practices will bring in future. Dharma says, every minute you meditate, enjoy it. The result will come later as you have created it, so just enjoy every moment of good things you do.

The sixth is attachment to the opposite of generosity – stinginess, clinging to what you have, such as your wealth, your knowledge etc. and not wanting to share. You should abandon that.

THE PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY

And the seventh is attachment to distraction. There are three types of distraction. One is the general wandering of distracted mind. For example, when you buy a lottery, you start thinking about what you are going to buy if you win. Likewise, while you are giving, your mind begins to wander, thinking about what will come as the result. Another is when you are giving, you are distracted by the thoughts like 'this will help free me from my own suffering and gain enlightenment' and so on. This is wrong from the Mahayana point of view, because Mahayana generosity is without self-interest; the prime interest should be on other sentient beings. The last type is when giving you think, 'I am someone who can afford to give this valuable thing to this poor person who needs help'. You are attached to yourself, and the object you are going to give, and you are discriminating the recipient as a poor person, someone who is below yourself. With attachment to such distraction, your giving becomes a worldly cause, not towards liberation. Attachment causes you to be reborn in samsara.

So, you should become free from the concept of self, other and object. Just giving. Recognise these seven attachments you should avoid; absence of these seven attachments make your giving the Perfection of Generosity.

BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY

The conclusion part of generosity is the benefits of the practice of generosity. This has two sub-topics: temporary benefits and long-term or ultimate benefits.

Temporary benefits of generosity

First, temporary benefits. When you have a giving nature, naturally people love you and become close to you. Giving is not just about material gifts but also includes loving kindness, fearlessness and Dharma. Being liked by people is not a listed benefit of the practice of generosity in the Dharma. It is only a side benefit. Most importantly, giving makes you richer in yourself: if you give wealth, it naturally increases your wealth; when you give fearlessness,

you become more fearless yourself; the more love you give, the happier you become in yourself; and the more Dharma you give, because you are giving wisdom, you become a wiser person yourself. The more you give, the more you get. As I mentioned before, if we plant a corn, one seed can bring hundreds of corn plants. Likewise, giving one thing can bring inconceivable results. These are the prime benefits of the practice of generosity. Other benefits include that people say nice things about you. Whether you know it or not, people speak good things about you – how generous, how warm you are.

In addition, the person who does the right thing always has more luck than bad luck. Because one has the right cause, one is more successful in everything one does instead of having to struggle. Also, as Śāntideva says in *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, we do not need to wait for a long time to attain buddhahood: life after life, the practice of generosity brings immense benefits. Imagine that, if you offer one glass of water to a thirsty person, the person appreciates it instantly, and is grateful to you. So, we do not need to do major things to make us happy; just small efforts of generosity are enough to bring us happiness. Even if you offer nice words to someone ‘you are such a beautiful person’, while it is not so much effort on your part, it will be enough to make the person happy. Making the person happy makes you feel good.

We tend to think we have to work very hard to achieve happiness. We spend thousands of dollars weekly or monthly on someone who we think will make us happy, and, in the end, there is no guarantee that we will obtain happiness. The real and practical way to happiness is to open your heart, just say one nice word to someone or do some noble act for someone. That is enough to make you happy. You can do this not only to human beings but also to animals, like our pets. Say something kind; carry some nice food in your pocket and give it to the animal. Such simple things actually make you happy. We do not need millions of dollars to make us happy. If it does cost millions of dollars, it would be difficult for us to be happy, as many of us do not have such money in our pocket. It is important to give from our heart and see the pleasure of others. That makes us very happy, and it is practical.

Maitreya Buddha says in the *Mahayanasutralamkara Sutra*, that one who

genuinely practises generosity does so without any expectation for return; one's intention is only to help others and nothing else. Nevertheless, whether one has the desire for return or not, when one gives, the result will come: it is the nature of cause and effect. Great masters or practitioners do not have expectation to get something back, but gifts keep pouring – even things they do not want! This is the result of their generosity. Many of us want something badly yet cannot get it because of our own lack of generosity. These are just a few things that can bring benefit in this life.

Benefits in future life

In future lives, the practice of generosity has benefits through karma. I will explain two ways of how karma works: 'the result similar to the cause/experience' and 'the result similar to the action'. The result similar to the cause or experience means that, because one practised generosity in this life, in next life one is born with abundance of wealth. This is natural. If you do not know the Dharma, you would wonder about those children of wealthy families. Without understanding of karma, you would think they are just lucky. In Buddhism there is no such thing as coincidence. One is born in a wealthy family because one has the karma to deserve wealth. There will be no result without the cause. The person practised generosity in the past, therefore he or she is reborn with abundant wealth.

The result similar to the action means that, when one practised generosity in the past, one is naturally happy to give things to others also in this life without encouragement or advice from anyone. We see people with no background in spirituality who always enjoy giving. These are the results similar to the action. Often people see a generous child and think 'this child's parents are stingy, and so are his or her friends. But this child is different – he or she always likes to give. Where does this child's trait come from?' If you do not have an understanding of karma, you have no answer. You only have to guess. But when you study how karma works, you know that this child previously had a habit of giving, and brought this habit to this life, without knowing it himself or herself. In turn, giving brings tremendous joy to the child. This is the result similar to the action.

Another benefit of constantly practising generosity with the right moti-

vation is that you will never be born in places where there are shortages, but will be born in places of abundance. That is the nature of karma: when you see an object and see its value and then offer it to someone, the way you value it conditions your mind. This mind in turn chooses where this valuable wealth is found; when you respect wealth, it naturally attracts you. For this reason, you will be born in the right places where there is no shortage of food, drinks and the like. But if you disrespect wealth, it will not attract you. One of the sutras says that if we all practised generosity constantly, hungry ghosts would not exist. We often describe the hungry ghost realm as a physical environment and physical conditions, but in reality, it is a mental state. If the mind does not have the right condition for consuming food or drink, then one does not see food and drink as eatable or drinkable, even while suffering from hunger and thirst. Practising generosity keeps you out of this kind of suffering – it is one of the antidotes to the hungry ghost realm. These are the temporary benefits of generosity in this and future lives.

But it is not good to force yourself to practise generosity. That is because if you force yourself, the practice will not last. Eventually you will be tired of it. Instead of rushing to be generous, you should give yourself time to think about the benefits of generosity – what are the advantages in this life and in future lives. As you contemplate on these benefits, you will be gradually motivated as it is something valuable that you should do. When generosity comes naturally to you, it lasts much longer and becomes part of your life. That is much healthier.

As I said before, we tend to be so driven by our feelings or excitement. But our feelings and excitements are very unreliable. We may feel good today and do too much, then tomorrow we lose that feeling. Today you are a good Buddhist practitioner, and tomorrow you become anti-Buddhist. Today you are a bodhisattva and tomorrow you are a demon! That is because you follow your whim and excitements rather than your natural feeling. So, it is good to always give time to reflect on the benefits of generosity and the disadvantages of not practising generosity. This way you can become a truly generous person.

Ultimate benefits of generosity

When considering the ultimate benefit of practising generosity, just think of the Buddha when he taught the Dharma: he had an inconceivable number of disciples. The immense number of disciples is a result of his generosity in his previous lives. As I said earlier, Buddha was not always a monk: in his previous lives he lived as a business person, a king, a minister... When living these lives, he gave material things to all the needy people. Then, when he became a monk, he practised giving of loving kindness, fearlessness and the Dharma. As a result, he attained buddhahood.

After he had gained enlightenment, giving to others was almost like having a treasure island: no matter how much he gave, the treasures did not diminish but rather multiplied. The 'generosity treasure' is much greater than the ocean: if you take a bucket of water out of the ocean, you may not see any decline but it is still one bucketful less water. On the other hand, the nature of this treasure is such that no matter how much you take, it grows more the next day. This is the ultimate benefit: one of the causes to attain buddhahood is the Perfection of Generosity. Without the Perfection of Generosity, one will not attain buddhahood.

There is much more to add to the ultimate benefits; no matter how many times you give wisdom, it will never decrease. No matter how much love you give, love never diminishes. All this is the result of generosity. So, we have completed the first perfection of generosity.

The Perfection of Moral Conduct

The second perfection is the Perfection of Moral Conduct or Ethical Discipline. Again, this has three topics: first, definition of moral conduct; second, moral conduct itself; and third, the benefits of moral conduct.

DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF MORAL CONDUCT

First, the general definition of moral conduct is abandoning non-virtue for the sake of others. Non-virtue is something that harms others. This definition is very important, because Buddhism defines morality in one way and other religions define it in other ways. We hear about morality all the time but we get confused because there are different versions of it. In Buddhism, moral conduct is abandoning things that are harmful to others. Only when one knows the definition can one differentiate it from wrong ethics. This is the general definition.

The definition of the Perfection of Moral Conduct/Ethical Discipline, as with the Perfection of Generosity, consists of three elements: intention, action and conclusion. Intention must be motivated by bodhicitta, that is, to practise ethical discipline in order to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. The main action must be based on the view of emptiness – of self and all phenomena – without grasping on self who is practising. Then, the conclusion is to dedicate whatever moral conduct one practises towards attaining buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. So, a bodhicitta motivation, action based on the view of emptiness and dedication make a

moral conduct perfect. This definition is unique to Buddhism.

MORAL CONDUCT ITSELF

Obstacles to Mahayana moral conduct

The second topic is moral conduct itself. This has three sub-topics: one, identifying the obstacles to moral conduct; two, the antidotes for the obstacles; and three, performing the correct moral conduct. There are three obstacles to moral conduct or ethical discipline. To avoid confusion, it should be noted that we are talking about the Mahayana perspective here. These are three things that are obstacles to Mahayana ethical discipline.

Obstacle 1: Not being able to uphold vows

The first is being unable to uphold vows, that is, one goes out killing, stealing, telling lies, harbouring negative minds and the like. These unethical actions are obstacles to practising the Mahayana Path, because whenever one creates these mental, physical and vocal actions one is hurting others and hurting oneself. Anything that hurts oneself or others is an obstacle to the Path.

Obstacle 2: Misguided conducts

The second obstacle is misguided conduct for example, some religions believe that killing animals and sacrificing their blood and flesh to the gods is ethical. But it is unethical from the Buddhist point of view, because such actions hurt other beings. When some people say that something is ethical and others say it is unethical, we need to look at the definition of ethical conduct. From the Buddhist point of view, it means abandoning harming others. This is not about criticising other religions. Rather, it is about the reality of ethics. From Mahayana Buddhist point of view, anything that harms others, even in the name of religion, cannot be ethical. This is a clear-cut definition.

Also, some believers of certain religions do not respect religions other than their own. They consider criticising other religions is ethical. That argument is also unethical from a Buddhist point of view, because religion

is an individual choice which should be respected. To think that harming others out of disrespect of their religion to be a virtue, does not make sense. It is not logical. Studying the Dharma gives you real wisdom, to distinguish between true ethics and non-ethics. If you do not have the wisdom, you would not know what to adopt, what to abandon. If we examine our life, we are constantly abandoning what we should adopt, and adopting what we should abandon. We have made many mistakes in the past, and we are experiencing their consequences right now. If we do not change, we will keep making the same mistakes. If we are born with those mistakes and die with the mistakes, our whole precious life will be wasted.

It is better to be late than never. Do not think that changing yourself in your old age is meaningless. Think of Milarepa. He was almost in his middle age when he entered the Dharma, and in a very short period of time he gained high realisation. Time is not important. Some people say 'I wish I came to the Dharma at a young age,' but young age is not an advantage nor old age a disadvantage. With the Dharma, it is about how strong your determination is. With a strong determination, even if you die tomorrow, today you have more than enough time to practise the Dharma. There is a story of Khenchen Kunga Wangchok: an old man came to him and asked 'I am an old man and will die soon. Is it worth for me to become ordained?' Khenchen Kunga Wandchok replied: '...even if you die tomorrow, it is worth receiving ordination today'. So, it is never too late, because death is only of the body. The mind will not die but will continue. If you connect with the Dharma today, tomorrow you are automatically connected. You do not need to be a nun or monk for twenty years; if you connect to the Dharma today, it is never too late.

When we understand what is unethical, this awareness brings mindfulness to us, which we need. The reason we need a powerful mindfulness is because we carry our habits in life, and these habits are more faulty than wise. We need to protect ourselves from these faulty habits so that we do not keep carrying them. We need something powerful to stop them, and mindfulness is the tool to stop them. If we know something is not right, we need to change it. But change does not happen overnight. When we have strong habits rushing like a

flood, a few sand bags will not stop its force. But if we keep building the sand bags, each time putting more and more, then eventually it might be possible to redirect the floodwater. Similarly, we have to build our mindfulness, each and every time making it stronger and stronger, until eventually, with enough mindfulness, it may be possible to shift the habit. It is a manual process, not high-tech: the Dharma is not an automatic system, so we need to build it up gradually. When you make a mistake, do not blame yourself – blaming does not help you but discourages you. Be motivated instead of bashing yourself. Feeling bad about yourself does not make you stronger: it will make you weaker. Instead, you should recognise that something is not right, so you need to change. Always be optimistic. This is very important when practising the Dharma.

Obstacle 3: Right ethics but obstacle to the Mahayana Path

The third obstacle is right ethics which can be obstacle to the Mahayana Path. For example, in the Theravada practice, for those on the Hinayana Path, the nature of samsara is clearly seen as suffering, and the practitioners seek their own liberation. They know that suffering is caused by the ten non-virtues, so they commit themselves to avoid non-virtues. These are right ethics, but for the Mahayana Path they are not right because the intention is for their own liberation only, leaving out all sentient beings. These two Paths need to be differentiated.

These are the three obstacles to the Mahayana discipline. The first two are the most dangerous: if you practise them it will bring more suffering than happiness. The last obstacle will not bring suffering – it will bring nirvana. But it does not take you to buddhahood, so it is still an obstacle to the Mahayana Path.

Disadvantages of unethical conduct

There are two disadvantages of not practising moral conduct: those in this life and those in future lives. First, the disadvantages in this life. With ordained persons, monks or nuns, if they break their vows, they will be despised. In Western culture, if a Christian monk or nun returns to secular life, I do not know how the society sees them. In Eastern culture, even if monks and nuns want to leave the monastery or nunnery, they often stay

due to cultural pressure. If they disrobe, people tend to consider them not worthy of respect. But that is not the dharmic way. The way of the Dharma is not adding to their sadness and suffering but to be supportive, and say, 'I know you feel bad about disrobing. What can I do to make you feel better?' But in society in general, people can be harsh, and criticise behind their back, which is a disadvantage of breaking the vow. Also, a person who breaks the vow usually has a low self-esteem, and thinks 'I am not a good person, I am not worthy to be in the temple, or have respect from others' and so on. He or she no longer feels equal to other monks or nuns.

Disrobed people can easily have negative opinions of themselves. When they are negative, they easily attract negative spirits. This can cause much harm. When one is having low self-esteem and the community lets one down, one can become like a zombie – one's mind is not with the body, becoming a lost soul. With low self-esteem, one would feel insecure and easily frightened of others, like a badly treated dog. A psychologically damaged dog is afraid of even a kind person. The primary cause of such low self-esteem is the recognition that one did not uphold the vow. Other conditions come from outside making one feel further down. These are some of the disadvantages of breaking the vow.

The ultimate or long-term future disadvantages of unethical conduct are as stated in the *King of the Samadhi* sutra, "The prime cause to be born in the lower realms is unethical conduct". In particular, actions contrary to ethical discipline is the cause to be born as a naga. A naga is half animal, half human, the most intelligent animal. Eventually one's karma is exhausted, and one is reborn as human, but in a deprived environment as explained in the section of generosity.

Karmic results similar to the experience

Two of the ways karma works are 'result similar to the experience' and 'result similar to the action'. Result similar to the experience means, for example, if one commits killing it results in that, even if one is reborn as human, one has a shortened life, or experiences diseases. These are the result of previously harming others. Then, if one steals others' wealth, in the new life one has less wealth; one always remains poor, no matter how hard one

tries to make wealth. If one commits sexual misconduct, in one's new life one will find many partners but they tend not to last or the relationship is harmful. Similarly, if one tells lies, in this life people criticise you or complain about you no matter how hard you try to do the right thing. If one has a coveting mind, then in this life one cannot fulfil one's wishes – there are always obstacles to your goal, destroying your hope, your goal. Sometimes one is sad, unhappy without reason. Nothing happens without a cause, but we do not see the cause ourselves. In teachings on karma it says that because one always harmed others, whether in this life or in past lives, then naturally the consequence is that one is a sad person, a naturally unhappy person.

But you should not be frightened of the Dharma: you should not be practising the Dharma out of fear – if you do, then you are not going to enjoy it. You should have wisdom to know the consequences of your actions and avoid negative actions. It is like our diet. Many of us have an allergy to this food and that food, so we avoid particular foods that make us sick. We choose the right food without fear; we are happy to be able to choose the right food that does not harm us. Similarly, we need to choose right deeds. Gently avoid deeds that cause harm to us. This is how the Dharma introduces us and explains to us things that cause us problems. Once we become aware of them, it is now our choice. Do we want to continue with our unfavourable feelings or do we want to change them? It is up to us. This is what we call practice. Practice is not just about sitting for a long time, calming our mind; it is not just about chanting millions of mantras. Practice means changing – changing things we do that harm us or things that are disadvantageous to us. It means recognising them and changing them into those that benefit us, make us happier. That is practice. The mind needs to change: it needs to think differently, do things differently and speak differently. You are still the same person. You are an arrogant person called John, and if you practise bodhicitta and become a bodhisattva, you are still John. You do not have a different name. But now you are a different type of person. When you were arrogant, people disliked you. Now you are a bodhisattva, everyone loves you. Your name has not changed. What has changed is your mind. When your mind changes, so does your personality. That is due to the practice. We

do not try to change our physical appearances; we try to change our inner qualities. That is the practice. These are a few examples of the result similar to the experience.

Karmic results similar to the action

Result similar to the action means that, if you keep telling lies in this life, you continue to lie in your next life. People think, 'her parents are so honest, her friends are so honest, then where did she get her lying habit from?' Again, this is karma. The person used to tell lies in the past brings the lying habit into this life. In our world, we do not understand why certain people have a certain personality. Karma explains it very clearly: it is because of the past habit of the person. The same can be said of stealing, coveting mind and the like. If we do not interrupt this continuation, these habits will repeat life after life. For this reason, even if we cannot completely uproot all our unethical conducts, just interrupting the habit a little is good enough. It is like trying to quit addiction to smoking or drinking. We cannot expect to stop it altogether tomorrow, but we can interrupt it first. 'I used to smoke every hour. Now I try to smoke every few hours'. If you can manage that, then you can make the gap between smoking longer. Then, one day, you can stop smoking altogether. Same thing with alcohol: 'I used to have three glasses of wine. Now I'll reduce it to two glasses a day'. It is important to know that everything is possible if you really want it. If you do not want it, nothing is possible.

So, you need to think whether you should follow your habit or follow logic. Logic gives you hope. Habit never gives you hope. Instead, it takes you down further and further, until you think you are a worthless person. Who makes you worthless? No one has the power to make you worthless; the only person who can make you worthless is yourself. Who can make you a buddha? No one. Your teacher can guide you; your sangha can support you; but the only person who can make you a buddha is yourself. If someone else has the power, the Buddha himself would have made many buddhas, without practice, without meditation. If our parents had the power to make us good people, the whole world would be perfect. No parent wants bad kids. But they can only provide the environment. In the end, the only person who can

make a good person is that individual, no one else.

We need to embrace this logic in our minds. We need to have confidence in our ability to do what we want to do. A good friend may tell you to stop smoking, but unless you yourself want to stop, nothing will stop you. These are examples of results similar to the action. You can apply this to the ten non-virtues: coveting, harmful thoughts, wrong view, lying, divisive words, harsh words, idle talk, killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. It is a good exercise of our mind to meditate, rather than just sitting and thinking of nothing. By reflecting and analysing your mind against these, you are developing a type of wisdom. The most useful thing in our life is wisdom. Wisdom does not come to us by only listening to someone. We must really put an effort ourselves to think what makes us feel good and what makes us feel bad. Realisation of these is wisdom. It is important to reflect and analyse the disadvantages of unethical conduct in this and future lives.

Antidotes to the obstacles

Antidotes to the cause

The second sub-topic of the moral conduct itself is the antidotes. There are two things: the antidote to the cause of unethical conduct, and the antidote to the result of unethical conduct.

The cause of unethical conduct is powerful affliction or defilement. Defilement is very clear. For instance, ask yourself: 'why am I having this coveting mind?' A coveting mind is a powerful desire mind – always wanting this, wanting that, wishing to have this and that; it is a result of unstable desire mind. If you do not have a desire mind, you will not have a coveting mind. That's logical. So, it is not easy to directly tackle the problem by thinking 'I want to stop my coveting mind'. You cannot stop it that way. In order to stop your coveting mind, you need to know its cause, and work to reduce the cause.

We live in this desire realm and are controlled by our desire boss, our job is desire, our activities are based on desire. That is unavoidable, so we need to be very mindful. For instance, many of you have been to India where we have

to be very careful of what we eat and what we drink, because hygiene is not good there. We know this in advance, so when we go we are very mindful of eating the right food, drinking the right drinks so that we do not get sick. It is not just in India – we need to be aware that nothing is safe unless we are always mindful.

In the developed world, it is very easy to arouse our desire mind: everywhere we see beautiful things, high-tech things, wonderful things. The political and social systems are based on material things. Everyone's ultimate goal is to make profits. When the shopkeeper is very nice to you, it is because he or she wants to sell something to you. This desire mind is the cause of a coveting mind, and it is the coveting mind that does unethical things. Directly, the desire mind corrodes ethical conduct, and indirectly, it causes the powerful coveting mind. It is same with the anger mind: when we get angry, and if the anger becomes stronger, eventually it manifests in speech as harsh words, mentally harmful thoughts, and physically harming others. What is the cause or pressure to create these? It is the anger mind. So, when we commit these acts, we are breaking ethical discipline, and doing so breaches the vow we have taken. Same with ignorance: when ignorance arises, we do not have understanding of cause and effect, and it manifests in wrong views. Out of ignorance we have idle talk. When we are engaged in idle talk, our desire mind, anger mind and ignorant mind also arise. So much of unhealthy mind arises out of idle chatter. Ignorance is the prime cause of stealing, killing and sexual misconduct. Then again, we break the vows. There are the three poison minds, but actually there are six root defilements, and twenty-one branch defilements. All of these are factors that cause us the powerful negative body, mind and speech.

Antidotes to desire mind

Now, with this awareness we need to reduce the desire mind, the first poisonous mind. The goal of the desire mind is the same as that of loving kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta mind: happiness. In terms of the goal, there is no difference. The difference is that one mind knows the exact cause of happiness, and the other mind does not know it. Loving kindness knows exactly how to be happy: wishing others to be happy and doing what makes

others happy. The happiness comes from the mind, not from others. Loving kindness deals with the wisdom that makes the mind positive and happy. Desire mind does not know that: it relies on others to make it happy. It expects this person to make it happy, money to make it happy, a place to make it happy. It keeps chasing after these things, but they do not make the expected happiness, because it is looking in the wrong place to find happiness. Desire is driven by ignorance; loving kindness is driven by wisdom. They both want the same thing, but while one can achieve it, the other cannot.

If we look into our lives, we are always running after the unachievable path instead of the achievable path. It is very important to be aware of this. The desire beings always take the desire path, resulting in more suffering than happiness. Enlightened beings take the path of love and compassion, resulting in happiness rather than suffering. With this awareness, we now need to switch from our existent path to the new path. The new path is the way to gain happiness. As long as I and all beings remain on the old path, we remain in the state of suffering.

One common desire is attachment to a person. Śāntideva suggested ways to overcome desire mind for ordained persons: if one looks at a skeleton, there is nothing attractive about skeletons. Neither are the flesh and bones under the skin. The reality is, underneath the appearance of an attractive person there is nothing attractive. But when one does not see the reality, the outer appearances – clad in costumes and decorations can deceive one. We human beings are very smart in some things, yet in other things we are easily fooled. We know that, but we still get attracted. When we bake a cake, it looks ordinary. But as soon as it is decorated, the same cake becomes very attractive.

If we understand this reality, the knowledge reduces the desire mind. We cannot just cast away our desire mind and get another one. If you dislike your desire mind and develop an aversion to it, then you end up with another form of negative mind. Instead, think of the object you are attached to, and examine whether it truly makes you happy or not. If you find nothing, you will naturally lose interest in it. Then you are liberated from it. The only thing that frees you is your mind, the wisdom that knows exactly the nature

of phenomena. Then you will not be attached to things: understanding of reality helps you reduce your desire mind.

Antidotes to anger mind

The second poisonous mind is anger mind. If you keep building up anger, it does a lot of damage. Anger's job is to cause harm to you and to others, nothing else. Again, anger and loving kindness have the same goal: happiness. But when we are not happy, we get angry; when we are happy, we do not get angry. Anger never arises when we are happy; it only arises when we are not happy. Anger is a wrong means we use to make us happy, so it will not give us happiness. With this awareness, again we need to train ourselves. The best way to be happy is to train our mind in loving kindness: the wish for others to be happy and to have the cause of happiness. Loving kindness is one of the methods to reduce anger mind. The prime antidote of anger is patience. We will discuss it in the Perfection of Patience. But if you continue to practise loving kindness it will really help you to reduce anger mind.

Antidotes to ignorant mind

The third poisonous mind is ignorance. Ignorance is a big topic: it means that, what the whole world is telling us (except the Dharma) is the cause of happiness, is actually the cause of unhappiness: almost everything is the cause of unhappiness. Some lie about it, others believe in it, and we also believe that what is the cause of unhappiness to be the cause of happiness. Look at it simply, happiness is a result. So, to produce happiness, what is required?

As I mentioned earlier, the cause of happiness is positive actions – mental, physical or vocal. Only positive actions can produce happiness. We need to check all the things we believe make us happy whether they are virtuous or not; if they are not virtuous, then we should not expect them to bring happiness. Against this criterion, objects, positions, fame, reputation are not the cause of happiness. They are just conditions – conditions to be happy, to be disappointed, or to be unhappy. This principle is again about the mind. When your mind is virtuous, these conditions will make you happy.

Happiness comes from this unique cause – not from any other cause or non-cause. This is the nature of interdependence. The apple must come from its own seed, not from an orange seed, not from the banana tree. It must have

the unique cause to have an apple fruit. Also, just having the right seed is not good enough: you need the right climate, the right soil and so on. When all the conditions are met, they produce the apple. It is exactly the same with happiness. Many things are needed: the seed is the virtuous mind; you need a positive environment; true desire to be happy is the right climate. When all these come together, then happiness is the result. If one of them is missing, you will not get the result no matter how badly you want it. If happiness can be achieved by people's wish to be happy, why is this world not happy when everyone wants happiness? Wishing alone does not give us happiness, just as the seed alone will not produce fruit.

When you listen to the Dharma, do not be too tense. Be relaxed. Try to see it from many angles. If you are relaxed, there is a good opportunity to see all the angles. Then you will have a clear picture. If you are too tense focusing on one thing, you cannot see different angles and will miss out on many things. Do not pressure yourself to catch every word. Rather, understand the basics. You can find out details later on, but for now understanding the basic idea is important. Then you can go home, listen to more Dharma, read more and think. But if you do not have the foundation, it is very hard to improve your knowledge. Here, we are covering the basic understanding. Later on, you add more by self-study or in a group discussion. As you share more, more things become clear to you. So, the antidote to ignorance is the understanding of the interdependent origination, from the positive point of view.

Understanding the difference between causes and conditions

Due to negative point of view, we have suffering. Suffering is not a result of bad luck. Suffering is not a result of someone treating us badly. Suffering is not a result of being poor. These are just conditions – things that we always thought made us sad or unhappy are just conditions. The only cause of sadness or unhappiness is our own non-virtuous mind. That is the seed, the cause that makes us unhappy. For instance, I might say: 'I am unhappy because someone is saying bad things about me'. If this person says bad things about me, the person may also be saying bad things about my friend. But my friend, instead of feeling bad, may feel sorry for this person, thinking he or she must be unhappy. So, this friend is feeling compassion towards the

bad-mouthing person. In other words, it is not the person saying things that make you unhappy; it is how you respond to the bad-mouthing that makes you unhappy. If you respond in a compassionate way, it will make you feel good. You may think: 'I have the opportunity to help this person who is unhappy'.

As in this example, many things we think are the cause of our unhappiness, are not the real cause. They are just conditions. The real cause of unhappiness is our own mind that is not happy with what we hear from others. This unhappy mind makes you suffer. It is so important, therefore, to differentiate the cause of unhappiness from the condition of unhappiness. This is understanding interdependent origination. If you have this understanding, you have more power to gain happiness, more power to remove unhappiness. Without the knowledge of interdependent origination, you do not have control of your mind. If you cannot control your mind, when you are surrounded by good things you are happy; when you are surrounded by not so good things you are unhappy. In such case, your happiness will be based on luck. You will have no control. Some new age people say, 'whatever the universe offers me, I will go with it'. This is like being a zombie – someone else is driving your life. From the Buddhist point of view, no one is driving your life but yourself. This is very important.

Arrogant mind is an ignorant mind

We are small-minded people. We think: if I have one dollar more than others, I am richer; if I know one word more than others, I am more intelligent; I can run faster than others, so I am the fastest runner. This small-mindedness makes us very arrogant. In Tibetan we have a saying that means, when you listen to the Dharma, you will be aware how vast, how profound and how difficult it is to understand. The more you know about the Dharma it subdues your mind: 'what I know is very little. There is so much to learn'. Other people hear the Dharma, learn a few extra terms and think they know a lot. These people are not really hearing the Dharma, not really understanding the Dharma yet. The more you listen to the Dharma, the humbler you become, because then you become aware how little you know. Then, one is really listening to the Dharma. This is a sign of your

understanding of the Dharma.

Likewise, the sign of a successful meditator is, the more he or she meditates, the less defilements she or he has. If someone thinks 'I am a better meditator than others; I can sit longer than others' and such things, this person is not meditating, because this kind of meditation supports your defilements rather than reduces them. How you check your understanding of the Dharma is humbleness, and how you check your progress in meditation is whether or not it is reducing your defilements. The best way to reduce your arrogance is to think: 'I may be the best in this group, but may not be in other groups. There are many people who are much better than I'.

Arrogance is an obstacle to progress. In practical thinking, none of us are the best in terms of knowledge, experience, skills or qualities. There are many who are better than I, so I just need to be content with myself. There is no need to put yourself down, to think you are the worst in such and such. Instead, think that you are doing what you can, and there are many who are worse than you. Even if you are at the top in the desire realm, you are not as good as those in the form realms. Then, in the formless realm there are better meditators than those in the form realm. Even if you are at the top of the formless realm, you are much less than the enlightened beings. When you reach enlightenment there is no arrogance because there is no self – enlightenment is selfless. We can be arrogant up to the formless realms but beyond that there is no arrogance because you have by then realised the selflessness of the person and selflessness of phenomena. There is no competition. So, always think that someone is better than you. That makes you humble. This is the antidote to arrogant mind.

Emptiness eradicates all defilements

The individual antidotes to desire, anger, ignorance and arrogance we discussed above are only temporary, just like the medicine that only relieves symptoms but does not cure the disease. The one medicine that cures everything is the realisation of emptiness. Dharmakirti says in a shastra, that when one realises emptiness, one realises one's afflicted mind, and then everything is free. He said 'every meditation we do is for one purpose only, that is to realise emptiness – every meditation'. It is like every river ends

up in one ocean. They can start from different parts of the world, but all end up in the ocean. Likewise, there are hundreds of different types of meditation, but all have one purpose that is to realise emptiness. It is very important to understand this aim of meditation. Similarly, Śāntideva said when talking about the Six Perfections, that all the Six Perfections have one purpose, that is to develop wisdom. Wisdom cannot be attained without training the mind in the first five. Also, Nagarjuna stated that to end samsara, that is so full of suffering, we need to know the root of samsara. The root of samsara is the defiled ignorance, the grasping of self-defiled ignorance. We do not say selflessness as just a word: we have to think about it from the *Madhyamakāvātāra* point of view. As long as you have ignorance, that is, the grasping of the five aggregates as real, with that mind you have the concept of self. When you have this view of self, this very view of self is ignorance. So, ignorance is the root of all the afflicted mind that follows. From ignorance, comes desire, anger, stinginess, jealousy, arrogance... everything comes from that.

The non-existence of 'self'

In order to control this root problem, we need to look where the 'self' is. If 'self' truly exists as we grasp, then it should be somewhere. We use our wisdom mind to search for it. But when we search, we are not going to find the "self" either in the conventional truth or absolute truth. That is the nature of "self", that is, it inherently lacks existence. It is not something that exists then disappears. Due to our lack of awareness, we grasp it without knowing the reality. The moment we realise the selflessness of self, we realise that we were just grasping on something that is non-existent. When we become aware of this, we realise that the mind that is grasping self is an illusory mind, because we grasp something that we think is real but when we search there is no object. The mind that grasps a non-object is itself an illusion. The nature of an illusion is that it is non-existent.

The moment we are awakened from defiled ignorance, then we may ask where to find the root from which the other afflictions arise. But there is no root, because it does not exist. This knowledge frees us. Desire, anger, arrogance... none of them exists. There is no source – no seed, no root. This

is the reason we say that emptiness is all. If you realise one emptiness you realise everything. This is the antidote to all the defilements. The whole purpose of studying *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*, the whole purpose of us putting our efforts into understanding its meaning, the whole purpose of doing meditation, the whole purpose of all of these is to develop wisdom, to realise the absolute truth. Once we understand that, we will never miss the target. Otherwise, we think: 'I do this to make me feel good, I do this to make me famous, I do this so I can impress someone...'. Then we have lost our focus. It becomes a spiritual mess. We already have a mundane mess and now we have a spiritual mess – we have a double mess. This is not a good idea. We need to tidy up the mess. In order to tidy up our mess, we need a single reason: to realise the absolute nature of all phenomena. We must focus on that purpose.

Antidote to the result – seeing what's not there

We have talked about the antidote to the cause of the unethical conduct – defilements such as desire, anger, ignorance, arrogance and so forth. So now in the second part we talk about the result: if we create so many defilements, what do they produce as a result.

In Tibetan Buddhism, we talk about an 'improper mind' or 'improper perception'. What this means is that we see suffering as happiness, we see uncleanliness as cleanliness; this means that what we're seeing is the opposite to reality: the ordinary mind does not see the reality. For us with ordinary mind it is very hard to be aware of these things. We think what we are seeing is the reality that exists. Why, then, does Dharma say we don't see the reality? It is hard to comprehend, to grasp the idea. To help us understand this idea, let me give an example. If someone is heavily drunk or heavily overdosed on drugs, what they see is different from what normal people see. So, which one is true, people who are drunk see things as true, or people who are not drunk see as true? People who are not drunk can see more reality than those who are, because drunken people see things that are non-existent and think they exist.

They believe what they see is real, but in the absolute state they are not there. This kind of mind is called the improper mind, a defiled mind that

creates illusion but does not realise it is an illusion. It thinks it is the real thing. Out of this defiled mind arises a desire mind, anger mind, jealous mind and so forth. These things eventually bring about unethical thoughts and actions: a coveting mind mentally; telling lies in speech; or stealing in body. Once we engage in these actions, improper conduct, we break down morality and once we break down morality, we face the consequences. It is important to be aware of this. Improper conduct or the mind that breaks the conduct is a damaged mind. And the nature of the damaged mind is such that it is impossible to find comfort, it is impossible to experience peace, and it is impossible to see the truth. That is its primary nature. No matter how much we try, mundanely, to find comfort, we can't find it – we may find temporary comfort, but then we soon become uncomfortable. No matter how much we try to be happy, any happiness we have is only brief.

This is because we are missing the point, because we do not realise that the mind is the problem. We think that 'I'm not comfortable because I'm lacking something out there' 'my house is not good enough, so I need to change it'; 'my friends are not good enough, so I need to find new friends'; 'my place isn't good enough, so I need to move somewhere else'; 'my job is not good enough, so I need to change my job'. We always think there is something wrong out there. We know there is a problem with us. We know that. But we do not know where it is coming from, or what created it. The problem is created by unethical mind, dishonest mind, sick mind, unhealthy mind – these are the causes of our problems.

Only the Dharma provides real solution

Now, who is actually giving you the medicine to fix that damaged mind? You are not going to find it other than what the Buddha taught. Until you find it, you may seek solutions in every religion, and say 'my religion is best' without finding the solution you need. It is so important to pin down where the problem is, and you have to find it yourself, because it lies in your mind. Then who actually offers you the treatment for that mind? Look around all over the world and all the religions. Who really gives you this clarity of where the real problem is? Who can offer the solution? If you really look at it, then you realise how fortunate you are to have found the Dharma, to have found

someone who really tells you the truth, who gives you the solution. That realisation makes you feel grateful to have met the Dharma. Being unethical is about defiled mind, not about culture. People with funny dress are not unethical. People who say strange things are not unethical. Being unethical means dishonesty in mind, dishonesty in speech, dishonesty in actions.

We judge so much by appearances and don't see the reality. First, we need to identify what is unethical. I say it is damaged mind that is unethical. Once our mind is damaged, then that mind is not going to do anything right. It is always going to make us do wrong things. The nature of a wrong mind is unhealthy. The more we do wrong things, the healthier our mind becomes. That is why our suffering increases. That is why we become increasingly stressed. That is why our fear increases. That is why our uncertainty increases – everything comes from an unhealthy mind. It is like a fire – the more we add the fuel, the more fire burns; the more it burns, the hotter it becomes.

Yet, we are not fixing the mind but instead constantly feeding it – feeding the unhealthy mind. The more we feed it, the more trouble we get. That's what Buddha saw for himself, and successfully fixed his mind. Then he shared that method with us. This became the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma.

Now as the solution, there are three types of medicine to fix this damaged mind. The first one is to discipline our mind. This consists of vows and training of the mind. The second, once we have disciplined our mind and created a foundation, we can accumulate virtues. And the third, not just merely accumulating virtues, you actually go out there to help others who need help. So, these three are the medicines to fix the damaged mind, or damaged life.

First antidote: discipline

I will discuss the vows at the end of this chapter but here, the following instructions are given to discipline our mind with training: training with respect to object, training with respect to time and training with respect to nature.

Training with respect to the object of the deeds

For the training with respect to object, let us take an example in that of non-killing. None of us have a problem with not killing human beings, but we kill beings such as mosquitoes, cockroaches, insects, white ants and the like. Of course, living in this ordinary world, it is impossible not to kill anything. Given this condition, and because the Dharma practice is not just for one lifetime but over many lifetimes, two things are required: one is the wish not to kill, a mental wish; the other is to minimise physical killing.

Sometimes due to circumstances we have to kill – there is not much choice because, if our house is attacked by white ants, unfortunately we cannot afford to say ‘let them eat my house’ and buy another house unless we have millions of dollars. We cannot afford to take up another mortgage. That is impractical. The important thing is to minimise killing – as few killings as possible. Then, eventually, we do not need to kill. This is what we need to train, so that we do not kill without thinking, but consciously minimise killing. Even if you have one million ants attacking your house, among them you can take one out and put it somewhere else instead of killing all, that is good enough. If you can manage one this time, maybe next time you can take out ten, then twenty. Then one day, when you are not attached to the house you do not kill any. This is the kind of training in object.

It is important to think that every one of the previous buddhas and bodhisattvas did not attain enlightenment instantly. They built up practice for many lifetimes and in each life, they killed less and improved the quality. So, we also have to plan that way: ‘my karma gave me this ordinary life with attachments, so I hope to not kill so many in my next life’. Then you will be reborn in a place where you have to kill less. As you continue to practise, it is possible that eventually you will be reborn where you do not need to kill anything. This is training in non-killing.

Similarly, you can train yourself with all the other non-virtuous actions: stealing, for instance. We may not be robbers, but we can steal: we steal someone’s idea, we take things without permission... we do these things all the time, sometime consciously, other times unconsciously. So again, we have to train ourselves. When you unconsciously take something, become aware of it, and think, ‘this is not right, I’m stealing. I shouldn’t be doing this’. That

awareness prevents you from committing the action. When you keep that awareness, one day you stop stealing anything.

This is training, like any other training – in cooking, to be a carpenter, to be a builder. The result does not come from nowhere. With training a little at a time, one day you can be a chef, you can build a shed. Same with Buddhist practice. By training bit by bit, one day you can really call yourself a Buddhist. Right now, we are not Buddhist. We are training to be Buddhists, but we have not achieved that.

We can train ourselves the same way with the other physical non-virtues – sexual misconduct – then with the mind – coveting mind, harmful thoughts, wrong views – and speech – lying, divisive words, harsh words, idle talk. If you keep training, you can minimise these non-virtues.

Training with respect to time

Next is training with respect to time, that is, setting a time limit: 'I can stop killing for half a day, and see how I go'. If you think half a day is a long time, then limit to an hour. Start with what you can. If you feel comfortable, then extend it to a few hours, one day, one week, one month... then, one day you can say 'I'm not going to kill'. This is the training with time.

Training with respect to the nature of the deeds

The third training is training with respect to deeds. The three levels of the nature of non-virtuous karmic actions are gross, medium and subtle. The gross actions are those via physical body, the medium ones are via speech and the subtle ones are of the mind. The bodily actions are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The speech actions are lying, gossip, idle talk and harsh words. The subtle actions of the mind are coveting, harmful thoughts and wrong view. The easiest to deal with are the gross ones. The medium and subtle ones are progressively more difficult, so you can start with the gross actions. Also, Sakya Pandita said that the great ocean cannot contain a dead body more than a day. Similarly, he said, the Dharma practitioner and the fallen person cannot be one. The Dharma practitioner is someone who does not have a downfall. So, to be really called a Buddhist is not easy. We are walking towards becoming Buddhists. One day, we will not have a downfall. Then we will be fully Buddhists – like Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, a real

Dharma practitioner.

But do not be discouraged. Remember what Śāntideva said: insects have buddha nature. If they have the courage, they can reach enlightenment. So why can we humans not achieve that? Even if we do not have the quality right now, do not be discouraged. Everything is possible. We have so much useless ego, but we should have one ego which says 'I can do it'. If other people can do it, I can do it too. That ego is a good ego because it is not causing any harm. Rather it gives you courage. That kind of ego is useful. You should have it – but not one that says: 'I'm better than others'. It is not useful but harmful to you because you are competing with something you cannot defeat –you against countless others. In the end you will be a loser. We should have a wise ego, not a foolish one.

Develop your habit gradually

Developing your habit is an everyday job. One long retreat is not going to fix everything. One long practice is not going to fix it. Day to day activities are the practice. Every night, before you go to bed, scan your day – what you did – and if you found a fault, think that it was your mind that caused the fault and regret it. Resolve that you will not repeat it tomorrow. That way, you can restore the faults you have committed. When you scan your day and if you have not committed any fault, rejoice that you have done well. But do not be attached to it. Whatever you did well, dedicate it to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. This way, you can end your day beautifully. When you have a beautiful end of the day, I can guarantee that you will have a very good sleep, because you are not going to sleep with a burden, in the form of stress, worry or concern. Instead you have cleaned up these things. In the West, many of you have a shower before going to bed, otherwise you feel uncomfortable. But you do not have the good habit of having a mental shower. You go to bed with a dirty mind that does not give you good sleep, but you do not realise it is not good. Having a mental shower is more important than a body shower.

We need to develop this kind of habit. It is healthy, and you can save thousands of dollars as you do not need to see a psychiatrist. You can also be a therapist for others for free. This is a bodhisattva's job. Provide the therapy

to someone because it also helps you. That will be a huge contribution to someone's life – make them sleep better. Not being able to sleep is a problem in modern times. In ancient times, people looked forward to going to sleep after a hard day. These days, people are reluctant to go to bed because they worry about not being able to sleep. They cannot relax. This is one of the modern diseases. Then in the morning you wake up and think about the many bad dreams you had, or think about the wrong things you have done. As I said earlier, there is no point feeling bad about what you have done. It will not do any good. Rather, you should recognise and change it. If you have made a mistake, in the morning you purify it – regret it, and resolve not to repeat it during the day. If you have not made mistakes, rejoice and dedicate that.

If you live like this for 24 hours, you will make your life very useful for the rest of your life. It is logical. But you need to build the system; you need to develop this habit. That is important. Once you have become used to it, be experienced in it, then one day you really become a Dharma practitioner – you do not have any faults. Like the ocean without a dead body, you are a Dharma practitioner without faults. One sutra says that there are two kinds of good person: someone who never makes any mistakes – whom we call a good person – and someone who makes mistakes, realises them and purifies them. Once you have purified yourself, you cease to be a bad person. I feel that there is a tendency in the West that when someone does a wrong thing, people always have a negative view of the person. That is a big mistake. Everyone can do wrongdoing, but everyone can change. Once the person has changed, people should not continue to have a negative view of the person. He or she made a mistake but he/she has changed now to become a good person. We should accept the person in our life, in our circle of family, friends and community. This ends the discipline, the first antidote to Moral Conduct.

Second antidote: committing virtuous deeds

The second antidote is virtuous deeds. Once you commit yourself not to be engaged in any of the ten non-virtuous deeds, you are now virtuous. You have to always act in a virtuous way. As you accumulate virtues, they become stronger each and every time. The benefit of that is you are getting happier and happier. You live a virtuous life. A virtuous mind means it is free from non-virtues. From the day you take refuge till you reach buddhahood, all your activities are virtuous. You are accumulating an inconceivable number of virtues for an inconceivable length of time. But because we live in this materialistic world, we are already tired from day-to-day activities, and things look too hard to abandon, too hard to commit virtuous deeds. And now we come to the Dharma, there are so many more things to do. We get tired just thinking about all the teachings!

Sakya Pandita says in his *Elegant Sayings*, that there is no need to do many things at once – just do one thing a day is good enough. If we do just one thing a day, in one year we have done 365 virtuous deeds. We have not wasted the year. From that point of view, it is possible to accumulate virtues. Anyone can do one good thing a day, and that is good enough. The most important thing is not to rush with the feeling or excitement of the moment but think how to sustain the Dharma in your life – how to make the Dharma last. Dharma is not a fashion. It is a way of life. So, bring the Dharma into your daily life. Something simple like, for instance, ‘I have to think positively’, ‘I have to say right things’ or ‘I have to do right things’. These are all Dharma. There is no need to be harsh on yourself.

We think, say and do things in our normal life. We need to do these, but we can try to turn them into virtues as much as possible. Sometimes, these actions are more valuable than spending time in the temple. Whether you are in the temple or out there, the point is to always remind yourself it is the mind that needs to be changed. Anywhere can be a temple. As Sakya Pandita says, if you just collect one thing a day at the end of the year you have 365 virtues. It is like how ants build their nests – how termites build a large mound. It does not fall from the sky or grow from the earth. Each tiny ant

carries the material and together the ants create a huge mound. Also, tiny bees with two tiny legs carry tiny bits to the hive where they accumulate a large amount of honey. We humans are bigger than ants and bees, so why can't we do it? Instead of being overwhelmed by the thought of doing a lot, we should encourage ourselves to do virtues bit by bit.

Similarly, there are many things we need to abandon, but again, do as much as you can. For instance, when you are tired, you do not want to wash all your dirty dishes or clothes. Just wash a little bit – put in the dishwasher, put in the washing machine. When you are strong enough, you can wash them all. Same with our mind. If you feel comfortable, you wash off as much as you can. Doing a little at a time is good enough. It keeps you on track, which is important. Make sure you are not disconnected from it. Once you are disconnected, it is difficult to reconnect yourself again. Keep the momentum. If you have a little enmity, just chant one mantra. I can guarantee that, if you chant just one mantra, it is good enough to get yourself on track, rather than doing nothing about it all day. So, we make offerings to the Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings, recite mantra for the sake of all sentient beings, offer a glass of water to someone... this way, we are always accumulating virtuous deeds.

Third antidote: moral conduct to help other sentient beings

The third antidote is moral conduct to help other sentient beings. What it means is – think this way: from the beginning up to now, we are so much centred on self. We need to shift the focus to others. Think 'how can I stop harming these people?' We cannot think that way if we covet someone's wealth. Instead, think, 'What can I offer to this person?' This is very important. Think about it logically. If you are thinking about what you can get from him or her, what will this mind bring to you? Not pleasure, but displeasure/disappointment. But if you think what you can give to this person, that mind brings pleasure. So, why not swap your thinking?

The reason you have the coveting mind is because you want to be happy. But this mind does not bring you happiness. The mind that wants to help

the person brings you happiness. Why not nourish the mind that brings happiness? If you do not understand the logic and instead think, 'I'm a Buddhist, so I shouldn't have a coveting mind', then that is religion. The logic is, 'I do not want to be unhappy; I want to be happy. Coveting mind makes me unhappy, therefore I don't want it. Wanting to help others makes me happy, that's why I want to have that mind'.

Such awareness makes it easier to change. Similarly, with vocal actions, ask yourself: 'I'm passing this gossip to someone else. What am I getting out of this?' It is like smokers who smoke when they are stressed. Smoking a cigarette makes them calm. But the calm is not genuine. Smoking gives more stress afterwards. Likewise, when you gossip you may feel relaxed and entertained by it. But afterwards, you feel bad, thinking you should not have said it that way. The gossip not only disturbs you but also disturbs the person who listens to you. If I gossip about someone whom the listener does not know, because of my gossip, the listener forms a completely wrong view of this person. Who caused that? I did. I presented an innocent person as a bad person. How could I draw happiness out of it? The gossip disturbs me, it disturbs my listener and it disturbs the person I talked about. Even if it does not disturb others, it certainly disturbs me. And it can get much worse. I enjoy gossiping. Once I acquire the habit, I cannot live without gossiping. Without gossiping, my life is empty. The only way I can entertain myself and others is when I am negative. That is very sad.

Instead, what makes me really happy? What can I contemplate in the other person to be happy? If someone has never met the person, say good things about the person. That is a good contribution. The listener will have a good impression about the person. That makes me happy. That makes me inspired. When the person hears about what I said, that will make him or her happy. This is the right ethic that helps other sentient beings – saying the right/positive things rather than wrong/negative things.

Buddhadharma is not telling us to do extra things. What Buddhadharma is telling us is to change our culture, change our personality. Change the colour. A professional renovator does not need to demolish your house. You can redesign it. Once you redesign it, your house looks totally new. Likewise, we

Dharma practitioners can just redesign ourselves. That is all. We do not need to go to the Pure Land to get a new mind to install in our brain. Our existing brain can be recycled. Renovate it. Change the way we think, the way we say things, the way we do things. That changes everything.

How to perform the correct moral conduct

Four qualities to achieve

The third topic of the moral conduct itself is about performing the correct moral conduct. As with generosity, there are four qualities: first, we should abandon unethical conduct; second, while living ethically, abandon attachment and live with understanding of emptiness; third, while living ethically, fulfill others' wishes; and fourth, when you help others, do it according to the level of the being, that is, when introducing someone to the Dharma, if the Hinayana Path is more suited to a person, introduce the Hinayana Path. Then some may be interested in the Mahayana Path, you should introduce that person to the Mahayana Path. Some may be interested in the Vajrayana Path, so you introduce them to the Vajrayana Path. So whatever level they are, help them achieve whatever suits them. These are the four qualities of ethical discipline.

Seven attachments to abandon

As with Generosity, there are seven things to abandon. When you practise ethical discipline, first abandon your unethical conduct. Second, you should never delay ethical practice. You can start now. For instance, if you stop one negative thought now, you are practising ethical discipline. If you stop saying one wrong thing, you are practising ethical discipline. You do not need to wait till tomorrow. Procrastination is a habit. It is a major disease in India. If you ask someone to do something, they say tomorrow. Sometimes, I ask them to give me the date, because there are too many tomorrows! Third, you should not be satisfied with doing some virtuous deeds when you can do more. Otherwise you do not progress. Even when you may not have the physical energy to do more, mentally you want to do more. But you should not push yourself. That is not skilful. Physically only do what you can, but

mentally think you can do more.

Fourth, when you commit ethical conduct, do not expect praise from others. Attachment to praise is a wrong motivation. If you do something good for a praise, what you do is not true virtue but a show for others. The fifth point – do not be attached to this human life. If you practise ethical conduct so that you will be reborn in the human realm, you are not going to enjoy this moment. As with generosity, when you practise, relax and enjoy every moment. If you are in a positive state of mind, you do not need to wait for next life: you can see the benefit right now. So be aware of the enjoyment of doing the right thing without being attached to future results. The sixth point is that one should not be attached to unethical conducts – the residue of one's habit of killing, stealing and so forth. Instead, one should try to minimise the habit. If you have a habit of killing, minimise it. If you have a habit of lying, minimise it. Lastly, the seventh point is that we should not be attached to the wandering mind. There are two types of wandering mind as with Generosity, so go back to this section of the teaching. These are the seven points of abandoning attachments for the practice of pure ethical discipline.

BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF MORAL CONDUCT

Temporary benefits

Benefits in this life

When we practise moral conduct, we will have two kinds of benefits: temporary and ultimate. Temporary benefits are in this life and in future lives. The benefit in this life is that, if one dwells in a state of ethical life, one has nothing to regret, nothing to feel guilty about. Living ethically means that we think rightly, say right things and act in the right way. When we do everything right, there is nothing to regret. This brings tremendous happiness in our hearts and minds. Happiness comes from having nothing to regret. Knowing 'I spent my time in an ethically virtuous way' brings a lot of joy!

As Dharma practitioners our ultimate goal is to reach perfection, buddhahood. This is possible because we have the seed. We have the condition.

We are holding a dream that is possible. To achieve the dream, three wisdoms are required: the wisdom of understanding via study, the wisdom of contemplation, and the wisdom of meditation through experience. When we live an ethical life, our virtues are the cause of these three wisdoms, which are the cause of many great qualities; beings from ordinary teachers up to the Buddha have immensely great qualities, and these qualities are the results of the three wisdoms, which are the product of living an ethical life.

The other benefit in this life is, as a king in the *Samadhi Sutra* said, if one wishes to understand emptiness, the prime ingredient of the secret recipe is an ethical life. Without living ethically, no matter how intelligent your mind is, no matter how hard you try to meditate on emptiness, you will not understand emptiness. The reason is that when your behaviour is unethical, your mind is deluded. A deluded mind is like cataract eyes – cataract eyes cannot see what really exists, and they see things that are non-existent. Ethical mind, speeches and actions remove cataracts from the eyes. Once the cataracts have been removed from your eyes you will be able to see the reality. That is why it is so important to live ethically. Only ethical life helps us see the reality of emptiness. The reason we respect the Dalai Lama and other great teachers like Sakya Trizin is not because they are famous but because they are virtuous. That is the reason why everyone, Buddhists and non-Buddhists regard them so highly.

Contrary to this, ego is not a cause to make you an important person. Arrogance is not a cause to make you an important person. The real and only cause of making you an important person is ethical conduct. If you are a virtuous person, everyone respects you and values you. Everyone can see that you are worthy of respect. If you wish to be promoted in this life, you should live an ethical life, be a good person. Many of us want to be successful in meditation. The quality of meditation also depends on how virtuous we are. If you live unethically, no matter how many hours you spend on the cushion or in the forest, you are not going to achieve anything out of it. So ethical conduct is most beneficial to meditation.

Use your wealth ethically

When you make offerings to a monk or a nun, it has two benefits: the

receiver, the monk or nun, does not have to worry about food and shelter so can practise the Dharma full-time; and you, the householder who make the offering, are investing your money in a beneficial way. Even if you made the money in a non-virtuous way, by offering it to someone who does good things it becomes a cause of virtue. Your wealth supports someone who may attain enlightenment and does great things. Without your contribution he or she may not have sufficient causes and conditions for practice. So, you are turning your wealth into something more valuable. It is same with money – if you invest your money in a dodgy bank, you may lose it rather than earn interest, but if you invest in a reliable bank then you get more interest. In the same way, do not invest your mind in a dodgy monk or nun! You may think you made offering to a good monk, but he turns out to be a bad one. Then you get a lot of negatives out of it. Also, the person who is receiving an offering should not think that he or she has a right to receive this offering because one is a monk or a nun. Instead, one should think, ‘These people invested in me so I must use their investment to benefit them’. One has more responsibilities when one receives offerings.

Ethical mind protects you from obstacles

When one has a clear faith in the Buddhadharma, the faith has two benefits: in the short term, it cultivates an interest in practising the Dharma, and in future lives it prevents one from being reborn with a lack of freedom to practise the Dharma. Many of us take our freedom to listen to and practise the Dharma for granted. But in fact, such conditions are not easy to acquire. People need to be entirely free from obstacles so that nothing stops them from listening to the Dharma. There are many conditions that prevent one from listening to or practising the Dharma – both in human and in non-human realms. If one is born as a hungry ghost, a hell being or an animal, or a long-life god, in these states there is no opportunity to hear the Dharma. So, we are very fortunate not to be in one of these four realms.

Even if you are born as human beings, four states can create obstacles: first, you may be born at a time when the Buddhadharma does not exist in this world. In that case, there is no opportunity to hear the Dharma. Second, if you are born with a heavily negative mind, they you will not

be interested in hearing the Buddhadharma even if it exists. Third, if you are born mentally disabled, your mental faculties are not activated. I am not discriminating mentally disabled people; this is the reality. If you are not mentally functioning, how can you hear the Dharma, how can you contemplate, how can you meditate? And the fourth state is being born in a place where you cannot hear even a word of the Buddha; in many places which are called 'barbaric lands', you do not have an opportunity to practise the Dharma.

When you look at these states, you realise how fortunate you are to be free from them, because these states are not easy to avoid. If you look into your mind for an hour, or even ten minutes, there are so many – maybe a thousand – thoughts arise. Within these hundreds or thousands of thoughts, how many are virtuous? If you are a non-practitioner or a beginner, ninety-nine per cent of your thoughts are non-virtuous rather than virtuous. So, you are actually doing more to be born in a restless state than in a restful state. If you look at it from that point of view, you would realise how fortunate you are to be born as human and have the opportunity to hear the Dharma. There are many causes to be born in this fortunate state, but the primary cause is having faith in the Buddhadharma.

The main factor that prevents us from being born in the lower realms is a virtuous mind. This is because a virtuous mind protects us from arising of desire mind, anger mind and ignorance mind. In the absence of the three-poison mind, there exists no hell realm, no hungry ghost realm and no animal realm. This is because we are the embodiment of our own minds. If you look into your own life, you may ask why you are so different from others. Scientifically, people explain with DNA, but Dharma explains that this is because each of us has a unique mind; my mind is different from your mind, and your mind is completely different from others. Whatever our characteristics or personalities are, we embody our own minds. For this reason, beside the mind there are no sentient beings. Different minds categorize different beings and different realms. The Buddhist point of view is that different beings manifest from different individual minds. It makes sense. That is the reason that it is most important that we look after our

minds. No matter how many books you may read or how many times you listen to teachings, the point always comes back to the mind. The mind is what we need to train, improve and look after. We talk about loving kindness, about compassion, about bodhicitta and moral conduct. But what are they really? They are all about the mind. Besides the mind there is no loving kindness, no compassion, no bodhicitta, no moral conducts. Keeping virtues is the best way not to be born in unfavourable conditions. These are the temporary benefits.

Benefits in future lives: Seven Excellent Human Qualities

For future lives, there will be faith and ethical benefits. In addition to that, keeping an ethical life will bring us Seven Excellent Human Qualities. The first is that we will be born in a right family. Second, we will have a good appearance. Third, wealth that makes a comfortable life. Fourth, an intelligent mind – a mind that finds it easy to understand the Dharma. Fifth, enough power to control our own lives. Sixth, good health and minimum sickness. And the seventh, a long and healthy life.

These seven good human qualities result from living an ethical life. This is really useful to know! We in this world spend billions of dollars in research on ways to improve our lives, but the Buddha already taught this! I am not saying that everyone should be a Buddhist. As a matter of fact, the Buddha never tried to make people 'Buddhists' either. The Buddha taught how to lead a healthier life. So, I think that if we are really serious about improving our lives it would be better to invest the billions of dollars researching the Buddha's teachings than finding new approaches and keep updating the results, than trying to find new things. It would be good if all universities study what the Buddha said. There is no need to make people Buddhists – just research on the accuracy of the Buddha's teachings. So, these are the seven benefits of leading an ethical life. One who is living ethically, no matter where one takes a rebirth, one can easily obtain these great qualities. Living ethically is a way of not being reborn in the unfortunate realms, it gives one opportunity to be reborn as human and have access to the Dharma. These are the benefits in next and future lives.

Ultimate benefits

You probably notice that people often put a piece of the Buddha in their garden – either a head or a whole stature – even if they never heard of the Buddha’s philosophy. People love the Buddha’s statue because when he was alive and practised for countless eons, he lived very ethically. As a result, anyone who sees the Buddha instantly finds some kind of peace, they are instantly drawn to him. That is a result of living ethically. So, I can guarantee that, even if you do not have time to do all those complicated Buddhist practices, just do one thing – live ethically. That contains everything! Living ethically, you feel much better. You change your behaviour. People’s perception of you changes. That is the power of living ethically. It has such multiple benefits.

Similarly, with the Buddha there is nothing secret about his body, about his mind, about his speech. All are crystal clear and transparent, because he is ethical. When you are not ethical, you have secrets to hide. That alone is a cause of stress. You tell your secret to someone and instantly you regret it. Then someone can use your secret to attack you or gossip about you. But if you live an ethical life, you have nothing to hide and stress about. You may not need a lot of meditation either. Just living ethically is a great form of meditation – it releases you from all sorts of worries and relaxes you. There are so many benefits, which is what the Buddha talks about. Anyone can go out and read about the qualities of his mind, his speech and his body. This completes the second perfection of Moral Conduct/Ethical Discipline.

ON VOWS

There are two vows that help to train our discipline: pratimoksha and bodhicitta vows. With pratimoksha vow, there are two kinds: lay bodhisattva training and monastic bodhisattva training. A bodhisattva can be householder or an ordained person. One does not need to be a monk or nun. Anyone can be a bodhisattva.

Layperson’s vows: refuge in the Triple Gem

So, first, the laypersons’ vow. One needs to take refuge in the Triple Gem.

When taking refuge in the Triple Gem, make sure we are not doing it merely as a cultural practice: just chanting, 'I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in...' and think they're going to protect me – that's not the real refuge. Real refuge means 'what Buddha said is the truth, there's no mistake whatsoever, and is perfectly spoken. So, I'm going to follow these perfect explanations'. Following what Buddha said is taking refuge in the Buddha. If you don't follow what Buddha said, no matter how many millions of times you say 'I take refuge in the Buddha', you are not taking refuge. These are the differences I am talking about.

Many people do not follow what the Buddha said but chant that refuge millions of times. Some of the teachings say that when it's raining out there, no matter how many times you recite 'umbrella', it's not going to protect you. What you need is to take an umbrella out there to protect you from getting wet. So, that's the first taking of refuge, in the Buddha. One must follow the instructions rather than mere chanting.

Now second, taking refuge in the Dharma. This does not mean reading Dharma books. It does not mean practising rituals or ceremonies. To take refuge in the Dharma means implementing the Dharma. When you are attached to something, you should think that this object is not really the cause of happiness. It is impermanent, why should I be attached to it? If there is no attachment, then you are implementing the Dharma. When you are unhappy, do not let yourself be angry but think: 'I should practise loving kindness, that's going to make me happy. I should not commit negative karma, that's not going to bring me happiness. I should avoid this negative karma'. So, what you have realised, what you have understood – implement these in your life. That is taking refuge in the Dharma.

So many of us are not really taking refuge in the Dharma, though we chant it all the time. At the beginning of a sadhana we always chant it, but when it comes to real life, none of us are taking refuge in the Dharma at all. We do the complete opposite of what the Dharma says. We become arrogant, we become jealous, we become angry. We get attached to all sorts of things more than ever before. We do the complete opposite. On the one hand I say 'I take refuge in the Dharma' all the time, but in reality, you do the opposite

of taking refuge in the Dharma. It is important to be aware of this. It helps us to ask 'am I really taking refuge in the Dharma or not?' Until now, we are actually not taking refuge in the Dharma at all. We need to understand that taking refuge in the Dharma means actually implementing the wisdom, compassion, loving kindness and helping others in our everyday life. Then, even without chanting, we are actually taking refuge in the Dharma.

Now, the third, taking refuge in the sangha. Taking refuge in the sangha is not about cultural actions of bowing down to the sangha or make offerings. These are nothing to do with taking refuge in the sangha. Taking refuge in the sangha is listening to its advice, finding inspiration in the sangha, allowing it to help us and to encourage us to practise the Dharma. The closer we are to an enlightened sangha, naturally we will have less defiled thoughts or take defiled actions. We increase positive qualities. When you take this to heart, you do not need to chant 'I take refuge in the sangha', you are actually taking refuge because you have more access to these kind of people, and you naturally increase positive qualities.

So, when we practise these three, we really follow... I am not saying we completely follow what the Buddha said. We are not ready for that yet. But we try the best we can to follow what the Buddha said. We try our best to integrate the Dharma. We try our best to draw good things from the sangha. Just trying is good enough. It is from there that we can grow. When we go to kindergarten you should not expect from day one you know A to Z. At the end of the day perhaps someone of low faculty cannot remember 'A'. But as long as you are trying, that's good enough. So maybe you cannot remember 'A' today, but tomorrow you go back again, and tomorrow it will be easier. It is the same with practice. If you know where to start, then you will not push yourself so much. Take your time, do your best. That is important. If you do that, there is room for progress. Also, no pressure. There's no stress. Relaxed but you are doing the job. Not just relaxing and doing nothing. Relaxed but doing the job – that is important.

When someone follows what we call the upasaka vows – meaning 'lay person's vows' – what one does is follow the guidance of the Buddha; what one integrates is close to the Dharma; and one exercises close to the sangha.

Following these three is called holding the upasaka vows or the Triple Refuge Vow. This is the root of all the Dharma. Apart from taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and sangha, there is no other gateway to enter the Dharma. That's the only gateway.

Layperson's vows: Pratimoksha vows

The gate to enter the Dharma is taking refuge in the Triple Gem. It is the foundation of all the vows. You cannot receive the pratimoksha vows if you do not have the refuge vow. Without the pratimoksha vows, we are not eligible to receive the bodhisattva vows. Without the bodhisattva vows, we are not eligible to receive mantrayana vows. In order to receive the mantrayana vows, one must have received the bodhisattva vows. In order to receive the bodhisattva vows, you must have received the pratimoksha vows. In order to receive the pratimoksha vows, you must have received the refuge vow. So, without the refuge vow, one is not eligible to receive any other vow. For this reason, there is no point in trying to jump into vajrayana when you do not have the root.

People think that the refuge is basic. It is not basic. As I said before, shamatha is not basic. We have been in samsara from beginningless time, and then suddenly we want to come into the Dharma. It is a big thing – it is no small thing. It is like going from one country to another country – even bigger than that. We have been immersed in samsara from beginningless time, and now we are moving from there to the Dharma – it is an enormous undertaking. We should not underestimate that. So even just having that idea is courageous.

When you actually make the move, you will be so powerful. You are a hero. To make this move, first you must know where to start, and it is important never to stop. Then, as an individual if you have the strength, if you have the courage, you can do the most powerful practice, vajrayana. But if you do not have the root it is almost as if you are building a huge house on top of an iceberg. You can build it on top of the ice but it is not going to last. The moment the ice melts, the whole building will collapse. Many of us do just that – build our practice on ice, not on a solid foundation.

Layperson's vows: Five Precepts

So, the first vow after taking the refuge vow is 'I'm not going to kill any being'. Then the next vow is 'I'm not going to steal anything from anyone else's wealth'. The third vow is 'I'm not going to tell lies in my entire life'. These are most of the upasaka vows – but not complete yet. To complete the vows, one must take two more: 'I'm not going to engage in any sexual misconduct' and 'I'm not going to take any intoxicants'.

This means that you now have several vows – multiple vows, not just one. It is like people giving you advice – you do this because it is good for you, you do that because it is good for you... all with good intention. But at the end of the day, you have to think for yourself what you are capable of. Can I really commit to take this vow or not? You must judge for yourself. So, anything that feels comfortable, what you think you can manage, you take the vow accordingly. But if you say 'I am not ready' and keep waiting, you never know if you will ever be ready. You need to prepare yourself.

Once you have taken all these five vows, you hold the full upasaka vows – very good lay persons' vows. I believe that, not only in a dharmic way but also from a social point of view, anyone who takes these five precepts has a really healthy life. Just think about it - on the one hand, we are scared of the discipline part, of taking vows or commitments. But on the other hand, we do not find it difficult to commit to other things. For instance, some of us are so health conscious and they decide, 'I am not going to eat any more cake – it's not good for me'. Even though you know cake is yummy, you can commit to that because it is not good for your health.

The reason we easily commit not to eat cake is because you cherish your health. If you cherish your health you can make the commitment. Likewise, if you really cherish your mind, then these vows are not difficult to commit. But we do not cherish our mind as much as we cherish our body. That's the problem. When you do not cherish your mind, then it is very hard to commit yourself to these vows.

The reality from a Dharma practitioner's point of view, is that the body is temporary. The mind is forever. So, in that sense, the mind is more valuable than the body. This concept, again, is new for us because our Western background is very much based on the concept of one single life: that you

grow up, saying this and that are important, but not beyond that. This new Dharma world is a very difficult concept for Westerners. But then if you use your logical mind, forgetting your culture, forgetting your upbringing, and use your logic, you can compare: health is very important while living this life but this health is not going to last forever, while the mind is going to be with us forever. We cannot avoid that. We cannot change that.

So, gradually you need to improve your awareness of the importance of the mind. One day, definitely, you are going to change your culture and think that the mind is more important than anything else. Then, it is not that difficult to commit to the vows.

It takes time. First, we must understand the point, then reflect on that, and evaluate. This way we can make our mind healthy. Taking the five precepts is not a religious concept, because many sufferings we experience are caused by killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. If you really look at each of them, none of them are good things at all.

So, if you do not want to suffer from these five things, then why are we not committed? Why do we avoid eating cake? Because we do not want to be diabetic. Why do you avoid fatty food? Because you do not want cholesterol in your blood. Why don't you eat food with high carbohydrate content? Because you don't want to put on weight. It is not that you dislike these things. You like them all, they are tasty, yummy, but you do not want to get sick. It is the same with those five things: they are the unhealthy food that we feed on all the time. Then how can we expect to have a healthy mind. Buddhist practitioners need to view the mind like a scientist does. Do not rush. Look from every angle what things are good for you, what things are not good for you. Once you are aware of this, then meditate on it. The more you meditate, the more clarity and confidence it brings you, and then you know what to adopt and what to abandon. Meditation gives you confirmation. Wisdom gives you clarity. Clarity is the best thing for making decisions in your life – what is right, what is wrong. If you do not have clarity, you make mistakes. We think we are doing well; none of us think we're harming ourselves. But in the end, we harm ourselves because of the lack of clarity of our mind.

Now you know it is not a religious thing to talk about the five precepts: it's

a scientific approach, and we can make a pledge not to commit any of these five actions. So, that is the upasaka, the lay persons' vows. When you commit to the five precepts, it's equal to not committing any of the ten non-virtues.

Among the ten non-virtues, what are not mentioned here are the three mental kinds: coveting mind, harmful thoughts and wrong view. Also not mentioned are two vocal kinds: divisive words and harsh words. These five are not mentioned here.

But when you hold the five precepts, not killing contains not harming other beings. Within not telling lies are contained divisive words and idle talk. When we say no stealing, that contains coveting mind. So, when you take the five precepts, actually you do not commit any of the ten non-virtues.

The ten non-virtues – we should think about them carefully. As Aryadeva says, why do we call them non-virtuous? The reason is that these are dishonest actions. Dishonest actions mean that, when taking these actions, you think they will help yourself. But actually, they are not helping you. They are hurting you. What they seem to promise you and what they deliver are two different things. Dishonest actions or dishonest mind are non-virtuous. Honest mind and honest action are virtuous. So that is how you differentiate, honest or dishonest; virtuous or non-virtuous.

If you do not explain it that way, then virtues or non-virtues become religious terminology, a cultural terminology. Buddha never taught a religion. Buddha never taught a culture. Buddha taught how things can make you happy. How things can make you unhappy. If you really see with unbiased mind and investigate what Buddha said, you can understand it. It's a logical system.

But if you do not understand these things, then Buddha's teaching is not valid for you. It is useless. His talk does not make sense to you. The reason the Buddha's teaching is so valuable is because if you really give time to reflect on its meaning, you can understand it. That is what we call a valid, logical teaching.

Something that is logical, something that has a reason – if you practise that, definitely you are going to be confident. If there is no logic, if there is no reason, then you will not have confidence: 'I'm just doing it because I believe

in it' or 'I'm doing it because someone told me to do it'. Then you never know if it will work or not work. Dharma is not like that. It is logical, it has reasons so I have confidence in it. This confidence is something we should be proud of – not be arrogant about, be proud of: what I have found is perfect. There is no mistake. I am so proud I found this Path. I'm so proud to be practising the Dharma. I'm so proud of doing this to help others. This pride is a valid kind of pride.

These are the five lay persons' precepts. If everyone kept these five precepts, the world would be a much more harmonious place; there would be no conflict, no problems, and everyone would be happy with each other. But we are breaking the precepts, not keeping them. We are doing the opposite. That is why we have so many problems with ourselves and with others. If people really wish to have a peaceful family, peaceful life, and peaceful country, then they must practise these five precepts; if we really practise these five precepts, we can make this world a peaceful world, we can make a peaceful family, we can make peaceful individual life if you really keep these five precepts. This is a possibility, because by keeping five precepts you will have no disturbance in your mind. Undisturbed mind is what we call peace. But when your mind is disturbed, nothing can make you feel at peace.

Other Buddhist schools' vows

I'll give you some other schools' point of view. The Sravakayana school only accepts the five precepts and mahayana also only accepts the five precepts. Then, others like the Svatantrika school they put one extra precept. The extra one which Svatantrika adds makes a lay person like a monk. Another school, Sutrayana school – another Theravada school- has others.

One of the precepts I mentioned is sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct means you can have a partner, you can have a wife, you can have a husband, but you should not have a sexual relationship beside your partner. If you have a sexual relationship beside your partner then it is sexual misconduct. So, a lay person is allowed to have a relationship. But with the full upasaka vows one does not have any sexual relationship. He is a lay person, but his

life is like a monk's: no killing, no stealing, no sexual activity, no lying, and no taking intoxicants. This we call the full upasaka vows. You can go to work and earn money. You're not a monk, not a nun. You're just a lay person, but you do not have a sexual relationship. So that is another type of lay Buddhists.

Another school I mentioned before, another Theravada school, has eight Mahayana precepts – something you do 24 hours in addition to the five: no singing and dancing; no wearing ornaments; no sitting on high seats; no eating after midday etc. These are the eight Mahayana precepts. These are vows one can take all one's life.

So, it varies. The more vows you take, the better it is for us. But I just need to tell you that there is no contradiction: when we talk about eight Mahayana precepts point of view, we are not allowed to wear ornaments, not allowed to wear beautiful things, not allowed to sing songs and so forth. But in Vajrayana, you should wear beautiful ornaments, you should sing Vajra songs. The same Buddha said you are not allowed to do these things at one time, and another time he said you are allowed. This looks like a contradiction. In fact, it is not a contradiction but it is about two different points of view: in Vajrayana, you visualise yourself as the deity. When you visualise the deity, it is good to wear beautiful ornaments – you are offering everything. When you sing a Vajra song, you transform all the desire into nectar. In ordinary life, when we wear ornaments, we wear them to make us happy. It is based on desire. That is why many people have problems: they spend a lot of money on ornaments. They buy an expensive diamond ring or an expensive watch, but one is not good enough and have to buy more and more.

From the Sutrayana point of view, things like ornaments increase our desire mind therefore they should be avoided. From the Vajrayana point of view, one is not a person but a deity. These objects are offerings. They increase joy and bliss. So, if you see in these two ways, there is no contradiction. But here, we are not talking about the Vajrayana Path. We are talking about Sutrayana, the householder's vows.

Monastic vows

The second is monastic vows. These are not explained in details here: there are vows for novices and for fully ordained monks. These things are written in great lengths and details in the vinaya shastra or vinaya sutra: how many vows for monks, how many vows for nuns, how many vows for novices and so on. The number of vows is very much based on how many types of mistakes we make. Vows are to prevent mistakes. If you make 100 different types of mistakes, you need 100 vows, if you make only one mistake, you need only one vow. So, the number is not fixed. It depends on the individual.

Then once you are enlightened, there is no need to take a vow. Sometimes I give an example: if you live in the city and you don't feel safe, you need to have a fence, you need to lock your house, you need security because if you don't have it, people come and break into your house. But then if you live somewhere remote and there's no vandalism, no one steal things, then you just leave your house open. There's no need to build a fence, there's no need to lock your house. Your house is safe.

The same can be said about your mind. If you don't commit wrong things, vows are not required. But when we make a lot of mistakes, we need vows to protect ourselves. So, the requirements for the vow is based on the individual's state of mind. It's not that one must have vows. This is a brief explanation of the different pratimoksha vows.

Bodhisattva vows

Next are the bodhisattva vows. This is a vow to achieve full buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. There are two traditions: Madhyamika tradition of bodhicitta vows and Cittamatra tradition of bodhicitta vows. The main difference between these two lineages is that in the Cittamatra tradition you need to have received the pratimoksa vows previously. Both traditions share major and minor precepts.

In order not to degrade these bodhisattva vows, we should avoid the Four Black Dharmas. These are four actions that will impede your spiritual

progress. The first is deceiving your guru or someone holy and the second is feeling misplaced regret, that is to cause sadness by bringing doubt into someone's mind about the value of his or her virtuous actions. The third is criticising or abusing a holy person and the fourth is cheating others. If you commit any of these four, or all four, it will cause degeneration of your bodhicitta vows. So, identify these and make sure you do not commit them.

Then, develop your bodhicitta mind, adopt the Four White Dharmas, which are the opposite of the Four Black Dharmas. These are four actions that will accelerate your spiritual progress. The first is not lying to your guru even at the cost of your life. The second is inspiring others to follow the Mahayana Path and the third respecting a bodhisattva just the same as a buddha. The fourth is being honest to all beings. If you practice these four or any of these four, it will accelerate your spiritual progress.

The Perfection of Patience

The third Paramita is patience. Again, there are three topics: first, the definition of the Perfection of Patience; second, the nature of the Perfection of Patience; and third, the benefits of the practice of the Perfection of Patience.

DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

The general definition of patience is that, when someone annoys you or harms you, you are not disturbed. But the general definition needs some clarification. When someone harms you, you become upset but often you suppress it – pretending it does not matter to you – that is not patience. It may look like patience but it is not. The Dharma says that many things look similar, and if you do not identify individual differences, you can easily make mistakes: you may see non-Dharma as Dharma, or what is not patience as patience. It is important to understand clearly what is patience and what is not.

From the viewpoint of cause and effect, if we have never heard of the quality of patience nor practised patience, we are not naturally equipped with this quality. If there is no cause, there is no effect. Someone who has not heard of Dharma or patience, may still have practiced patience. That is because this person has practised patience in past lives. On the other hand, if a person has not practiced patience in the past nor learnt it in this life, the person cannot possibly have the quality. We can define patience again as when people annoy you, you know how not to be disturbed. If you keep your anger in you, yet pretend you are not bothered, that is not patience.

The motivation for patience is the same as generosity and moral conduct: 'I'm not to be disturbed when people harm me. I'm doing this to attain buddhahood for the sake of sentient beings' – that is, bodhicitta. Also, in the meantime, think: 'this person is trying to harm me verbally, physically or mentally. But I am perceiving this in a dualistic mind. In the absolute truth, there is no such thing as 'me' who gets hurt; there is no such thing as the person who is going to harm me. There is no word which is harmful by nature'.

When you realise these things, nothing can upset you. Look at the nature of 'self, the nature of phenomena or the nature of other'. When you realise the emptiness of these, nothing can upset you. This is understanding of the View, the absolute truth. Then, as you practice – not to be disrupted, not harming others – you accumulate immense virtue. But do not be proud of yourself or be attached to the virtue. Instead, dedicate it thus: 'may this practice cause me to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings'. This completes the practice of patience: motivation, practice and dedication. This makes the Perfection of Patience.

PATIENCE ITSELF

The second topic is the nature of patience. In order to recognise patience, first we need to recognise the obstacles for practising patience. Once we recognise the obstacles, we need to apply the antidotes. Once we successfully apply the antidotes, they make patience perfect. It is like diagnosing a disease, finding the medicine for the disease and applying the medicine to become healthy again.

Obstacle to Patience: anger

The obstacle for patience is anger. It is important to know what anger is. When someone – may be others or yourself – harms you, your mind is deeply disturbed. This disturbed mind is called anger. So 'anger' is a label. Labels are sometimes useful, but at other times, not so useful mainly because we

hold onto them. We think anger actually exists. It is like when we explain what a tree is, we may describe its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, fruit and so on. But in reality, root, main trunk or branches do not exist by themselves. Similarly, we need to use names to explain different stages of phenomena, but ultimately nothing exists separately. I often say that Dharma practitioners should follow the ethical precepts of the vinaya code in their behaviour; they should meditate according to the sutra pitaka; and when they explain things, they should do so according to the Abhidharma way. But one's behaviour, meditation and explanation do not exist separate from the person. So, naming of things and the real condition are two different things. When we describe anger, we say that it is caused by a deeply disturbed mind. But the reality is that anger does not exist by itself. If you consider there are many disease names – nowadays there are thousands of names in medicine – to research and to give treatments. This is because we have to label them differently. But in reality, no disease exists by itself. Diseases are different naming conventions associated with conditions of the body. Likewise, anger is a disturbed state of mind. When the mind is disturbed, it is not at peace. To be free of anger is to be at peace. This peace I am talking about is neither happiness nor unhappiness – it is a neutral feeling.

The nature of anger

Now, disturbance has many levels. If you are a little disturbed, you have small anger. If you are very much disturbed, you have a lot of anger. Someone, due to his/her samsaric nature, harms you for a selfish reason – the prime cause of harming others is selfishness – but it is just one instance of harm. What amplifies this harm is yourself: 'this person said this to me, this person has done that to me...' You chant your anger mantra every day. Instead of chanting Om Mani... we chant this anger mantra on and on. This way, we are multiplying the anger far more than the initial anger created by the person.

But in our ordinary world we do not see that. We always think 'this person hurt me, hurt me, hurt me...' In reality, what this person did was only at the beginning. We are multiplying the hurt many times over and over. This is what we need to recognise. If we do not multiply the hurt, what the person did to us cannot harm very much. On the other hand, if we keep thinking

about it, holding onto it and thus accumulating anger, it grows strong, and one day completely overtakes us. There is no happiness in this situation. This is what we call the hell realms. You cannot find any joy. You may live with a wonderful family, or live in a beautiful place. You may have everything, yet your mind is full of anger. People wonder: 'why is it that this person has everything yet is so unhappy?' So, anger is the prime obstacle for the practice of patience.

Anger can be useful

Anger can be useful. Once we understand the temporary and the ultimate consequences of anger, we see so many disadvantages. But in wisdom's eye, everything is useful. There's no rubbish. Even anger is not rubbish. How can we make anger useful? When you are angry, think about your own feeling, what you are going through right now. If you think of what will happen in the future, you'll be frightened. Rather think about the many beings out there who are in similar situations or much worse. You can feel for them, wish that they do not go through what you are going through. Your anger then turns into wisdom or compassion for others to be free from such states. If you can manage to use your anger that way, it is very useful. You do not need to create anger to develop: use your existing anger. Use it as a Path to help other sentient beings. That way, anger does not do damage to you, but rather helps you. But if you do not have that kind of mentality, of course anger will destroy you: not only just you but people around you. If you are an angry person, your whole family can be affected by your anger. When the family is affected by this anger, the family member's friends can also be affected. So, first we need to identify anger – as a disturbed mind. It is like a disease, then we need to apply medicine and the medicine is the antidote.

Disadvantages of anger in this life

Now we talk about the danger of anger, in this life and in future lives. First, the danger of anger in this life. As Śāntideva says in *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, a small upset can make you unhappy, enough to destroy your peace of mind. Without peace, there will be no joy, because joy and happiness come on the foundation of peace. Without this foundation, there will be no way you can be happy or enjoy your life. If you really want to be happy, you should design your

life such that you live a peaceful life. This is very important. Anger always destroys peace.

As Śāntideva said, we need to recognise that it is our own upsetting mind, our own disturbed mind, that is destabilising the foundation of peace. When you are not at peace with yourself, it can affect your sleeping pattern, because you cannot relax when your mind is disrupted. Some people today worry about going to sleep because they are afraid of nightmares. When you do not have enough sleep, as you know, you become grumpy. Even when your partner or friend brings a nice cup of tea, that does not make you happy. Even when a nice person tries to make you happy, if you are grumpy, the person is put off, and they wonder what they have done to upset you.

Anger affects your mind, affects your body and other things. When we drive on a rocky mountain or on a bumpy road, at the end of the journey we are exhausted. Similarly, if you're angry you are inwardly always driving on a bumpy road. In the western world, we have such a beautiful and comfortable physical environment, but we travel that bumpy road inwardly. In India, on the other hand, the outside road is bumpy, but the road inside is peaceful. It is good to have a good road out there as well as one inwardly. Then our journey will be smooth. We have this practical method to live our life smoothly and comfortably. We have designed everything extraordinarily comfortable, so why not bring that infrastructure within us? If we invest as much into developing our inner structure as we do into the infrastructure, we will have a much more peaceful space. Buddha is like a designer. He designed our inner comfort. Samsara is so well planned in terms of outer comfort, but not so much in terms of inner comfort. We need to realise that we are always driving this bumpy road mentally.

When you are constantly disturbed, you lose your sense of focus. When you lose your sense of focus, you become unstable. Because the nature of the world we live in is not perfect, people may tease you: 'look at this person, so unstable'. Even if they do not have the courage to say it to your face, they say negative things behind your back and let you down. Unfortunately, that is the world we live in. You are suffering, and not having enough people with compassion makes it worse. So, your own lack of training of your

mind, combined with your habit of being easily disturbed, becomes the cause of disturbing other people, and in turn this disturbs yourself. This is the disadvantage of the anger mind.

Anger can affect your whole life. You may have a generous heart and personality. You give a person what he or she needs, say good things to the person and the person becomes close to you. But then, your own short temper or anger can destroy months or years of that relationship. Or, when you were at high school, you dreamt about a career, so you studied hard at school and university, gained job experience, and finally you got that dream job. You are very happy. But then, one angry incident demolishes your reputation and hence your career in the company. Your colleagues say 'you are not fit for this job, not good enough for this job. You have to go'. One second of anger is enough to destroy your life's ambitions. That's the danger of an anger mind. Anger is one of the main destroyers of relationships. Even as a sangha member, if you are an angry person you are left out. Other sangha members want to help you, but your angry nature stops them from assisting. They keep a distance from you. Then you complain that no one loves you or cares about you. This kind of trouble occurs within the sangha members, within a family, a community or work environment.

The Buddha said that the solution is not to blame yourself but to recognise the problem and treat it. For instance, when you have a disease you go to see a doctor. The doctor will not criticize you for having the disease but explain the problem you have. When you know your problem, you ask the doctor what kind of treatment you should get. The doctor then tells you about the treatments. There is a solution. If there's no solution to anger, you have a good reason to be depressed. But when there is a solution, why be depressed? You just need to receive the treatment.

Future disadvantages

One of the future disadvantages in being an angry person is that life after life you will be born as an unhappy person, even if you are born as a human being. There are many people who are born with an unhappy mind. They may have everything, yet they are not happy. Sometimes people who come from poor countries to the west, and see a lot of wealth everywhere, find it

hard to understand why people are so unhappy. They measure happiness by material wealth or success. They do not understand, therefore, why people are unhappy. But if you know how the mind works, it is easy to understand. People are unhappy because, even if they have material wealth, their mind is not in the right place. That's why they suffer. If you do nothing about your disturbed mind, as your mind continues beyond this life, you will be born with the same disturbed mind. You may migrate to another place, another country, another life, but you will take your disturbed mind with you.

Now sometimes what the sutra says does not sound logical, but you need to trust the sutra, which is what the Buddha taught. One sutra says that, if you get angry, this anger has the power to destroy or burn a thousand eons of virtue that you have accumulated. And then, the *Madhyamikavatara* says that one's anger has the power to destroy one hundred thousand eons of virtue you have accumulated. So, one text says one thousand eons and another says one hundred thousand eons. This may sound contradictory but the difference reflects that of a non-enlightened person's anger and that of the enlightened person's anger. The enlightened person's anger has much more severe consequences. It's like a fire on a flat land that burns slowly, while a fire that starts at the bottom of a hill burns fast. In this analogy, different geography makes the difference and in the case of the consequence of non-enlightened persons and enlightened persons, it is mental geography that makes a difference. The anger of an enlightened person has far greater consequences. Also, Nagarjuna stated in *The Precious Garland* that the prime cause that you are condemned to the hell realm is your angry mind. If there was no anger, hell would not exist.

These are only some of the disadvantages of anger mind. Once you are in the hell realm it is difficult to come out of it: it takes eons. It is like committing a serious crime and getting a life sentence, except a life sentence is miniscule from this karmic point of view: you are going to be in the hell prison for many lifetimes. But you should not be frightened. It is just how it works. We should not have fear of negative karma but rather see the danger of it. We are not frightened of eating wrong food, but we know the risk of eating wrong food. We can avoid it. If we do not eat what we love, like ice cream,

that's because we know it will make us sick. Similarly, mental food, like anger, causes us tremendous suffering. We need to recognise it, and make up our minds not to go near it.

Antidote to anger

Now let's turn to the antidote, the treatment, so you will not be frightened of hell or hungry ghost realms but know what to do. It's like going to a health conference, where many scientists and doctors give you details of how some foods or drinks will affect you or make you sick. But at the same time, they tell you how to get healthy, so you are glad to hear all the advice. You know what to avoid. This is the same thing – imagine you are at a Buddhist mental health conference, discussing what is good for you, what is bad for you. Instead of being frightened, you will think: 'now I know what to feed my mind, what not to feed my mind'. Religions often frighten us by telling us about hell and sometimes we are scared of doing anything. But the problem is not action: it is the mind, or motivation. What you have in your mind changes the result. If you have a negative mind, even healthy food turns into poison, while if you have a bodhicitta mind, even poison turns into medicine, like feeding poison to a peacock. The peacock is supposed to have the ability to turn poison, such as poisonous snakes and reptiles, into nourishment. So, for a wisdom mind there's no such thing as poison.

Identify the cause of anger: unhappiness

In order to prevent anger, we need to know the cause of anger. Many of us think that the cause of our anger is someone who abused us, or ourselves when we did something wrong. Neither is the cause of anger. The cause of anger is unhappiness. Whether I am happy or not is entirely up to me, nobody else. This choice to be happy is our right. In the west, people assert their rights. Rights are so important, so valuable. Yet, people do not assert their right to choose not to be unhappy: they do not take advantage of that right. Instead, they insist on their right to be unhappy. It does not make sense, if you really think about it. Samsara is illogical. When you listen to the Dharma, everything makes sense. The cause of anger is unhappy mind. The greater

the unhappiness, the stronger the anger. So, to make our mind less angry, we need to be happy. People think material things make us happy, but material things do not give us happiness. If happiness depends on material things, we should be far happier than anyone in poor countries. We have almost everything that should cause happiness. Yet we are not happy. It is because the true cause of happiness is a virtuous mind – a mind that is free of the poisons of attachment, anger, ignorance. That is the true cause of happiness and what is lacking in our world. That is why we are not happy.

Happiness is virtuous mind

For this reason, we should listen to the Dharma. Then we will be grateful that we now know the true cause of happiness. We have spent a good part of life making wealth to make us happy, yet we have achieved nothing – no happiness. That has been proven. Why are we not happy? It is because we have missed the true cause of happiness. The true cause of happiness is virtuous mind, absence of the three poisons. It is very clear-cut. But we hear of many kinds of virtue: different religions talk about virtues. What, then, is the right virtue and what is the wrong virtue? Nagarjuna defines virtue in *The Precious Garland*, as the absence of the three-poison mind. Also, Ayadhara says that virtuous mind is honest mind. They are the same thing because when we think, say or act out of a mind influenced by desire, anger or ignorance, nothing is honest. As I said before, a drunken or intoxicated person sees things that are not true whereas people who are not affected by intoxicants see true things.

How to avoid unhappiness

So, how can we avoid an unhappy mind? Śāntideva explains that, when a problem arises, we should look into the nature of the problem – whether it is fixable or not fixable. If something is fixable, there is no point being upset about it: just go and fix it. Being upset does not solve the problem. It is like when you are driving a car and have a punctured tyre. If you do not stop and repair it but keep driving, you will damage it further. Just call the NRMA. They'll come and fix it. In the same way, if something is fixable, you need to fix it rather than become upset about it and do nothing. If, on the other hand, something is not fixable, you cannot do anything, so just accept

it. For instance, your parents die. Your loved ones die. Your house is burnt. That is the nature of things and you cannot do anything about it. It is best to accept it. It is beyond your control. So, you need to have a flexible mind. With a flexible mind, you have less chance of being upset. But if you have a rigid mind and expect everything to go your way, then you will have many problems. You may want to do things your way, but sometimes you have to follow his or her way; that is give and take. If you are flexible, you are likely to be upset much less. But if you are rigid, you get upset easily and this leads to anger. As Śāntideva said, 'Anger is not static. It is a state of mind'.

So, you need to look into your anger: investigate what your anger does to you, what it does to others. Sometimes it is not easy to see your own anger. In order to understand your anger, it is often helpful to look at someone else's anger: how the person's anger is disturbing him or her; how much harm it inflicts on others. Once you can see that, think that there is no difference between this person's anger and your anger. One of the teachings say that we humans are very good at finding other people's tiny little problems but are so bad about finding our own big mistakes. The reason is because we don't focus in the right way. We scrutinise what others are doing. That's human nature. But what is really bothering you is your own problem. This is a very important teaching of the Buddha: the real problem I have does not come from out there, it comes from inside me, so we need to look into ourselves and fix it. That is the Dharma practice.

If you can recognise the problem and fix it, then you become more capable of helping others. You just need a bit of extra effort to find out about your anger, how it harms you and others. Then you have a better understanding of anger and will be able to minimise it. Minimising anger is not about telling yourself not to get angry, because then you are likely to make yourself angrier. How many people tried this and failed? The only method that works is to tell yourself 'I need to be more virtuous'. When you are virtuous, anger naturally dissolves. It is like trying to reduce smoke in the house. To reduce the smoke, I need to either take out the wood that is producing smoke, or add more fuel and increase the flame. The smoke is anger, wood is the cause, and the flame is virtue. You either take out the cause or increase your virtue. Then you

will be happier. The happier you are, the less angry you are. This is a very practical instruction.

To summarise, first you need to identify the damage your anger causes. Second, you need to increase your happiness. In order to increase happiness, you need to be more virtuous. The happier you become, the less likely you will get angry. The more flame, the less smoke. You need to light the wood, then make sure that this wood keeps burning. If it is burning well, it does not produce smoke.

Specific methods of antidote

Now that we have looked at the general antidote to anger, let's cover the specific methods, specifically patience. There are three types of patience: first, accepting difficulties; second, understanding reality and; third, not being upset with the person who troubles you.

1. Accepting difficulties

First, accepting difficulties. Living in this ordinary world, we are not tolerant but very sensitive: when it is a little hot, we complain it is too hot; when it is a little cold, it is too cold; if we become a little sick, we say 'I'm so sick'. We're naturally like that. What we need to do is understand the reality, and the reality is that, if we live in samsara, the nature of samsara is suffering. We get cold, we get hot, we get hungry, we get thirsty, we get sick, we get unhappy. That is natural. But what we are doing every day is fighting every discomfort. We need to look into this attitude. By fighting every discomfort, we are adding mental complaints or criticisms to small physical discomforts and disturbing our own mind. It is not a practical solution. The practical solution is to accept that it is natural that we sometimes feel hot, cold, hungry, thirsty and so on. Because it is natural, we accept it and do our best to deal with it.

In the modern world, there are many complaints. I come from a family of refugees with only basic things. In such an environment everyone helped each other, was kind to each other and supported each other. In the west, things are modernised and people have an excess of everything. This environment

has made people impatient: they feel everything must come right now. If they don't get things right now, they always complain. We may be improving material things, but we are increasing problems not providing solutions. We used to wait for a letter for a month. If it didn't arrive, we would wait another month. Now with emails, people wait a few hours and complain that they have not received a reply. It gets even worse with the faster Facebook messages. More improvements result in more complaints. I'm not sure where we're heading with these.

Changing your mind

It is very important to have this understanding about the nature of our relationship with the world. Dharma does not just tell you to commit virtue but tells you not to blame the world. Intolerant minds cause so much trouble. You need to think differently. What the Buddha taught is a much healthier way – you need to re-adjust, re-design and re-construct your mind. With physical problems other people can do things for you. But when it comes to your mind, you cannot employ a buddha to do the work for you. You are your own buddha, you have to do it yourself. Accept difficulties. It is not going to be easy. When we practise the Dharma, we encounter a lot of challenges: it is not the Dharma causing the challenges but our habits – our thoughts, our mind. The Dharma is very simple. It is our mind that is complicated. Yet, we do not see that. We think the Dharma is complicated and hard. The Buddha too faced difficult challenges. He practised for three countless eons even though he must have had so many problems. But he freed himself from those problems. Samsara means problems because we have retained our complicated mind from beginningless time.

Our present habits did not happen yesterday or this morning. From beginningless time, we have accumulated our chaotic mind. So, we need to understand that the trouble is not the Dharma but our habits, this messy mind which needs sorting out. It is like cleaning your house. The house itself is not the problem. The things you put in the house are the problem for you to clean up. If you think the Dharma is complicated, sooner or later you will give up. Once you give it up, you lose a lot: you lose wisdom, you lose the Path. But if you understand that it is your mind that is complicated,

then you will stop making more mess. You will tidy up your mind. It is very important that you identify what is complicated and what is not. Do not be discouraged by the challenge. In his time, the Buddha went through the same problems as we are going through now – so messy, so confused. But he somehow managed to go beyond this chaotic environment.

In samsaric life, it seems that the more effort we make, our problems keep perpetuating. Jobs in samsara are really difficult: no matter how much effort we put in to clean things out, next day we find exactly the same mess – or even more mess. That's really hard work. With the Dharma if I consistently concentrate with determination and focus, the challenge is not going to last forever. The more effort I put in, the easier and more comfortable things become. The challenge is only for a short time. It's a totally different situation with samsaric jobs.

Example from past masters

It is good to remember what the past masters went through. We are happy to read teachings of great masters, but we do not appreciate how they achieved the results. They went through a lot of physical hardship; they went through a lot of mental concentration. It is not that they sat and suddenly obtained the peace of mind. Think about Milarepa. After he entered the Path and until he reached enlightenment, he ate just nettle. Only nettle. If you eat nettle for two days you'd be complaining. But Milarepa ate just one type of nettle soup for the rest of his life. That's a lot of hardship but he got a result. Reading Milarepa's story is very inspiring. He was a very smart person. His focus was not food or physical comfort but comfort of the mind. So, he put every effort into making his mind comfortable. We in samsara put all our efforts into physical comfort. Physical comfort is worthwhile. But the more comfort we have, the more sensitive we become. The more sensitive we are, the more we complain about things. So, we are not really getting the point.

It is good to read Milarepa's story and understand how much effort he put in to attain what he did. Then look at ourselves. Even trying to be calm is an effort. We live under air conditioners. We live with heaters. We protect the roof. But those great yogis lived in the cave or jungle where animals might attack. Yet they kept their practice. When I think about their circumstances,

it makes me feel that my efforts are not even worth talking about. Ayadhara said: “we complain so much about pain in our body – knees, back etc. If the nature of the body is not pain, we would be right to complain. But the nature of the body is pain. Then, why do we complain?” If you understand the nature, the reality, it is easy to accept. You may expect your body to be painless, but in reality, the nature of the body is discomfort. One of the most difficult things to maintain is the body. Accepting this reality makes you less troubled. That’s how things work: the cause is your understanding of reality and the effect is peace of mind.

2. Understanding the reality of phenomena

The second type of patience is understanding the reality of phenomena. There are two kinds of reality: conventional reality and absolute reality. First, I talk about conventional reality. Understanding conventional reality means that, when somebody harms you or disturbs you, you see it as the nature of samsara: the nature of every being is suffering. When I am suffering, whether intentionally or unintentionally, I am going to make others uncomfortable. That is natural. Only buddhas and bodhisattvas attain the ultimate happiness, and if these superior beings upset you, that would be a shock. But as for all of us in samsara, it is our nature to upset each other. We need to practise not to harm others. This is the reason we need compassion because others are suffering. We cannot expect people to treat us well; that is not going to happen, because they do not have good things to give. To expect good things from others is unrealistic. If you understand the nature of sentient beings, then it does not bother you when they harm you. For example, if a drunk person abuses you, you would not be upset very much. On the other hand, if you do not know how drinking affects a person, you may get upset by the abuse. Similarly, we in samsara are all drunk, with our desire mind, anger mind, ignorance mind. We are mentally completely drunk. When these people harm you, you do not need to take the harm personally. Buddha is not telling you not to be upset by someone’s harm and pretend it did not happen. He is saying that you need to understand that when people harm you, they are influenced by defilements, like a drunken person. Because it is defilements that did you harm, you should be compassionate towards the person, rather

than resent the harm done. When you have this kind of understanding, you retain your peace of mind, so there will be no anger.

Of course, you cannot change your habit when you read this once. Because habits are so powerful, you will be facing challenges all the time and have to keep telling yourself to remember the teaching, to remember these reasons. You may still respond to harm with harm, but at least you will remember to say to yourself your reaction is not right and next time when it happens you can handle it a little better. We need a lot of time for improvement. Do not rush. Every time when someone harms you, remember what the Dharma says. The person who harms you is actually giving you an opportunity to practise the Dharma; without this person, you cannot train yourself in patience; without this person you cannot overcome your anger mind. This person is not different from your teacher who talks about patience; this person is not different from the Buddha who taught you how to be free from anger mind. Instead of being upset or angry, you should prostrate to this person; offer flowers to this person; what's the difference between this person and the Buddha? If you really think about it, there's no difference.

The nature of sentient beings is suffering and suffering beings can easily upset others. The nature of fire is heat: you should not expect fire to be cold. The nature of water is wet: you should not expect water to be dry. The nature of soil is solid and heavy: you should not expect soil to be light. Each phenomenon has its own nature. Because we lack wisdom, we do not see reality and we overreact. The nature of fire is to burn. Anger is like fire. Wherever you take your anger, it will make you unhappy. You should not let anger arise, because if anger arises you will burn yourself, you will burn others. There are limitless sentient beings. The ordinary world is very much driven by ignorance and the nature of limitless sentient beings is suffering.

So, wherever you go, you should prepare yourself for being disturbed. You should not be upset with it but be more compassionate. When you have the Dharma and understand the nature of sentient beings, you see things differently. When you do not have any Dharma, you expect everyone to be nice to you and you wonder why this person is causing you this problem or that problem. The more you think this way, the angrier you become. You will

be unhappy, and unhappiness feeds anger. When we do not have the Dharma, we think we see reality but we are not seeing it. Like a drunk person would not admit he or she is drunk, samsaric beings insist what they see is real. But because they see things with desire mind or with anger mind, none of what they see is real. If we see things correctly, we all should see the same things. But we all see things differently. That is the reality of all sentient beings.

See reality as karma

When someone harms you or causes you difficulties, there are two ways of understanding it. One is to think of karma: 'In my past life, I harmed this person, so now it's coming back to me. There's nothing new, so I accept it'. An easy way to explain karma is that, if you are a parent, you may be challenged by your teenager. You complain about your child, forgetting that when you were a teenager you caused so much trouble for your parents. We think we have a right to cause problems to our parents but our children have no right to cause us problems. That doesn't make sense. It is the same with karma. If you think about the trouble you caused your parents when you were a teenager, you can accept your teenager causing you trouble. You get less upset. But if you forget what you have done in the past, you get upset with your children. 'I feed them, I send them to school, I do this and that for them, yet look what they do to me!' When you understand karma, you will be upset less, you are less angry. Another way of seeing it as karma is to think 'this person, to whom I committed negative karma in the past, has come to me now to cleanse my karma by giving me a hard time. Once I accept it, I will not need to suffer the consequence of my negative karma again in future. This is very fortunate. This person is so kind to cleanse my negative karma that I have committed'.

Dharma practitioners redesign their mind, not by force but through logical reasoning. If you believe in karma this way, what the person did will not upset you or make you unhappy, and you will not be angry. Whatever karma you may have committed could cause you to go to the hell realms. But instead of that karma ripening in the hell realms, it is ripening in the human realm. It is much easier to exhaust your karma in the human realm instead of experiencing the terrible things in the hell realms. It is like you committing a

crime and being sentenced to two years in jail, but instead you are told to do community work. You would be grateful to do community work rather than to go to jail. Similarly, the person who harms you is actually preventing you from going to hell realms. You would be grateful rather than be upset about it.

See things as emptiness

The second way to look at reality is as emptiness. As Śāntideva says, the purpose of meditating on emptiness is to free your defiled, ignorant mind, so now is the time to apply your understanding of emptiness in these circumstances. Think that the person who is hurting me is an illusion. And me as a person being hurt is an illusion. The object of hurt is also an illusion. So why should I be bothered about it? To be bothered about it is like thinking that a nightmare is real: when we wake up, none of the dream is true. This understanding helps you not to react. Once you can manage your mind to think this way, next time when someone hurts you, you can use the same method. It is like when you have a headache and take panadol, it helps. Next time you have a headache, you already have the panadol. You will not worry about getting headaches. So, when you view reality as emptiness, as a result you will not be upset, you will not have anger.

How to handle pain

Your teacher tells you that when you practise the Dharma you will feel comfortable, and the comfort shows that it is the right Path. Yet, you experience hardship – physically, mentally and emotionally. So, you may see some contradiction: you should be comfortable practising the Dharma, yet you feel overwhelmed, emotionally tired, or physically in pain, because you find the Dharma difficult to comprehend. In such a case, tell yourself this: ‘I am investing this discomfort for a good purpose, a meaningful purpose. I am not wasting my effort’. Then, you feel more at ease.

Many of us, in samsaric activities, have to sit in front of the computer all day to run a business, or if you work in a supermarket you have to stand all day. You have to bear the pain for the sake of earning dollars. But what we are facing with the Dharma is for a much better purpose than earning money – to exhaust our defilements, to reach buddhahood, and to benefit countless

beings. When you think of these reasons for bearing pain, the pain becomes more enjoyable and you feel more relaxed. You need to bring this mentality into your practice – the awareness of what you are doing. If you do not think this way, those difficulties can become the cause for giving up the Dharma.

There was a great king in Tibet who went to prison and died in prison, for the sake of the Dharma. How did he comfort himself in prison? He thought 'I had many lives in the past. Most of my lives were wasted. But this time, my life in prison is useful for bringing the Dharma to Tibet. So, I am happy to die in prison as long as the Dharma remains in Tibet for the benefit of countless sentient beings'. So, instead of being miserable or sad in prison, he died a joyful death. Like this Lama, if you know what you are going through is for a good purpose, it will not bring unhappiness. Even if you are in pain, it can be a source of joy. It is like when you love sport or are in love, you would go anywhere to see the sport or meet the person you love. If you are supporting a team you would go to the stadium on a cold day or in rain. You would not mind the discomfort. You take a lot of enjoyment out of it. If you can turn your discomfort into joy, why not turn a bit of pain into joy when you practise the Dharma? We have the skill to change our view, yet we only use it for insignificant purposes. If we have the interest in and opportunity to practise the Dharma, a small pain here and there should not bother us.

It is human nature that none of us want pain but pain or suffering of any kind can give us renunciation. Without suffering, we would not wish for renunciation. Pain also allows us to develop compassion: if we did not know what suffering is, we would not have any idea what compassion is. This way suffering is very important. Suffering does not come from nowhere. It is created, and the creator of suffering is non-virtue. So, due to suffering, we want to abandon non-virtue. Laziness puts us to sleep and increases our ignorance, but suffering keeps us awake so we can develop wisdom. Therefore, the most favourable condition for practising the Dharma to make us good Mahayana practitioners is to experience difficulties. We do not need to reject suffering but use it to develop bodhicitta, compassion and to renounce or abandon non-virtuous deeds. In that sense, suffering is positive: it can be used to realise the conventional nature of phenomena.

The absolute nature of phenomena

Now let us examine our sense of 'hurt' from the viewpoint of the absolute nature of phenomena. When we think a person has hurt us, first we have the concept of 'others'. Second, we have the concept of the words or the object that hurt me, or money that was taken from me, or a job that was taken from me and the like. And third, we have the concept of 'me' who is hurt due to him or her, or his or her action. From the emptiness point of view, the self that I think is hurt, that 'I', is a mere label, a label given to the five aggregates: my form, my feeling, my perception, my mental formations, and my consciousness. We see these five aggregates as 'mine'. But if I look at each of these five aggregates, I do not find 'me' or 'I' or 'self'. If there was such a 'self', it would have to be either one of the five aggregates or separate from them. Yet we are not going to find it in any of them or separate from them. Then, where is the 'I' that you think was being hurt? Not finding 'I' does not mean it has disappeared: in order to disappear, it has to exist in the first place. But it does not exist from the beginning, so there is nothing to disappear. It is in your imagination, a dream. It was your illusion mind that dreamed it up. In other words, there is no 'self'. Where there is no 'self', how could you say there are 'others'? 'Self' and 'other' are interdependent. If there is no 'one', how could you say there are 'two'? If there is no 'right', how could you say there is 'left'? Likewise, if there is no 'short', there is no 'tall'. Everything is interdependent. So, when you do not have 'self', you do not have 'others'. Then, why do we have this story in our mind – 'he hurt me' or 'she hurt me'. These are not relevant from the ultimate point of view. When there is no 'I' or 'other', there is no action of hurt. Who is going to hurt whom? When there is no actor, where could action be? This helps you realise that the 'hurt' is mere illusion: in reality, when you are awake, the concept of 'self' and actions are not really there. When you are aware of this reality, you are not being hurt. You will not be disturbed. This is one of the ultimate methods for not being disturbed, that is, understanding the absolute truth, the absolute truth antidote.

3. Not being upset by others who trouble you

The third type of patience is to not be disturbed by others who hurt you.

But to reach that stage, we need to train ourselves, we need to practise. When you join the Army, they will tell you that you have to defeat your enemy. That is the ultimate goal. But to defeat an enemy, you need to train in methods to defeat them. Without training, just saying you can defeat them, it is not going to happen. Similarly, our enemy is our own defilements. The purpose of the Dharma practice is to defeat these defilements. This is the ultimate goal. To defeat this enemy – like in the Army – you need to train with your weapon, and the Dharma practitioner’s weapon is qualities such as loving kindness, compassion, wisdom, tolerance... these are the weapons you need. Without weapons, with your bare body, you cannot defeat your enemy. In the same way, a bare mind not equipped with love, compassion and wisdom cannot defeat your defilements. Instead, your mind is defeated as it has always been. So we need to train. We need to train ourselves in three things – the object, the time, and the nature of sentient beings.

Training with respect to the object

First, the object. The object is the person you used to have difficulties with. For instance, one of your family members who always annoys you, disturbs you, bothers you. Let us look into two aspects of this, which will give you a little clarity. Without the Dharma, when somebody annoys you, you would think like this: ‘this person really annoys me, disturbs me’. That is a normal reaction. Now the Dharma says that the cause of your anger is not the person but your own unhappy mind. The person says something to you. You are disturbed and feel unhappy. But to be disturbed or not is not up to that person. It is up to you; it is the way you respond. If you respond in a negative way, you get disrupted, and your disturbed mind makes you unhappy. It makes you angry. This is what the Dharma says. Let us compare which is true, the normal way of describing anger or how Dharma describes the anger. You have to examine. This is important. It is not right to think something is true because the Dharma says so. That is a cheap decision. You must buy an expensive decision – invest your time, invest your effort, apply your intelligence in making the decision. When you do that, whatever comes out would be a more accurate for you. So, you present yourself two points of view: the worldly point of view and the dharmic point of view. The Dharma

does not hide anything. It is logical. Whatever people ask, the Dharma has the right answer. Intellectual understanding is very important. When you understand and implement what you understand, that is the real medicine or antidote. That will change you and fix the problem.

In the past, this person was annoying you. Now you look at the person differently: this very person is helping you, to succeed in becoming tolerant and in practising patience. We are so used to thinking about things as others' fault. It is a very strong habit. Even when we think we understand otherwise, when a situation arises, the control of your habit is often stronger than your effort to apply what you learnt from the Dharma. For this reason, my advice is to pause a little, if you can. Do not react but give a little time to recollect what the Dharma says: 'actually, it is me who is not happy with what she said. It is me who is disturbed. So, I need to train myself not to get disturbed'. When you try that, there is ninety-nine per cent chance that you fail. That is fine. You are trying. When you are first trained to hold a gun, there is more chance that you make mistakes. That's natural about everything we learn. You should not expect to do it right the first time – unless you have done it in the past. You should not be ashamed of not achieving the result from the start: the reason we practise is because we accept that we are not yet experts. We need to say that to ourselves as often as we need to. Some of you may need to remind yourselves only a few times, while others may need to repeat a hundred times. How long it takes depends on the determination, focus and intelligence of an individual. First, train in this method with the person close to you. Once you feel a little confident, you train with your friends who annoy you. You love them, but at the same time they annoy you. Then, you use this method for neutral types of persons – strangers who annoy you, who make you upset – to practise on them. Then the last type, you practise it on your enemy – who truly disturbs you.

So, keep training yourself with different types of people. Each and every time you do this you will become wiser, get more experience, and as a result you will get less disrupted. This is the true practice. Meditation allows you to see clearly: 'if I do this, that will happen' and so on. But to prove that, you need to apply the method in reality. If you do not apply it, you do not know

if your meditation is right or wrong. When you meditate, you have some idea, but you cannot tell if this idea is right or wrong until you apply it in real life. You need to work both with meditation and application side by side supporting each other. So, training with the object is to use the person with whom you have problems in order to train yourself. It is not easy, but it is very important. What makes you a great doctor? It's your patients. Who makes you a great politician? The public make you a great politician. Who makes you a great teacher? The students. Who makes you great parents? Your children. In that sense, the Dharma says every sentient being is helping you whether they have the intention or not. They are helping you because they are the ones that make your practice of patience perfect. Once you are aware of this, you will not have resistance against them. Rather, you look forward to seeing them because you can turn dust into gold. Normally, we turn gold into dust. You can reverse that. This is how you train with your object.

Training with respect to the time

The second is the time, or the pace you proceed with your training. You should commit yourself to your practice and once you are committed, you should stick with it. That makes you a reliable person. But in the beginning you should not commit to something you cannot do. Do not make commitments based on impulse but do it with a logical mind. This is very important. For example, some of us feel good about doing Hevajra sadhana and commit their whole life to the Hevajra sadhana. But when the feeling is gone, they lose the motivation. Be practical, be sensible about what you can and cannot do. Ask yourself if you can do it even when the initial feeling or excitement is gone. If your answer is that you can still continue to practice the sadhana, then it may be right to commit to it. To be successful, you should give yourself a time limit. 'For an hour a day, if someone comes to me and tries to disrupt me, I will not respond in a negative way. I will do my best not to be disturbed'. Just an hour a day. Do this until you are comfortable, then you can extend the time – a few hours, half a day, a full day. Gradually, a week, a month, a year. This is training, like in jogging. At the beginning, if you start with 5 km, next day you will be discouraged. So, start

with half a kilometre and enjoy it. It will make you feel good about it and the next day you are encouraged and think you want to jog a little longer, may be one kilometre. This is a skilful way – start with a short duration, enjoy it, see the benefit, and you are encouraged to do longer. This is how you train yourself with time.

Training with respect to the nature of sentient beings

The third is training yourself with respect to the nature of sentient beings. We discussed how we need to train ourselves in loving kindness, compassion and the like. We should not get upset with sentient beings because they have been so kind to us. There are many ways to explain this, but we can sum them up into two: biological and Dharma viewpoints. Biologically, we need to trust what the Buddha taught. The Buddha says that we will not find one single being who has never been most kind to us in past lives – not just once but many times. They cherished us more than their life. Rather than always taking from others it is our turn to give back kindness and think: 'I am fortunate to have found the Dharma. I will be more mature in thinking and will take more responsibility. I am fortunate to have this opportunity to look after them and I will take joy out of it'. We need to create this frame of mind within. If you have the right frame of mind, a joyful state, then you will not find practising the Dharma difficult. The right mental environment is, whatever you do, you see it purposefully and meaningfully. Think of the great result for the future – bring into your mind all the merit you invest. This will give you joy. When you are in a joyful state of mind you do not feel tired. This is from the biological point of view.

Second, from the dharmic point of view, there are many levels. If you want to be happy, the prime cause of happiness is loving kindness. If you genuinely love others, this very loving mind is a truly happy mind. If you do not have this love for others, no matter what else you may have, nothing is going to make you happy. From this viewpoint, sentient beings make you happy because you wish them happiness. This is a very important dharmic point of view. Your compassion is also for other beings. When you see they are suffering, when you see that they are creating the cause of their own suffering, then either mentally or physically you try to stop them from suffering, to

stop the cause of their suffering. This compassion mind is a virtuous mind. When you are in the virtuous state of mind, no misery exists in your mind. So, who is actually helping me cultivate a wholesome mind? The sentient beings. So, they are very important to us.

The third point of view is that we need sentient beings to achieve buddhahood, the ultimate goal we can achieve. Buddhahood cannot be achieved without having bodhicitta, and the object of bodhicitta is sentient beings. Our reason for wanting to achieve buddhahood is for the sake of sentient beings. Therefore, sentient beings are helping us achieve that state. So, from the biological and dharmic points of view, and for achieving our ultimate goal, sentient beings are extremely important to us. Just the thought of their importance will improve your relationship with others. But if you keep thinking that others are the cause of your suffering, and that you are the victim, then you become distant from them and eventually you will be isolated from everyone. It is not that they isolate you but your own ignorance isolates you from others.

Dharma can be applied to other social relationships

This is true with conventional social relationships too. Dharma is very rich. It can be applied to improve social skills, have a good personality, have a happy life and so on, because the Dharma contains all. Once you have acquired a strong relationship with others, then you are not going to be disturbed easily. If you are not disturbed, you will not be unhappy. Without an unhappy mind you will not get angry. Just think of anyone who causes you trouble. That person is now the cause for your success in compassion, your success in patience. As Śāntideva stated in *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, when you have someone who causes you trouble, and you think in the right way, you can acquire patience. If there is no one who annoys you, then you do not have the opportunity to practise patience. In that sense, troublesome people are giving you a great opportunity. This awareness will stop you from thinking about them negatively, as troublemakers. Rather, you begin to see them as helpers for you to become more tolerant.

Importance of practice over knowledge

Now, these are possibilities. Whether this possibility is realised or not is

entirely up to you. If you practise, you will succeed. If you do not practise, even if you understand the logic, nothing will change, no matter how many years you study the Dharma or how many thousands of books on the Dharma you read. In other words, the antidote for overcoming anger is practice. The main element of success for your acquiring patience is practice. Sometimes just putting a small thing into action is more powerful than reading a hundred books on the Dharma. This is very important. You may be a bookworm and read hundreds of books, and say 'Oh, I've read this, I've read that' yet you continue to have the same problems because you do not practise. Even if you sit on a cushion meditating for a long time, it does not necessarily guarantee your practice.

Recognise the value of the troublesome person

How much do you respect the Dharma, how much do you respect the Buddha? You should respect troublesome people just as much, because they are equally helping you. They help you just as your guru. There's no difference. We need the Buddha who taught the Dharma; we need a teacher who explains the Dharma to us; we need time to practise; then we also need objects to practise the Dharma on. None of these is more or less important than the others. They are all equally important. That is why we should respect the troublesome person because he or she makes you a better person. As the Tibetans say, 'Your parents do not make you a hero. Your enemy makes you a hero' because 'your enemy challenges you, and when you defeat them, people call you a hero. Defeating your parents will not make you a hero. Likewise, without an enemy you cannot practise patience. Whenever someone tries to disrupt or annoy you, think about all the opportunity for practising patience. It is like this with generosity: in the past, you were annoyed with people who asked you for money. Now you know the importance of the practice of the Perfection of Generosity, as soon as people ask you for something you realise that they are helping you to practise the Perfection of Generosity. Similarly, you can look forward to people disturbing you so you can practise the Perfection of Patience.

This attitude makes it much easier for you to fit in a society. There are many troublemakers – everywhere you go, there is a troublemaker. Now you

are turning all of them into good friends. You will not be afraid of going out into the world. Once you know the technique, you look forward to going out there: the opportunity is everywhere – free doctor, free medicine, all free! Why not take advantage of them? The trouble someone can cause you is small compared to what you would experience in your next life if you react negatively. Due to negative karma you have a consequence. As I said before, suppose you commit a crime that would send you to prison for three months but instead you get a lighter sentence of one month of community service. You may not want to do it, but compared to three months in prison it would be much better.

Understanding pain during meditation

I want to add something here in relation to the Dharma. When we meditate, we sometimes experience physical discomfort. We may think, 'I'm sitting for a long time in this position to meditate. This is causing me so much pain. When I don't meditate, I don't sit like this and I don't have this pain'. So, we almost think that meditation is causing this pain. It is normal to think this way, but we are missing the point slightly. From the dharmic point of view, when we meditate, we are in the virtuous mind. Virtue cannot lead to suffering. The reason we have the pain is because the nature of the body is suffering and it manifests as reality. We should be grateful that we experience this pain for a good purpose rather than for an unnecessary purpose. When our mind is virtuous, we can see the situation. In summary, the three antidotes are: accepting the difficulties; accepting the reality; and not getting upset with the person who troubles you.

Śāntideva's *A Guide to Bodhisattva Way of Life*

Śāntideva talks much about patience in the chapter on Patience in *A Guide to Bodhisattva Way of Life*, so it is good to read this chapter. For example, he says that if you are angry with someone who beat you, then you should not be angry with him or her but with the stick that beat you. The stick is what beat you, not the person. If you say you are angry with the person because the person had the intention to beat me, then you should not be angry with the person because it is his or her defilement that beat you. You need to defeat his defilement. It is defilement that causes trouble, not the person. A person's

nature is the pure buddha nature. Harmless. Our nature is harmless. It is a temporary defilement that controls the mind and hurts you and others. If you really want to stop that person hurting you, you need to help him or her to reduce his or her defilement, so that they do not have anger or hurt anyone. Śāntideva says that we should differentiate the person and his or her defilements. At present we retaliate; our retaliation hurts the person and supports his or her defilement. That's a wrong approach. The right approach is to help the person defeat the defilement.

This philosophy – what I call logic – is very useful. When you understand it, you know how to handle everything; right now, we have the right intentions and we try, but due to lack of wisdom we always make mistakes. Every mistake has its own consequences and we suffer because of them. Most of us are really victims of our own mistakes, not victims of others. If we really investigate closely, we should realise that.

How to perform the correct patience

Four qualities to achieve

There are four qualities of the Perfection of Patience and seven attachments to abandon in the practice of Patience. The first of the four qualities is that it destroys anger as mentioned above. The second quality is to realise emptiness: do not think 'I am tolerating this hurt inflicted by this person' because no 'I' or 'other' exists. The third quality is that it fulfils all our wishes. Our wish is to be happy. When we have enough patience, nothing will disturb us. The undisturbed mind is peace, which is the foundation of happiness; the practice of patience makes us happy. Also, it does not disturb others, so others will also have joy and happiness. The fourth quality is to lead others to the Dharma. When we help others, they trust you, respect you. Then, according to whatever their level, you can guide them to what is good for them. For example, someone who is negative and undisciplined but wants to gain benefit for themselves, that person is more suitable for Theravada. Advise the person 'if you really want to be happy, what makes you unhappy is your negative mind, so you should discipline your mind'. Tell the person to

go and learn Theravada teaching; give him or her strict rules to follow.

If someone wants to help everyone but does not have the skills and becomes a victim. Introduce this type of person to Mahayana methods of how to help others; tell the person to go and learn Mahayana teaching. Another type of person may rush to help everyone but makes a lot of mistakes. This type of person is suitable for Vajrayana as he or she wants to do good things in a short time. Introduce him or her to the Vajrayana Path to reach enlightenment within a short time to help all sentient beings.

You may think this is a small task, but actually it is a big task. If you can introduce one person to the Dharma, once this person attains full enlightenment, you are the one who has connected this person to the Dharma. It is like you introducing a friend to a large corporation. He becomes so successful in the company and he remembers that you introduced him to the corporate world and is very grateful to you. Dharmically, you do not need to teach people. Just introduce them to the Dharma is good enough. Do not underestimate what you have done. You have made a huge contribution to their life.

Seven attachments to abandon

The seven attachments to abandon are: do not be attached to anger; do not delay your practice; do not be satisfied with small things when there is more room for improvements; do not expect return; do not expect to be reborn in a higher realm; do not be attached to the residues of anger; and do not be attached to the potential habit of anger.

BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

Temporary benefits

Benefits in this life

In this life, if you keep training in the practice of patience, it becomes easy to tolerate disturbances of modern life now that you know how to deal with them. Previously, when we wanted to do good things, we expected that no one would disrupt us. But because in reality many people disrupt us, we

could not achieve what we wanted to do. With training in patience, we are not easily disrupted, so we can handle things better, even though there are still a lot of disruptions.

When our response changes, it seems as if the world is a better place now than it was in the past. This is the immediate benefit in this life. Also, when you are tolerant, with a little more patience, your mind becomes calmer and your body is more relaxed because there is less stress. When you can relax your mind and body, that creates happiness in your mind and your body becomes healthier. There are many ways you can develop fitness in your body – exercise, taking nutritious food and so on, but these make only minor contributions to the body. The main factor is the mind. The mind is most powerful.

If you can manage to keep your mind at peace, that is great nutrient to your mind and body. Think about some samadhi meditators. They do not eat, they do not drink, they do not exercise, yet they are healthy. How can you explain this scientifically? Science says that we must exercise, we must eat this food, that food or our body would deteriorate. But these meditators have healthy bodies without those. I am not saying that we can achieve their state right now. We need to train. If we keep training, one day we will achieve such a state. Everything depends on the mind. Where there is the mind, everything else is there. But we are not utilising the mind. Scientifically speaking, we only use a small part of our brain. Buddhists also say that we use a very small part – less than one per cent – of our mind. So, there is much more we can utilise for the benefit of ourselves and others.

For us, the mind seems small and the world is vast. But as you approach enlightenment, the mind gets larger and the world gets smaller. One day, when you reach enlightenment, you mind and the world are the same size. So, in the immediate life, with peace and health we can relax, and in the long run, we will have no enemy. As Śāntideva says “Once you subdue your anger, no enemy exists out there.” If there is no inward anger there is not an enemy outside. This is a practical and achievable possibility. Right now, you think you have enemies out there, say ten enemies. You may defeat them. But then, these ten people have relatives, friends and others, so you multiply

your enemies to a hundred. The outer enemy is impossible to defeat: the more you defeat them, the more of them you have. You cannot win. The Buddha gives us one thing we can achieve: we can get rid of all our enemies by defeating our own anger. When we do not have anger there is no enemy. This is achievable. This is the benefit in this life.

Benefits in future lives

From next life onwards, wherever you take your rebirth, an absence of anger or being full of patience gives you a longer and healthier life and you will be harmonious with everyone. Neither humans nor non-humans cause you trouble. All the excellent qualities can be obtained. Śāntideva also says: “if you are a patient person, you are the most beautiful person in the community”. Everyone knows that you are tolerant, people talk good things about you. You have the inner beauty. You will be reborn that kind of person. You will have everything you want – as a result of your patience. One sutra says that the practice of patience gives you good appearance: when people have positive mind, their outlook is soft and gentle. In the Buddha’s case, his skin turned into a golden colour. One of the causes of this is patience. Due to his patience, the Buddha’s whole complexion is like gold – an unstained, golden colour. Nagarjuna stated in *A Letter to a Friend*: “if one has abandoned anger, one is not going to be reborn in the lower realms.” It is also said that once you have abandoned anger, you will attain the enlightened state much more quickly. Anger constantly disrupts our practice, so when there is no disturbance the Path is much smoother. You can attain enlightenment quickly as a result.

Ultimate benefit

According to Nagarjuna, Buddha also said that if one really practises patience, one is definitely going to attain enlightenment in a very short period of time. This will be the great liberation, the cessation of afflictions and obscurations and the completion of all realisations. A Mahayana sutra says that the Buddha’s one hundred and twelve signs – we say eighty minor signs and thirty-two major signs – are a result of practising patience. The Buddha practised patience for three countless aeons and the result is these marks

THE SIX PARAMITAS

that beautify his physical body. Practising patience on a daily basis will bring peace, happiness and success for yourself and others in this and many future lives, So, there are many benefits. If you are a patient person, you can easily fit into your family, your work environment, your society. That makes your life much easier. The opposite would be a person difficult to get along with anyone. So, these are the benefits of practising patience. Once you have gained enlightenment, you can work for the benefit of all sentient beings in order to free them from suffering and its causes and to bring them to buddhahood as well.

*There is no evil like hatred
And no fortitude like patience.
Thus should I strive in various way
To meditate on patience.*

Śāntideva A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life

The Perfection of Diligence

The fourth perfection is the Perfection of Diligence/Enthusiasm/Joyous Effort. As with the previous perfections, there are three main topics: first, the definition of enthusiasm; second, its nature; and the third, the benefits of practising diligence.

DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF DILIGENCE

First, the Mahayana definition of diligence. Like the previous qualities we discussed, joyous effort in the Mahayana context is to enjoy committing virtue for others. But this Mahayana definition does not necessarily mean the Perfection of Joyous Effort. When we make joyous effort for the sake of others, it may be based on bodhicitta and we may properly dedicate the effort, but what is missing is the knowledge of absolute truth – the understanding of emptiness. Diligence without the view of emptiness cannot be perfect, because only when one has the view of emptiness can one be free from self-cherishing, so one's effort is completely unconditional. That makes the effort perfect.

Check our own practice – trust the Dharma

When we practise virtues such as giving, ethical discipline or patience, we should look at them not from the viewpoint of these actions themselves but from our personal viewpoint: our own history, where we come from. If we think about our past, we have always been grasping onto our self: we looked at things as 'mine', we thought we were more important than anyone else. That has always been our mindset, our history. With this background,

it is impossible to totally let go of this self. We may let go perhaps a few percent, but ninety percent of the time we cling onto it. That makes our virtue imperfect. It is not that the qualities of generosity, moral ethics or patience are imperfect: the imperfection is in our practice. This is logical.

In order to improve, we need to change our history: we need to increase our understanding a little more. In the past, we were insecure, so we grasped onto everything. With that grasping, if we look back, when we listened to the Dharma it did not help us feel secure – rather it made us grasp more and feel even more insecure. Now the Dharma is telling us just let it go. Once we let it go, it makes us feel secure – now we are tasting how it feels, we are trusting the Dharma. It is like our trust in food – when we go to restaurant or eat meals at a retreat, actually we are brave because we are completely trusting the food. If our food contains chemicals or is poisonous and if we eat it without checking, it will make us sick. But we trust the food completely and enjoy it. Likewise, we should completely trust the Dharma when we practise it. It is very important. If we are unsure about it, have doubts and not completely trust it, it will not give us the full effect in our practice. We should fully trust the Dharma. It may not be easy, but we need to remember we often have so much trust in other things that are smaller or less important.

What needs to be changed is our practice: when we give and when a bodhisattva gives, the object and recipient may be the same – I give a dollar to a poor person, and a bodhisattva gives a dollar to the same poor person. There is no such thing as a bodhisattva dollar – the Australian government did not make two kinds of dollar coins. But these two giving actions come from different minds. My mind expects something in return; my mind is proud of myself for doing something to help others. So much is about me – the ‘me’ flavours my action, is the substance and the spice of my action. The bodhisattva, on the other hand, does not have any of those: his or her giving is one hundred percent ‘this is yours, not mine’. That makes a vast difference in the giving.

There is no need to change the amount of money you are giving or change how you share the Dharma with others. Give what is comfortable for you. What you need to check is your mind; make sure you are giving one hundred

percent for that person's benefit. But this is not going to happen without training your mind. Training changes your attitude.

Enjoyment is not joyous effort

When we practise the Dharma and enjoy doing these virtues, that is not the Perfection of Joyous Effort. Many of us would stop practising the Dharma if our desire mind is not enjoying it. If we seriously ask ourselves, we will find that we are in fact feeding our desire mind: we think 'as long as I am happy, I like doing this practice; but if I don't like it, then this practice is not important to me'. So, on the one hand we know that this practice of the Dharma is valuable, but on the other hand we are just feeding our desire mind, instead of purifying it. We are practising the Dharma but not in the right way. If we are not doing in the right way, we will not get the result we expect, because the law of cause and effect never falters. Whatever the cause we create, we receive the result only accordingly. That is the law. This law was not made by the Buddha; it was not made by me or you. That is the law of nature, so no one can change it. No matter how powerful you are, even if you control the entire world, you cannot change the law of karma; no matter how rich you are, even if you can buy everything, you cannot change the law of karma. Karma is how things exist. What the Dharma is saying is that we should follow the mainstream, which is the rules of nature, rather than make up our own rules.

Requirements for the Perfection of Diligence

Going back to the main topic – wishing and creating virtues to help others is Mahayana practice, but such enthusiasm is not necessarily the Perfection of Enthusiasm. The Perfection of Enthusiasm requires three things as with the previous perfections: the motivation towards bodhicitta; one's action needs to be based on emptiness; and one needs to dedicate it to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

On the last, dedication, there are two types of dedication: one is the dedication with the object and the other is the objectless dedication. The supreme dedication is the objectless dedication. Objectless dedication means that there is no grasping whatsoever – no grasping at self, no grasping at buddhahood, no grasping at other. It is dedication based on emptiness.

This type of dedication is the perfect dedication because there is no stain or obscuration of self, other or actions. In summary, whatever virtue you cultivate, if it is motivated by bodhicitta, based on emptiness and dedicated to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, you are generating enthusiasm that is perfect.

Absence of the three-poison minds

So, the general definition of enthusiasm is, as Śāntideva says, the kind of enthusiasm one has when one enjoys committing virtues. This needs more explanation because there are many kinds of virtues which are practised by different religions. What I think is a virtue does not necessarily fit into other religions' points of view. The Buddhist definition of virtue is whatever one thinks, does or says, one does it with a mind that is absent of the three poisons – desire, anger and ignorance. Whatever you do, therefore, you need to check whether your mind is associated with the three poisons or not. If your mind is stained by one, or all three, of the three poisons, your action is not virtuous. Then, you may wonder if your desire to attain buddhahood is a poison in the mind. Bodhicitta is not poison. The poisonous desire is selfish desire. Like drugs, cigarettes or alcohol, poison may make you feel good temporarily, but ultimately it will harm you and bring unhappiness. Desire, anger and ignorance all cause unhappiness. Virtue is the cause to achieve happiness. Poison and virtue are opposites and cannot mix – like water and fire cannot mix. It is important to be aware that if your mind is absent of the three poisons, it is a virtuous mind; if you do something, say something or think something without the three poisons, it is undisturbed action, undisturbed speech, undisturbed mind. Such mind is naturally contented, so it makes you relax and gives you peace and joy.

Be an engineer – design your future

Sometimes I think that the Dharma practitioner needs to have a mind like that of an engineer – to be able to design with a vision of what the result will be. Dharma gives us instructions in engineering, but in the end, we need to design and construct by ourselves and for ourselves. Right now, we have some idea of the fruit of our efforts. That gives us direction; without it, we may do something and just wait for a result to happen without knowing if

or when the result would come. All great engineers can tell what my house will look like when completed, or what the city will look like in a few years' time. Similarly, the Dharma practitioner needs to design for one's future: one is not there yet, but it is where one will be next year and determine what experience one will have. Dharma practice is a major project – not like making a breakfast – so it is important to have a good idea of where one wants to be in the future.

In summary, the definition of enthusiasm in general is to enjoy virtues; the particular Mahayana enthusiasm is to commit virtue to help others; and the Perfection of Enthusiasm consists of the right motivation, the view of emptiness and dedication.

DILIGENCE ITSELF

The second topic, the nature of diligence, has three sub-topics: the obstacles to diligence, the antidotes to the obstacle and the correct diligence.

Obstacle to enthusiasm: laziness

The obstacle to enthusiasm is laziness. There are three types of laziness. The first type is not engaging in any virtues through your body, mind or speech. This is the common laziness – not engaging in virtues.

Engaging in misguided virtues

The second type is, even if one thinks one is engaged in virtues, one is misguided: for example, diligently burning one's skin in the sun, walking on fire or torturing the body in other ways thinking that is a way to gain liberation. Many people punish their mind, punish their body or punish their emotion, thinking such punishment is virtuous. They try very hard, but they are missing the point – they are not committing virtues.

A good example is why Buddha stopped the fasting meditation after six years: he had thought it was the way to gain liberation, so he meditated with a heretic school for six years. After six years he was left with only skin and bone, then he realised that it was not the Path. Instead of leading him to liberation,

it tortured the body. In those six years he put in inconceivable effort; we find it difficult not to eat or drink for even one day, but Buddha spent six years doing this. But it was a wrong effort. That was the reason Buddha stopped it. He rose from that, and he ate. He looked after his body, nourished it, made it healthy, then went into the Path and reached Enlightenment.

Many of us, from lack of skill, tend to be harsh on ourselves. It is important to remember that, being virtuous means being in a happy state of mind; Dharma practice is much easier when we enjoy it. If you are bashing yourself, thinking 'I must do it – if I don't do it, I'll feel guilty, I'll be unhappy', it is unpleasant, and there is no virtue in an unpleasant state of mind. If you practise in a non-virtuous state of mind, how can you get happiness as a result? It is impossible.

On the other hand, one needs to differentiate two kinds of enjoyment – enjoyment of laziness and enjoyment of virtues. If you enjoy yourself laying on your couch doing nothing, that is not virtue. That is laziness. But if you are enjoying practising the Dharma because when you do, your mind is absent of the three poisons – there is no disturbance, you are free, so you really want to do it.

That is virtuous. The enjoyment that comes from committing virtue is right enjoyment. Enjoyment that comes from non-virtuous deeds is wrong enjoyment – we can be addicted to it and it can lead us astray. Again, you should practise to enjoy – if not physically, enjoy mentally: when your mind is free from poisons you have joy in your mind. That joyous mind indicates that you are on the right path to progress your practice. You need to identify the genuine practice from the other – heretic – path. If you put efforts to practise the misguided path, it becomes an obstacle to Mahayana practice.

Engaging in non-Mahayana virtues

The third obstacle is engaging in proper virtues that are not Mahayana virtues: with understanding of emptiness, you commit virtues to achieve higher rebirth in your future life, in order to achieve your own liberation. From the Mahayana viewpoint, this is laziness. The reason this is laziness is because you have the potential, opportunities or capability to do so many good things for all sentient beings, yet you think that is too hard and you

practise for your own purpose.

So, from the Mahayana perspective, we have three types of laziness: not engaging in virtues, practising wrong virtue and practising proper virtue but for only our own liberation. We are all Mahayana practitioners – Vajrayana practitioners included – but if we fall into one of these categories, we are not true Mahayana practitioners. If we are not any of those three, we are in the fourth category – practising virtues to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. That is Mahayana diligence.

Antidotes to the cause

The antidote for laziness is to consider its disadvantages in this life and in future lives. A disadvantage in this life is, as Śāntideva stated in *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, when one feels discouraged, when one feels low or has low self-esteem, one does not have physical energy and can easily give up making efforts. Once one gives up mentally and physically, it is very hard to pick up to free oneself from this spiritual poverty. It is a poverty one has created for oneself. When you are in such a state, it is good to have an ego or pride which tells yourself 'I can do it' to give yourself a kick start. When you push yourself, get some energy and keep doing it, one day you can become a powerful person, so powerful that people who used to look down on you can no longer defeat you.

Joyous effort can overcome spiritual poverty

I can tell you this is a reality. I know a monk who is still alive. When Tibetan refugees first went to India, many of them worked on the roadside, on the Himalayan side. The Indian government gave them a job. Among them was one guy – he was not very intelligent or good looking. Everyone – all Tibetans – would tease him. He was an ordinary layman, not a monk at the time. One day he met a woman and asked if she would marry him. She rejected him outright. Likewise, everyone let him down because he was not good looking or intelligent. He was feeling down and sad. One day he left the group and went to a monastery, where he worked as a chef. After some time, due to some karma, he left the monastery. There is a retreat place near

the Himalayas where he met one khenpo of the Nyingma school. He was in the mid-thirties then. He began to study, and continued to study. He has now grown old, and he has attained the rank equivalent to an abbot and is well known, while those who used to tease him have made no progress.

Do not underestimate your potential

This kind of 'fighting spirit' is a good one. The monk was not fighting to defeat others, which would not be a good motivation, but he was fighting himself to practise more, to be successful with diligence. When you have this kind of spirit, you can be successful. We all have the potential, so we should never underestimate our own potential. We have been fortunate to be born as humans. We all have the equipment, but we either do not know how to use the equipment or do not use it due to laziness. We need to activate all the equipment we have. We need to defeat our laziness. All that stops us from making efforts is laziness. The kind of ego which tells us 'I can do it' can help us start, and once we become successful and knowledgeable, those who used to look down on us can no longer defeat us. This is what Śāntideva said.

Depression is laziness

Underestimation of yourself or low-esteem causes you so much disadvantage – and you can fall into depression. When you are depressed, you have no strength in your mind to think of anything positive. You have no physical strength to get up from your bed in the morning, no strength to speak good words: you are down mentally, physically and vocally. When your faculties are down, you also go down emotionally. Western science talks about the state of depression. The prime cause of all this is laziness. Furthermore, because you are human and recognise your poor condition, you become inwardly angry. You are not happy with your situation so you have anger, but you cannot show your anger to other people, so this anger is turned to yourself, which makes you very unhappy. This low feeling is caused by laziness. This is one disadvantage of laziness.

Disadvantages of being lazy

Another way laziness works is by procrastination. We do not feel we are down, but we think 'oh, I am a bit tired today. I'll do it tomorrow'. We are younger now than we will be tomorrow. Each day we are getting older. If

we cannot do it today, how can we do it tomorrow? Human beings are not logical. This is how we fail to achieve what we are supposed to achieve due to laziness. Then, because we have not achieved, we regret. In our society, we have so much regret: 'oh, I should have done this last year'. If we have one regret for not having done what we needed to do this year, and if we are not doing it, next year comes and we think we should have done it this year. The passing of years is not favourable for us – rather it is against us. If we have one regret this year, in three years' time how many regrets will we have? Procrastination is disadvantageous both materially and spiritually. It makes us unsuccessful.

If we are unsuccessful in mundane things, how can we be successful in Dharma practice? Dharma practice is harder and more intensive than samsaric things. I always share with my friends in the west that the Dharma practitioner needs to be someone who is a worldly successful person; if one is capable of worldly success, it is easy to be successful also in the Dharma practice. But if one is not successful worldly, I am not sure if this person can really be successful in the Dharma; if you cannot do simple things, how can you do more advanced things?

This may or may not make sense to you, but the reason we have not seen the Buddha is due to our laziness. The reason I say this is that our beginningless cyclic existence means that we are not latecomers after the Buddha. When the Buddha lived as an ordinary person, we also lived as ordinary people. When the Buddha appeared in this world 2500 years ago, we all had opportunities to meet him and receive teachings from him. But due to our laziness, we did not have the karma to meet him at that time; we did not have the karma to receive teachings directly from him.

The obstacle that prevented us from receiving teachings from the Buddha was our laziness. If we remain lazy, we will not have the opportunity to meet and receive teachings from future buddhas. What will stop us from meeting them is our laziness. Nothing else. Some of you may have heard of the crazy yogi Drukpa Kunley, a Tibetan yogi. Once, he went to visit Jokhang, a Buddhist temple in Lhasa. He looked at the Buddha's statue and he communicated with it. He said: 'a long time ago, when you were an ordinary

human being, so was I. There was not much difference between us. But, through your diligence, you're the Buddha now, and, due to my laziness I'm still in samsara. Now there's a vast difference between us.'

So, while Buddha attained enlightenment due to his diligence, Drukpa Kunley remained in samsara because of his laziness. Laziness delays everything, that is the disadvantage.

Students not ready to hear teachers

Laziness also obstruct us from hearing the Dharma from our teachers. There are two ways how this happens. The first is that we feel tired or do not feel like going, for example, all the way to India, Tibet or Nepal to hear our teachers. The second is that we enjoy samsaric activities, business or non-virtuous things and we do not want to give them up to go and receive teachings. We are not prepared to sacrifice our enjoyments. The antidote for that is to see what we do as less valuable and the Dharma as more valuable. Laziness is a tough thing to overcome. Just think how many teachers in this world give teachings. Teachings are always available, yet the students are not making time to receive teachings. You may have heard the saying 'when the student is ready, the teacher appears'. What this means is that the teacher is always teaching the Dharma, but the student is not ready. People think that teachers are always busy and not available, but the reality is the opposite. The fact is that students are less available than teachers. His Holiness the Dalai Lama or His Holiness Sakya Trizin are always turning the Dharma wheel, yet we do not have time to go to receive their teachings. It is not that the teachers are busy; we are the ones who are busy for no reason.

Laziness likes to feed desire mind

Then, we listen to the Dharma, we understand its value, we understand its importance. Yet, we do not have opportunities to practise the Dharma. It is always hard to practise the Dharma. But what makes it hard? What stops us from practising it? Again, it is laziness. Laziness is a major obstacle to the practice of the Dharma – one of the main obstacles. So, from the dharmic point of view, if we live a lazy life, it is disadvantageous to us. Laziness is a disadvantage also from the mundane point of view: kingdoms collapsed due to the laziness of heirs and this undermined the royal systems; successful

family businesses failed when the members became lazy and stopped working hard. Many mishaps occur due to laziness, both in the mundane life as well as spiritual life. There are effects on our social life. If you are not successful, people look down on you. One thing about society is that it is a tough place; if you are not successful, people do not want to help you or be your friends. We should all help each other, but in reality, people are less willing to help. On the other hand, people offer help to those who are successful and who do not need help. This is because we are lazy. We are happy to do things that feed our desire mind, but not things that do not feed our desire mind.

How, then, can we change our lazy mind? How can we stop eating junk food or stop taking drugs? We need to know their drawbacks. Junk food is tasty and easy, but it harms my health. I know that. So even if I am tempted, I am not going to touch it because, at the end of the day, my health is more important than the enjoyment of taste. Similarly, we need to bring this awareness of the drawbacks of laziness to our mind. Think about it over and over; be aware that the world supports and encourages us to be lazy. The lazier we are, the more successful many businesses are: they keep selling us things that give us quick pleasure. The lazier we are, the politicians have more power to do whatever they want to do. They have control over us when we are lazy. This is the disadvantage of laziness in this life.

Disadvantages in future lives

The Heart Sutra, or the perfection of wisdom teaching, says that, you may be inspired to help others, but if you cannot fulfil your own wishes due to laziness, how would you be able to fulfil others' wishes? In order to help others, first you need to be independent. This is logical. You can only help others when you do not need help from others yourself. But if you are lazy, you are not independent, so you cannot help others. This is stated in the sutra. Śāntideva also says that laziness creates a lot of negativities in our future lives.

There are two kinds of laziness: passive laziness and active laziness. Passive laziness is not very dangerous – it makes us waste our time and miss opportunities, which is still a great loss. Active laziness is dangerous. With active laziness, you are rushing every day, working hard, but all the

while accumulating the three-poison mind: you are increasing your desire mind, anger mind and ignorance mind. These cause us to be reborn in the lower realms; our strong attachment creates stinginess and that leads to the hungry ghost realm. You work hard and accumulate anger, which leads you to the hell realms. You do many things which you think are causes of happiness but in reality are causes of suffering, thus increasing your ignorance mind and you end up being born in the animal realm. Active laziness is more dangerous in that it becomes the cause of rebirth in the three lower realms. Śāntideva says that we should be mindful of the inexhaustible suffering in the future caused by laziness.

The cause of laziness is attachment to non-virtuous activities

In order to apply the antidotes, first we need to know the cause of laziness. Unless we recognise the cause, it would be difficult to stop laziness in us. There are many causes or types of laziness: the first one is attachment to non-virtuous activities which increase one's poisoned mind: anger mind, desire mind, jealous mind and so on. People think, if these things are really bad, why do we get so attached to them? The answer is that non-virtues are very smart: they are like sugar, which we love but which contain many problems for our health. If it does not taste sweet, then we will not be attached. In other words, we are very shallow-minded. We are very short-sighted. We only look at things on the superficial level; we do not see things deeply. I think this is why the Chinese industries are so successful – they make things that are attractive outside but inside they are plastic. This is because we do not look at the quality – we only look at the outside. Hundreds of people are employed to research and design what people like to see: good design outside, fake inside.

If you look closely, all the samsaric things are fake. They look nice outside, but if you open up there is nothing that actually gives you what you want. We are short-sighted: we do not have a mind to see through them but are attracted by appearances. Ikea is easy and lazy – no need to put in hard work. Within twenty-four hours we can have a house built and decorate it. These things cause attachment; they cause laziness. Being attached to easy things, we do not want to do things ourselves when we can get others to do them for

us. For this reason, many of us search a guru who can give us enlightenment. Unfortunately, a lot of people say they can give you enlightenment and attract hundreds of people who want it. In reality, no such person exists. The Buddha never had the power to give enlightenment to someone else. Anyone who claims to be able to give enlightenment to someone else, the person would have to be smarter than the Buddha himself.

Delaying through deception and attachment to laziness

The second cause of laziness is delaying things through deception: one tells oneself it is all right to do it next week when one is capable of doing it now. It is strange that you get upset if you are lied to. Yet, you are quite comfortable lying to yourself. You believe it and enjoy it – delaying everything. This is another cause of laziness. The third type of laziness is that one does nothing, enjoying doing nothing, but after enough rest regrets having done nothing. This is attachment to doing nothing. I am not saying that you should not rest; if you have worked tirelessly it is good to rest. You can recharge, re-energise and you can do better afterwards. Here the type of laziness is that one keeps telling oneself that one is tired, then one enjoys being lazy and as a result loses a good part of one's life.

Attachments to sleep and to samsara

The fourth is sleeping longer than the body requires. We only live 80, 90 or 100 years, and we sleep half of that. Some people think they need to sleep 10 hours, which means they spend 40% of their life sleeping, nearly half of your life leaving only 60%. You say 'oh, I don't have enough time – there's so much I need to do'. You have time, but you are not using it. You are attached to sleeping. Scientists say our body requires at least six or seven hours of sleep. I say that it depends on the individual. If we trust science too much, we may be forcing ourselves to sleep, which we will not enjoy. I would think that we need at least three hours' deep sleep nightly. A good healthy three-hour sleep is more than enough. But if we do not have a healthy three hours of sleep but instead we are half-awake and half-asleep, we may need six hours. But if you sleep ten hours or more, I do not think it would be good for you because it would stop stimulating the blood's oxygen and can cause illness. I am talking about a normal, healthy body. When we are sick, we of course have to lie

down and let the body rest. But when healthy, attachment to sleep is a cause of laziness. The fifth cause of laziness is being content with samsara; despite much difficulties, one still feels okay with it. One enjoys the suffering of samsara. That also causes laziness. These are five causes of laziness Śāntideva talks about in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

Understanding the nature of laziness

In *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*, it says that laziness delays everything. I talked about India before. India is an extreme country: while it can take a long, long time to do anything, it can be done very fast, faster than in developed countries. If you give them money, what takes three days in a western country they can do it in one day. But if you do not give enough money, what takes three days here can take three years in India. It shows that if one really makes an effort, one can do things in a very short period of time. But if one does not, one can take many days. I am using a country as an example, but this can also apply to individuals. We can be Indian: we say 'I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it' and never do it. Sometimes, we are even worse.

Laziness makes us attach easily to lower activities rather than good things. Those lower activities are simple, unnecessary things like drinking beer, smoking cigarettes or taking drugs – things that are not useful to us or anyone else. That is one nature of laziness. Another aspect of laziness is that, even when we practise virtues, we do not do them diligently. For example, while reciting a mantra, after a few times the mind starts wandering. Half an hour later, we come back to the mantra, but after chanting a few more times the mind starts wandering again. So, to do one round of mala takes an hour instead of two minutes.

Laziness is harmful. Being lazy means you are scornful of yourself because you are telling yourself 'I cannot do this practice' or 'I cannot finish this mantra'. You are the one discouraging you – no one else. How many people you have met in your life told you that you could not do certain things? Very few. How often do you tell these things to yourself? Quite often, almost regularly, you are telling yourself you cannot this, you are not good enough, you are not capable enough. You tell these things out of laziness. The only person who is letting you down is yourself. As I said earlier, if someone tells

you that you are not good enough, you would be very upset, yet when you tell that to yourself you easily accept it: you are not seeing yourself as equal with others. Your mind is discouraging you instead of supporting you.

Just think about it – we could have attained enlightenment at the time of the Buddha. We all had the potential; we had the conditions. Why did we not attain the state? That was because we were lazy. Due to our laziness we are still in samsara. There is no end to samsara. We all have buddha nature, but some people may never attain enlightenment, as samsara is endless. So, laziness is quite dangerous. Sleeping, not practising virtues, and also simple things you enjoy make you lazy: sometimes, you go to a quiet, peaceful place and stay there doing nothing. Other times, you sit in a restaurant for idle talk, which is so entertaining that your plan to stay for half an hour for a cup of tea becomes two hours because this chatting, idle gossip, is so entertaining that your work does not seem as important as this chatting.

Nature of samsara

Both Śāntideva and Sakya Pandita said that we do not understand the reality of samsara; we think it wonderful, but the reality is that we have the suffering of birth, suffering of sickness, suffering of ageing and suffering of death. If we seriously think about it, if we spend so much time resting, we would not have much time left. It is like we are on a treasure island. The reason we came to the treasure island is to collect as many jewels as possible. Similarly, our precious human rebirth is like a Dharma treasure island, and we can do so much in our life – not being forced, but joyously with the realisation that we are so fortunate to be born human and have found the Dharma; the most joyful way to live our life is the virtuous Dharma life, because the virtuous state of life or mind is straightforward, with no disturbances. That is the most joyous life.

Samsara is not joyful; samsara is all about grasping of self; it is about desire, anger, ignorance, jealousy, pride and harmful thoughts. How can you enjoy these states of mind? We have not yet fully recognised what samsara is: there is no such thing as pleasant samsara. This very place – there are enlightened beings and non-enlightened beings. They both exist either enjoying or suffering. Both samsara and nirvana are a state of mind: a

mind free from obscurations is nirvana; a mind deluded with obscurations is samsara. Beside the mind there is no samsara.

Why, then, do we think samsara is beautiful? Of course, the sun is beautiful, nature is beautiful. These are not samsara. Samsara is the mind that we do not enjoy. It is good to look into our mind and examine what kinds of mind we have, and if each kind of mind brings pleasure or not. We are not going to find pleasure in any of these, that is why we need to come here to change our mind. If we do not recognise our mind, we will have trouble with this mind in this life, and when we die without changing it, we will carry the same mind into the future with the same problems. Because of the lack of awareness of the nature of samsara, we do not develop renunciation or bodhicitta.

Death is certain

Śāntideva also says that once we are born, we are definitely going to die; there is no way we can avoid death. He asks 'do you know this? Once you are born, you are going to die'. It is a big question. If you know you are going to die, then what is the purpose of life while we are alive? The purpose of life is not just waiting for death; the purpose of life is doing something good that helps us, doing something good that helps others. If we do not do anything good or bad, but just do wrong things, that is our one job, and the second job is just to wait for death. That is not the meaning of life, Śāntideva says. Once we come, we must go. When I was in Singapore, everyone asked me if I had a PR (the Australian permanent residency visa). I replied that my visa is permanent residence, but my life is impermanent.

I am not saying that we should force ourselves onto the Dharma and give up everything. Dharma really means recognising the mind – whether we meditate, go to work or deal with somebody else. We cannot make our mind totally absent of the three poisons. That is impossible. But at least we can minimise or not multiply these poisons. We can reduce them a little bit, or just stay at the same level. That is Dharma practice. If we are not watching every minute, we are actually accumulating the poisons in our mind. The bigger it gets, the less happy we become. For example, when we were younger, we had a happy life. As we got older, we became less happy. We tend to think that it is old age that causes unhappiness, but that is wrong. When we are

young, our mind was less poisoned, so we were happier. As we grew up, we have accumulated more and more poisons and become less and less happy. If it was age that caused unhappiness, why wouldn't all the great practitioners become happier as they got older? It is because as they get older their minds become freer so they are happier, more joyful. It is nothing to do with age, but we create this condition with the mind. We are creating the cause of unhappiness all the time, yet we fail to recognise it.

So, our job while alive is to enjoy virtues, not non-virtues. Non-virtues like drugs may make you feel happy, but that is deception. How many people out there felt good with drugs in the beginning but their lives ruined because of them? Defilement always ruins our life. It is very important to identify the differences between virtues and defilements. Such knowledge tells you what to adopt and what to abandon.

Recognising impermanence

Śāntideva also talks about the slaughterhouse where the unfortunate calves line up, without any idea that they are coming close to death, still eating grass and relaxing. We are very much like that. We are still relaxing in samsaric things without concern. We are not concerned about things we should be concerned about, but are always concerned about things we should not be concerned about – how I should dress, where I should go out to have fun and so on. We need to have a mind that really knows what is important and what is not. Without this awareness, we spend a majority of time on unnecessary things and a tiny amount on important things. We need to change that culture, that personality. That is the practice. We cannot be perfect Dharma practitioners as ordinary persons, but we can improve ourselves each and every time, a bit here, a bit there. That way, one day we will be good enough to have perfect Dharma practice. Laziness deprives us of the awareness, nature or circumstances to do these things.

When death comes, you cannot tell Yama, Lord of Death, that you have not finished your job and ask him to wait. When Yama comes, it is time to go. An Indian actor who was good at playing a bad guy, put a good advice on his Facebook last year: a man, he wrote, worked his entire life making money, which was the most important thing for him. When death came to him, he

said to Yama that he would give half his money if he could live a few more months. But Yama said to him 'I don't want half of your money. Your time is up'. The man said, 'I will give you everything I have earned. Please give me a few days.' But Yama said 'there's no way I can give you more time. Your time's up'.

Be selfish wisely

We have a wonderful life. Yet we spend all of this just making material wealth, and there is no time left for ourselves. I think this is unwisely selfish mind. A wisely selfish mind would spend our entire life with something great for ourselves. But we do not have such a mind. Instead, all our lives our unwisely selfish mind has done nothing to help us in this life or in our future lives. We need to be wisely selfish. Buddha was wisely selfish, because he always wanted to help others. As a result, he attained full enlightenment. He attained enlightenment so as he could help countless others. This is the difference between Mahayana and Theravada. Theravada practitioners' primary goal is self-liberation, so others are secondary. For Mahayana practitioners, others come before self and self is secondary. In reality, however, when one puts others first, one actually benefits first. For instance, Buddha always put others first and himself last; but he attained enlightenment before others. As a result of his achievement and his turning the wheel of the Dharma, many beings have had the opportunity to reach his state. That is the trick. If you badly want to be successful, put others first with sincerity. If you want happiness, it will come from that. But if you put yourself first, you will be the last to gain happiness. So, Mahayana is a wise method for fulfilling one's wishes.

So, death will come – it can come at any time. If you think about all these disadvantages of laziness, it may help you to be less lazy. In order to attain nirvana, we need to abandon samsara; in order to abandon samsara, we need to know the faults of samsara; once you understand the faults of samsara, it will motivate you to abandon samsara. But if you do not see the faults, you are not going to be motivated to abandon it. Likewise, in order to abandon laziness, we need to look at the faults of laziness. This is very important. If you apply your logical mind, it makes sense to you. If it makes sense to you,

yet you still do not abandon laziness, you are more foolish than a fool. A fool does not have an idea of what is good and what is bad. A real fool is one who knows what is good for oneself yet does not apply it. Such an intelligent fool is more foolish than a non-intelligent fool.

Antidotes to the result

First antidote for laziness

The first antidote to overcome laziness is: keep repeating, keep visualizing, keep familiarizing yourself with this positive view, then one day you will have a virtuous mind. This virtuous mind is the result of the causes you created in the past. If you do not create the cause, you cannot have the result. It is up to you.

A series of practices for overcoming laziness is listed in the commentary to *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*. [Khenchen Appé Rinpoche. 2008. *Teachings on Sakya Pandita's Clarifying the Sage's Intent*. Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 72-75.] It says, for instance, when you go to sleep, think that you are attaining dharmakaya. This is because when you are in deep sleep, your thought is there but it is non-dualistic – there is no subject-object duality in deep sleep. Sleep without dreaming is like dharmakaya: in dharmakaya there is absolutely no duality. So, before going to sleep, imagine that you are going into dharmakaya, then your sleep will become virtuous – it becomes the Path to gain full enlightenment. Then, while you are asleep and dreaming, remember that all phenomena are like a dream, not real. Use the dream to understand the illusory nature of phenomena. Next day, when you wake up, think that you are waking up from ignorance. When you walk, think that you are walking towards liberation; when you enter a home, think you are entering a liberation palace, when you meet someone imagine you are meeting a bodhisattva, when you are washing dishes you just imagine you are washing away your defilements and so forth.

When you practise these, it means you are watching every defilement and turning every action into the Dharma. Because of the power of interdependent origination, as you create the cause by wishing virtue, one day

it will become reality. Reality does not exist other than in your mind. It is like when we were children, we did not see a toy as a toy – it worked as a reality for us. As we grew up, we no longer see toys as reality. Instead, now we need other things to work as reality – clothes or other material things – that serve us as reality. But they work for us only for a short time: we want them, we enjoy them, but before long when new things come out, we get tired of them and want the new things. Reality does not exist outside our mind. So, if you are washing dishes thinking ‘I am washing my defilements, if you really believe it, then it is your reality at that moment: you are washing your defilements, negativity and so forth. That is a powerful way of training your mind. If you think in a negative way, it brings suffering; if you think unnecessary things it wastes your time. This Mahayana training method skilfully transforms the mind that is negative or neutral into a purposeful/positive mind. This is the Dharma practice.

Second antidote for laziness

The second antidote is to use our efforts as practice to overcome laziness. Again, Śāntideva says that whatever you do, either do something directly to help others, or indirectly to help others. Once you have done the deed, do not just leave it there but dedicate it thus: ‘whatever I have done to help others either directly or indirectly, may this be the cause of attaining buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings’. Helping someone directly means, for example, when someone is in a disturbed state of mind you go out and talk to the person to support them, to help them feel secure. Helping someone indirectly means, in this case you ask someone else to go and help this person. This way, it is impossible not to be able to help someone either directly or indirectly.

Our habits can be a problem when we practise helping others. Our habit makes us think ‘I am helping this person’ or ‘I have arranged someone to help this person’. Such thoughts arise out of the deluded concept of self, ‘I’. We may be practising virtue, but it is still about ‘me’. If these thoughts arise, we need to remember that what we are doing is not for mundane purposes, but we are training ourselves in the Mahayana Path. In the Mahayana Path, whenever we help others, we need to do it with the bodhicitta mind. We therefore need to subtly change our mind when helping others; if we do not change our

mind, we are not progressing. Our habitual thinking when reaching out to others is 'I am doing this for you because you are my friend' or 'I am doing this because you have done good things for me'. These are not good reasons. The bodhicitta eye, or the bodhicitta mind, regards all people as equal. With the mundane mind, our loved ones come first and our enemies last. We have this caste system in our mundane mind. In bodhicitta mind, all are equal.

We often look at the Indian culture and criticise its caste system. But when it comes to our mind, we have our own caste system, even worse than the Indian system. We treat people who are close to us very nicely, but we do not care about others who are distant. By this hierarchy in our mind we are causing ourselves long-term harm. So, it is important that we practise virtue in the Mahayana way. If we ask ourselves 'Can I see people in the Mahayana way?' Right now, the answer is 'no, I can't'. That is why we need to practise to achieve that. If we try, everything is possible. Buddha was not able to see everyone as equal in the beginning. He had the same discriminatory mind. But he kept training and training, and he achieved the perfect mind with which he could see all beings as equal. We have to do the same – keep training. Whether you improve in your practice or not cannot be measured by how long you sit on the cushion; it cannot be measured by whether or not you can recite this mantra by heart. It is how you respond to others – whether or not you can respond to others in a little less discriminatory way or see or treat others a little more equally. This is how you check yourself to see if you are improving in the Mahayana Path. This is what Śāntideva says in the *Bodhicharyavatara*.

Putting others first brings greatest happiness to oneself

In general, when we do things, the purpose of which is either of two motives: for one's own sake or for someone else's sake. Earlier I discussed the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas. It is not right to think that because they are Hinayana, they always do things just for themselves. They do help others. The point is that helping others is not their prime goal. Their prime goal is their own liberation. Likewise, it is not right to think that the Mahayanists only look after others and not care about themselves. They do look after themselves, but the self is secondary. Others come first. At the end of the day, this is

smarter because the most powerful path, that brings greatest happiness, is achieved when one turns one's mind out to wish the happiness of all beings. This is the greatest loving kindness. You cannot find a mind greater than this mind, and it is this mind that brings the greatest result. Can you see that? It is very smart indeed. Sincerely, you wish others to be happy; and you obtain the greatest happiness too. If you understand this, you will not find the Mahayana Path difficult. But if you do not understand this, Mahayana is difficult. You were brought up from beginningless time to think only about 'me', then suddenly you have to think about others. That is a very hard task; you would not be interested in the job! But once you really understand this, it is easy.

Mahayana is not telling you to forget about yourself and do things for others. Mahayana is saying that you should have great happiness. It is saying 'I will support you in what you want, but what you are doing now is not giving you what you want. If you really want the greatest happiness, then I will teach you. Do it this way. This is going to bring you the greatest happiness.' You need to get this Mahayana message. If you really understand this message, Mahayana is not difficult, and you will find it also exciting. With Mahayana the self is secondary and others are first; but in the end you get the best. It is like when you are single, you do many good things for yourself but your happiness is limited. Then one day you become a parent, a caring, loving parent. You have children whom you really love and do good things for them, and you draw immense happiness from this – greater happiness than you had when you were single. Similarly, if you really love sentient beings, then whatever you do for them brings great happiness to you. But if you do not love them, it is a different story. If you are a parent and you do not love your children, nothing you do for them is going to bring you happiness. Instead, you will be stressed out and start thinking how you can run away from home. The secret ingredients for the recipe we need in life are: love for others, care for others and respect others. Very important.

How to transform your actions into virtues

The bodhisattva/Mahayana practice is to identify the non-virtuous and neutral deeds and abandon them – not let them control your life. The best

thing you can do is transform them into virtues: turn non-virtuous deeds into virtues and transform neutral deeds into virtues. But you need a method or skill to do this. For instance, telling lies is a non-virtue, but if you tell a lie that is to benefit other sentient beings, then the non-virtue turns into a virtue. Similarly, washing dishes is a neutral activity, but if you can think you are washing up to help someone, or you are washing to purify all sentient beings' minds, then this neutral activity becomes the Mahayana Path. In fact, this is a really skilful method, because you have to wash every day – after breakfast, lunch and dinner – and every wash becomes the Mahayana Path!

Also, Aryadeva said that once you cultivate bodhicitta, genuinely cultivate bodhicitta, whatever you think with this bodhicitta mind turns into the Mahayana Path. Again, the good, the bad and the neutral do not exist apart from your mind. The mind creates everything. When your mind is virtuous, whatever you say, whatever you do, becomes virtuous. On the other hand, if your mind is negative, even if you are polite to someone it can be non-virtuous when your intention is to deceive the person. When your language is sweet, people love it and do anything for you. But if your intention is to get something done for you, your sweet language is poisonous. From the Mahayana point of view, actions and speech are constrained by your mind. In a positive way, even if your action appears non-virtuous or harsh, if it comes from your virtuous mind it turns into the virtuous. This is because the mind is the boss, the leader. Whatever is in your mind manifests in your life. That is why we need our mind to be right.

The great arya Asanga stated that if one has great love and great compassion, then all one's defilements become the Path to enlightenment. I will give you an example with generosity. If one accumulates wealth but, while alive, keeps it all to oneself, when one dies the wealth benefits others. In other words, indirectly one is causing benefit to others. On the other hand, if one decides to give wealth to someone while one has control of one's mind, the generosity directly benefits the recipient and that is more powerful, because one is consciously giving. What it all means is that we need to train our mind. In this life we are attached to our possessions, our wealth. But we can prepare our mind 'I do not have the courage to give while I am alive, but I will make

sure when I die someone will benefit from my wealth.' This is preparing our mind.

When we are attached to our belongings, there is a danger. At the time of death, our physical body does not exist to control our wealth, but our mind is still attached to the objects. We can see everything that is going on after our death. People think that since we are dead, they can take whatever they want: they do not see that our mind is still attached to our wealth. So, when someone takes away our objects, it upsets us, as it would when we are alive. When we are upset, that will make us unhappy. If we are angry, we are in the hell realms. This is the danger if you do not prepare your mind because one day you are going to die. You may not have the courage to give everything away, but you can prepare right now so that your possessions will be someone else's benefit. It becomes indirect generosity. That way, you turn your attachment to wealth which is part of Mahayana enlightenment.

Studying the Dharma to help others

Similarly, when you are listening to the Dharma, if you are thinking 'I want to teach this to people to impress them' or 'I am learning the Dharma so I can make this my livelihood,' these are wrong motivations. Rather, you need to think: 'Dharma is wisdom. Wisdom helps me overcome my ignorance to become a better person, so this is something wonderful to share with others. I know if I give the Dharma to others, they can also minimise their ignorance and gain benefit. For that purpose, I need to listen to the Dharma and go out and study the Dharma.' This is the right motivation; listening to and studying the Dharma is an indirect way to help others, and your main purpose is to help others.

The direct way to help others with the Dharma is to explain or to give a teaching on the Dharma, because when you are explaining the Dharma to someone you are helping the person to lead his or her life in a more virtuous way. You are helping the person recognise his or her defilements and reduce them. It is important to explain the Dharma with the right intention; the right intention is to always give so that all sentient beings can reach enlightenment. Always give with the bodhicitta mind. A wrong intention, on the other hand, is to gain respect 'I'm teaching you, I'm helping you, so I'm important in your

life'. The reason such motivation is wrong is because that very intention will hurt you; you put so much expectation in return, so if one student disrespects you, it is going to hurt you. In such case, the disrespect is not the cause of your hurt: it is a condition. What hurts you is that your expectation to be respected is betrayed. This is the result of your wrong motivation, even when you do something good, that action will hurt you.

Teaching the Dharma helps us refute our own wrong views: a lot of time we are holding wrong views. Listening to and teaching the Dharma give us an ability to see what is the right view and what is the wrong view. When we are equipped with this ability, we are in a good position to establish which is the wrong view. That is a tremendous advantage. Once you have a wisdom mind, you become a very reliable person: people trust what you say and rely on you. That is a benefit in this life. Then, in the next life, as a result of studying the Dharma and teaching it to others, you acquire more and more wisdom. Each and every time, you become a little wiser.

The Vajrayana practitioner

At this point, I would like to discuss a little about the Vajrayana practitioner. The Vajrayana practitioner needs to have very sharp faculties, be a very intelligent student. This intelligent mind does not come by accident: for many lifetimes this person studied the basic Dharma, contemplated, meditated and has developed an advanced mind. When he or she died and was reborn, he or she was born with the sharp faculties. So, if you want to be reborn a good Vajrayana practitioner, right now you need to train your mind to be wise, to be intelligent. Then one day you will be reborn with intelligence suitable to practise the Vajrayana Path. But unless you prepare, you cannot expect to be intelligent enough to practise the Vajrayana Path. It will not happen. The King of Shambhala was a very, very intelligent person; while he was receiving the Kalachakra empowerment, he reached enlightenment. That did not happen by accident. For many, many lifetimes he had trained his mind. As a result, his mind was so sharp that at one teaching, one empowerment was enough for him to achieve full enlightenment. Also, the King of Udayana achieved full enlightenment while receiving one initiation from Guru Sambava, also because he had such an intelligent mind.

We often wish to be more intelligent. But wishing is not enough to develop intelligence. The method to follow is to listen to more Dharma, explain more Dharma, contemplate more Dharma and meditate on more Dharma. Then we may not even have to wait until our next life. Just think about it! We have progressed through a fair amount of our Course. If you think about where your mind was on the first day, your mind now is much, much sharper, and you know so much more than you had known before. If you can progress that much in one and a half years, imagine what you can achieve in your whole life! There are many opportunities. You do not need to think it too hard to learn; if you really put your heart and mind into it, within a very short period of time you will feel you know a lot. A sharp mind, a mind with clear intention, comes through practice – listening, study, contemplation, discussion and explanation. These are the causes and conditions at work. One of the prime causes of perfecting vipassana is to hear more Dharma. The more Dharma you hear, the more you improve your vipassana. These are the antidotes to overcome laziness.

How to perform the correct diligence

Four qualities to achieve and seven attachments to abandon

Practise of the Perfection of Diligence, as with the previous perfections, requires one to achieve four qualities and abandon seven attachments. The four qualities are: first, eliminate laziness by making joyous effort with your practice; second, diligently fulfill others' wishes by benefitting them; third, do not grasp on anything and develop the view of emptiness; and fourth, help others in whatever way that suits them. The seven attachments to abandon are: one, laziness; two, delaying virtuous deeds; three, stopping the Dharma practice when you can do more; four, expectation of return; five, expectation of mundane improvement; six, residues of laziness; and seven, distractions to Dharma practice.

Your achievements depend on your enthusiasm

As Chandrakirti explained in the *Madhyamakavatara*, all good qualities you want to attain depend on your efforts. If you are diligent, every good quality

you want can be attained. Without efforts, you will not get it, no matter how badly you want it. As we are in samsara, if we want to be happy, we have to practise virtues, but if we are lazy, we cannot practise them. Without virtuous deeds, we will not have even mundane happiness. For self-liberation, we need to realise emptiness. In order to realise emptiness, there are many requirements: we need to lead an ethical life, we need to hear the Dharma and we need to meditate. If we are lazy, firstly we are not going to live our life ethically; secondly, laziness stops us from going out to listen to the Dharma; and third, we will not sit and meditate. When these virtues are absent, we are not going to achieve self-liberation. From the Mahayana point of view, if you are lazy, you are not interested in thinking about other sentient beings. Sometimes, we want a cup of tea but are too lazy to boil water for it! If we are too lazy to make a cup of tea, how can we practise the Mahayana Path? Laziness is a great disadvantage, because all good things we want come from enthusiasm. It is logical – it is good to give time for ourselves to reflect on the drawbacks of laziness and the rewards of diligence. Then we will be more attracted to joyous efforts because it brings so many great things in our life, and we will be further discouraged from laziness because it brings so many disadvantages.

BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF DILIGENCE

Temporary benefits

Benefits in this life

Again, there are temporary and ultimate benefits of practising joyous effort. Temporary benefits, for this life and future lives, are that enthusiasm helps you accomplish whatever practice you want to do. If you are diligent, nothing will stop you. And once you have accomplished the practice, you can help not just yourself but also a large number of other beings. From the dharmic point of view, if you study with enthusiasm, you increase your knowledge. With that knowledge you can help a lot of other people. From a mundane point of view, if wish to create wealth and do so, you can help a lot of other

people. This way, diligence can fulfill your wishes and also help you to fulfill the wishes of others.

Importance of authentic teaching

It is important to practise the Dharma diligently according to what the Buddha said. Whatever we practise, it is vital that we make sure that the Dharma was first taught by the Buddha; make sure it was explained by the pandits (the sages); make sure that the purest masters practised it; whatever we practise in the Dharma, make sure that the great translators translated it from Sanskrit to Tibetan. These Dharmas are the pure Dharmas; these pure Dharmas can accomplish for you whatever you wish. There are many so-called Dharmas that are deluded. Deluded Dharmas are not going to give you what you are looking for. For this reason, it is very good to consult *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* by Sakya Pandita, because it is an authentic text based on the Buddha's teachings, so it can really help you identify what is authentic Dharma and what is not. Otherwise, many teachers tell their opinions and you cannot be sure if they are originated from the Buddha or not.

Teachings that are not originated from the Buddha are 'false wisdom' – it appears like wisdom, but it is false. 'False wisdom' is not going to free you from defilements or ignorance. It is like a false medicine: the packet looks authentic so you cannot differentiate from the true medicine, but the content is not true, and instead of helping you get better, it will make you worse. Likewise, if you practise false wisdom, instead of freeing you from ignorance it will confine you to more ignorance. That makes it more difficult for you to correct yourself.

Some dharmic texts say that, if your background is that of an ordinary samsaric being, you have ordinary ignorance, which is easy to remove through wisdom. But if you come from ordinary ignorance and study false wisdom and form a view according to that false wisdom, then it will be much more difficult to purify, because you then have a double falsity: a false samsaric view and additional falsity. This additional falsity has been deliberately created, so it is harder to wash out. Therefore, it is good to study right from the beginning something that is taught by the great Indian and Tibetan masters such as Sakya Pandita's *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* or Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

Once you have studied these texts, when you listen to a teacher and the teaching is not one hundred percent right, you can compare it with the text. This is important. You can compare them and make your own decision, using your wisdom mind. When you act according to the correct Dharma, you are doing the right virtue.

Diligence is a virtue in itself

When you practice right virtue, that will make you really happy. Happiness is not measured by wealth; some people do not have much wealth but because they are living a virtuous life, they are very happy. Other people have a lot of material wealth yet because they do not live a virtuous life, they are not happy. The happiest way to live is to live a virtuous life, and virtues come from the teachings. Diligent practice of virtues brings a lot of happiness. That is the benefit in this life. Also, at the time of death there is nothing to regret. You can look back and say to yourself 'I did everything virtuously as best as I could do and according to my capabilities'. If you led a lazy life, at the time of your death you regret 'I had all this opportunity, yet I never used it. Now I am dying and there's nothing I can do about it.' Enthusiasm also makes you stronger with your virtues against harm by other human beings. It is like our immune system: when we are healthy our immune system is strong and can resist the flu virus. But when we have a low immune system you can succumb to the virus easily. It is same with mental strength. If our mental system is not strongly virtuous, our mind can get troubled easily. In the west, people are easily troubled; even if nothing is said, if someone looks at us in a strange way, our mind is troubled. That shows how insecure our minds are. With a good practitioner, if someone is rude to him or her that will not affect his or her mind; rather, he or she feels compassion towards the person. Diligence is not a cause of virtue – it is a virtue in itself, because it is the absence of the three-poison mind. So, inconceivable good qualities come from joyous effort – there is no limit.

Benefits in future lives

Enthusiasm also affects future lives. One sutra said that diligence is the seat of all the virtues: all good things come from enthusiasm. Every moment, diligence frees us from non-virtues; it is the greatest antidote to non-virtues.

It is like an antivirus of the mind; it helps us improve ourselves; it is a method that completes our mission in a very short period of time. I can relate my own experience to this. When I was studying under Khenpo Appey Rinpoche, I was very lazy. We had a whole day to prepare for our presentation the following day, but I thought: ‘oh, I’m a bit tired. I’ll have freer time in the afternoon then I’ll study in the afternoon’. But by the afternoon I was even worse. The next morning came and I was so nervous because I had not prepared. It was just laziness. I had twenty-four hours to prepare for a ten-minute presentation, and I failed because of laziness. As a student, I rarely put effort in preparation for the next day. Then, after completing my eight-year course I returned to Sakya College as a novice lecturer. Now I had no choice; I had the responsibility to give a class every morning. For the preparation, I only needed one hour of study to understand all the teachings I received from my teacher. Previously, twenty-four hours had not been enough. That was laziness: laziness delays everything. If you want to accomplish something in a short time, the only method to achieve this is diligence. When you cultivate diligence, in the future life it becomes very easy to accomplish what you wish – all the qualities arise out of diligence. These are the temporary benefits.

Ultimate benefit of diligence

The ultimate benefit of joyous effort is buddhahood with all the great qualities: the power, fearlessness and so on, which will be discussed later. All the qualities of the Buddha are the result of diligence; without it, the Buddha would not have attained any of these qualities. The Buddha himself was a result of diligence! Earlier, I told you the story of Drukpa Kunley – due to his laziness he remained in samsara while Buddha had attained enlightenment. Had Drukpa Kunley been as enthusiastic as the Buddha, he would have reached buddhahood in Buddha’s time. As I mentioned earlier, when the Buddha was here, so were we. The Buddha has been our mother many times. The Buddha has been our child many times. The Buddha has been our partner many times when he was an ordinary being. But due to his diligence he achieved enlightenment 2500 years ago. We, on the other hand, have not

THE PERFECTION OF DILIGENCE

even entered the Path! We have had the same opportunity, but still we cannot achieve it because of our laziness. If we remain lazy, none of us will reach enlightenment in the coming lifetimes. Laziness has not allowed us to go beyond the beginner's stage. If we want to advance, we need to cultivate diligence. With this we conclude the fourth perfection, diligence.

The Perfection of Meditative Contemplation

The fifth perfection is the Perfection of Meditative Contemplation. As before, this has three aspects: first, definition of Perfection of Contemplation, second, the reality of contemplation, and the third the benefit of the practice of contemplation.

DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF MEDITATIVE CONTEMPLATION

Definition of meditative contemplation in Mahayana Buddhism

The definition of meditative contemplation here is that of the Mahayana tradition, that is, meditating for the purpose of obtaining buddhahood. There are many kinds of meditation, but all Mahayana meditations can be divided into two types: shamatha and vipassana. Shamatha is defined as 'single-pointed virtuous mind'. If one is ready to do shamatha meditation, it means there should be the absence of the three-poison mind. If one meditates for some worldly purpose consciously or unconsciously – like mundane peace – then it is a poison mind. One is not doing shamatha. This is how we define what is Mahayana meditation and what is not. But we are not discussing these at the moment. When discussing meditation for the purpose of obtaining buddhahood, we are referring to both shamatha and vipassana together, because when we do shamatha, the prime purpose is to meditate for the sake of all sentient beings. When we do vipassana meditation, its prime purpose

is also to meditate for the sake of all sentient beings. This is the definition of meditation in Mahayana Buddhism.

Definition of the perfection of contemplation

Now, the perfection of contemplation is the same as other perfections: you must have the right motivation, the right view and the right dedication. The right motivation is bodhicitta, the right view is the realisation of emptiness and the right dedication is 'I am doing this practice to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings'. These three make the Perfection of Contemplation.

A student asked me in which state of spiritual progress we actually accomplish the six perfections. The answer is only when we reach the buddha state. Until that time, we will not be perfect – not even when we reach the stage of the first to ten levels (bhumis). This means that right now, we are practising towards perfection. We keep training our mind towards perfection, and one day, when we reach buddhahood, then our practice will be perfect. Of course, at the bhumi level, the practice will be closer to perfection than it is at our present level. But it is not necessarily completely perfect. It will only be completely perfect in the buddhahood state. This is important to know; I'm not just making this up. I studied this philosophy and heard from my teacher, then went out and discussed with different teachers. Some say no, no, that's not right, which can be confusing. Here I am telling you what I have heard from my great teachers and what I have read in the text, and they say that the true perfection can only be achieved in the state of buddhahood: until that time, we cannot be perfect.

MEDITATIVE CONTEMPLATION ITSELF

The second topic is the nature of contemplation. Again, there are three sub-topics: first, obstacles to meditation; second, individual antidotes; and third, the right meditation.

Obstacles to meditation

The wandering mind

The first obstacle is the wandering mind or distracted mind. You try to meditate on an object – your breath, a flower, or a statue etc. – to meditate single-pointedly, but your mind is unable to stay with the object. That is an obstacle, right? One reason why you are unable to stay with the object is because your mind wanders somewhere else: the wandering mind is not allowing you to stay focused on the object. Sometimes we call the wandering mind the thorn of meditation; when you have a thorn, you cannot sit on it – it makes you feel so uncomfortable. If you have thoughts, they do not allow you to focus. Thoughts are like thorns. Another reason may be that you have fallen asleep; when you are trying to stay awake, then again you cannot concentrate. Another possibility is that you have no interest in meditating. When the mind is agitated, sinking or uninterested, you will not be able to concentrate.

Meditating in a wrong way

The second obstacle is that, even when you are meditating, you are meditating in a wrong way. The right Buddhist meditation has a twofold purpose: one is to downgrade one's defilements (shamatha) and the other is to uproot one's defilements (vipassana). If you meditate just to relax your mind, that is okay, but you do not need to study Buddhism. If one really wants to do Mahayana Buddhist meditation either for the sake of one's liberation or to attain buddhahood, then one must know that, first of all, one does shamatha to downgrade one's defilements. When one does vipassana it is to uproot one's defilements. Beside these two, whatever one does, for example to calm oneself but not downgrading or uprooting one's defilements, is a wrong meditation. This is important to know because sometimes people who do the wrong meditation can end up in the hell realms, or they turn out to be more ignorant than they were before they started meditating. It is like taking a wrong medicine – it is not only ineffective but also it can make it worse. You must take the right medicine.

The reason this is so important is because without this awareness one can

acquire a bad habit. For example, if you have ordinary ignorance, it is not difficult to remove it, because it is an innocent ignorance. But once you train your mind in a wrong way, it becomes very difficult to demolish this cultivated ignorance; someone who is influenced by a wrong view is harder to purify than a person who has originally held a wrong view. I can share an observation here. When people first come into the Dharma, they are very beautiful. They really want to benefit from the Dharma. Their mind is innocent, they are polite and try their best.

After studying the Dharma for a few years, however, some become a little strange. Their thinking becomes rigid, like a piece of dry leather. The hardened Dharma leather is difficult to soften. They become grumpier and even use the Dharma as a weapon to attack each other! The good personality they had when they first came to the Dharma changes to a bad personality. I have seen a lot of people to whom this has happened! This is not about the Dharma. Dharma is about making one softer, gentler, more kind. So, you need to make sure that you do not develop this hardening of the mind, make sure that you remain soft and flexible. If your personality is hardened and unpleasant, then you are not doing the right meditation. It is like some medicine – if you do not use it properly, the bug becomes stronger and the medicine is no longer effective. It is same with the Dharma. If you do not use it the right way, the bug in your mind gets stronger.

Right meditation that is not Mahayana

The third obstacle is that, you are meditating in the absence of the three-poison mind, in a virtuous mind, but your intention is limited only for you to have a better rebirth in a future life. This kind of meditation is right, but not correct for the Mahayana practice because it can only take you that distance and not beyond; if a person sees that samsara is full of suffering, realises emptiness and seeks liberation from samsara, renunciation is the right motivation, but from the Mahayana point of view it is not right. In the Buddhist Path, the biggest obstacle to obtain buddhahood is taking the shravaka or pratyeka Path. It is because the attachment to the short-term goal of achieving own liberation becomes the obstacle to attain buddhahood. Once you have reached a certain stage of nirvana on the Path, you could stay

there for eons, and you delay attaining buddhahood by that length of time. From the Mahayana point of view, this is also an obstacle.

So, these are the three unfavourable conditions in the practice of Mahayana meditation: the first is unfocussed mind; the second is wrongly focused mind; and the third is correctly focused but is an obstacle to attaining the greater, Mahayana result.

Buddhism is a science

Sometimes, we become attached to meditation and make mistakes. The purpose of meditative concentration in all the Dharma practices – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana– is to discard our attachment or clinging, because clinging is the root of the many problems we face, if we really investigate. If some say that Buddhists must free themselves from attachment because it is bad to have attachment, then it becomes a ‘religious’ concept, a blind belief. It is important for us to know why it is bad. The reason attachment is bad is because it causes mental disease, physical disease or emotional distress. That is more dangerous than harm. This is why we need to recognise our attachments.

Once we recognise them, then we know why Buddha said they are bad and why we need to discard them. Buddhism is much more than a religion; it is much more than culture. It is a science. In science, one accepts only things with valid reason after examining them with one’s intelligence. Buddhism is an intelligent path. If you do not have intelligence, you are not going to understand Buddhist philosophy. To study science you need to have a sharp mind, a logical mind, a precise mind. If you have such a scientific mind, you do not need clairvoyance: like the climate scientist who analysed present conditions, made estimations and predicted the future of global warming. Likewise, if you closely analyse what you are doing now, it will tell you what will happen next, because you understand the law of cause and effect. Whatever you create as the cause, you will have a result accordingly.

Disadvantages of the wandering mind

The second topic is disadvantages caused by those obstacles. As with the other perfections, there are two types: disadvantages in this life and disadvantages in future lives.

Disadvantages in this life

Śāntideva says that if one is always distracted during meditation, one has more chance of increasing one's defilements. For example, if you build a house in the desert and if you leave the windows and doors open, what will you get at the end of the day? A house full of dust! Similarly, if you do nothing about your wandering mind it will collect all the dust of afflictions, and in the end your mind is full of dust. Such a mind lets you down. All sadness, deep unhappiness or deep depression are in fact manifestations of the afflicted mind. Buddhism tells you this and gives you the best medicine, and the best medicine is virtue. As many teachings say, when the prime problem is of the mind, the solution also needs to be the mind. Mind can only be fixed by mind. Nothing else can fix the mind. We are always looking for solutions outside the mind, but it is impossible to find. They may have some short-term benefits. For instance, if you have a mental problem and take a drug that balances the chemicals, you feel alright temporarily. Such solutions are not true solutions. The problem will persist. Only the mind can fix it, and it is the virtuous mind that fixes it.

Sometimes, when people feel so low and depressed, they do not have the energy to be virtuous. In that case, you can skilfully help them to do good things gently, without making them aware of it. If they do virtuous deeds, or you do them together, eventually it will lighten their depression, lighten their sadness or lighten their unhappiness. It is a slow process; it took a long time for them to get so low, so it takes a lot of time to recover. From a Mahayana point of view, you are a most fortunate person, because you had an opportunity to make the other person easier with whatever he or she was going through. When you are successful in helping, you gain confidence: 'I have managed to help this depressed person become a happy person, so I can help others in the same way.'

It is not only that you helped this person, but also this person gave you a tremendous opportunity to really practise your bodhicitta. Such an opportunity is a test – to see the strength of your bodhicitta. What usually discourages us is the concept of ‘me’ – we think ‘I’ll get tired if I do this’ or ‘I can’t do this, there will be too much involved in this’ and so on. We make up those false stories and we get tired even before we start anything! These false stories we create are enough to make us frightened. Instead, we should think, ‘this person really has a problem and this is my opportunity to help.’ When we help, our mind is virtuous, and that will make us happy. You have to trust that. This virtue is not going to harm this person but is going to help, in whatever way. The safest thing you can trust is your virtuous mind. We need to identify the value of that state of mind. Then we can see that doing something good for others is the real solution.

This knowledge will bring up in your mind how truly great the Buddha is – how he realised these things. You will be impressed with the accuracy of his teaching. With this awareness you will cultivate deeper devotion to the Buddha’s teachings. Devotion is not a cultural thing: it is something which has been proven, which you believe really works and which you respect deeply. When you have something that you apply to yourself and see its benefits, then you trust it – that is devotion. No one can take it away from you. But with cultural devotion, you find something good and initially get excited and have a devotion towards it, but then later you find some mistakes in it and lose your devotion.

Śāntideva says that wandering mind is the creator of all the afflictions; the more you let your mind wander, the greater the affliction becomes. The greater the affliction becomes, the more it dominates you, controls you, and downgrades you. This is the nature of defilements. Śāntideva also said that our wandering mind is like a crazy, wild elephant. Actually, it is worse than that. When the crazy wild elephant comes into a village and rampages, it destroys farms and houses and even kills people. But no matter how much damage it does, it is still limited compared to what a wild mind does. If you let your wild mind do damage, there is no limit – it is limitless! So, our crazy mind is far more dangerous than a wild elephant; the danger develops when

we let our mind wander.

Once you are distracted, your mind becomes unstable – a wandering mind is unstable. To see how unreliable our mind is, just look at your own and others' points of view. See how unreliable our mind is? We cannot even rely on our own mind, so how can we rely on someone else's? But what makes this unreliable mind? Lack of concentration. The wandering mind is constantly changing, from this to that, we do not even have a second of peace. When we are sitting on a comfortable chair and think we are resting, what is resting is our body but not our mind; no matter how much our body rests, we are not going to feel fresh. We need to learn how to rest our mind so we can feel fresh. We need to learn to rest our mind as well as our body. It is very important. Thinking about the disadvantages of the wandering mind, I heard of a suicide bomber in England who killed many people. Where did this kind of action come from? It came from his wandering mind which collected anger, restlessness and the like, and formed this inner terrorist in his mind. Once one develops such inner anger, it becomes destructive – he destroyed many people's lives. So, the danger comes from the mind, not from outside – from the mind that is wandering, unfocussed.

If you think about the destruction such a mind causes – your own life, others' lives... There are so many drawbacks in our lives. Most of them are created by our own mind, which is wandering mind, fleeting mind – nothing else! Dharma is pointing out how mind causes us these problems and that we need to give treatment to the mind. Our mind is our patient: we need to treat it. Once we focus on treating our mind to make it healthy, then we can call ourselves Buddhists. A Buddhist is someone who works inwardly, on one's own mind. That is an aspect that is unique to Buddhism – training one's own mind.

In our modern life, we have access to so many different religions, and we can research them. No religion talks about the mind as the Buddhists do, in such a scientific and logical way. That is why I say how fortunate we are to have found the Dharma. If you see Buddhism this way, you realise that the Buddha never taught religion. Buddha taught how the mind works, how it feels, how it can benefit others. It is extremely practical, and this is the beauty

of Buddhist philosophy that you can explain it to people who do not believe in Buddhism. With other religions one can only explain one's belief to other believers. Non-believers are not interested in hearing about what you like. I am stating the fact here, not discriminating against other religions.

Other disadvantages include a lot of regret at the time of death. Also, dying with the loss of one's mind. So many people die with a dementia, especially in our modern age. Some people get dementia in their sixties. While we have the mental power, if we let our mind go astray, it will damage our brain. Eventually, the brain can damage us – we cannot hold our mind together and we get dementia. In medicine they call dementia 'brain damage' – but what causes the damage to our brain? It is our mind: full of stress, worries and unnecessary things – the mechanism of the mind damages the brain until we can no longer hold our mind together. It is so sad to lose a loved one who does not recognise you before dying. All these harmful things towards oneself and others, done while we are alive, are created by the wandering mind. These fill us with regret at the time of death. These are the disadvantages in this life.

Disadvantages in future lives

Once you let your mind wander freely, it will create problems in your next life onwards. Never underestimate the power of your wandering mind! If you do not control it, the wandering mind becomes a habit. Once it becomes a habit, it is very difficult to change. It is like the dirty plate. If you wash it soon after your meal, it is easy to clean. But if you leave it in the sink for a few days, it becomes harder to wash. It is the same mess, but it gets stuck on the plate. What would have required half a litre of water, now after three days requires three litres. You waste so much water. Likewise, if as soon as you get distracted you recognise the fact and deal with it, it is easy to bring your mind back. In later years it gets much harder. The longer you leave it, the harder it becomes to train your mind, because the mind becomes wilder, more difficult to train. So, if you let your mind be wild in this life, it becomes much harder to train in future lives. A wild mind is like a steep waterfall – unstoppable and forceful. Once you have developed such a situation, it is very difficult to stop your wandering mind which creates a lot of non-virtues, resulting in much suffering in samsara. It will create difficulties in the lower

realms too. This way, the wandering mind causes us long-term harm.

Then, even when we meditate, if we do so in the wrong way, it will have negative outcomes. For instance, when heretics meditate, they have the concept that objects are inherently existent; they have a concept of permanent or indestructible phenomena. If one has such concepts, one cannot uproot the defilement of grasping of self. In *Madhyamakāvātāra* it says that when one looks at the five aggregates and thinks of them as real, sees oneself as real, then out of that attachment, arises aversion, arrogance and many other non-virtues.

When you meditate thinking that something is truly existent, this meditation is not really helping you. Instead, it causes you to establish the root of all the defilements. So, this meditation has more disadvantages than advantages. That is why we call it the wrong meditation; it is not that we want them to be wrong because they are Hindu or believers of other religions. That thinking would not be right: this is not an argument as to who is right and who is wrong. What I am pointing out is that Hindus practise meditation on something they consider has permanent existence. When you have the view of permanent existence, you have grasping, and this grasping leads to defilements and many other mistakes. That is the reason.

In the past, when the Indian Buddhist masters debated, winning was not their intention. From their great compassion, they saw a person intending to obtain liberation while holding a view that would not bring what he or she wanted, so they felt the need to help them break that view. The purpose of the debate was to demolish the wrong view to let the person be free. That was the right intention – instead of trying to win the argument to feel good about defeating another person. To engage in a debate for the purpose of defeating someone is not a Buddhist practice. For this reason, many great Buddhist yogis would deliberately go to a Hindu place and debate with their masters because they knew those Hindu yogis were very intelligent people, so the efforts to help them were worthwhile.

The good thing about the debate between Hindus and Buddhists was that it did not involve anger. It was all intelligent, scientific and logical. These were beautiful debates. As a result, many Hindu masters realised that their view

was not right and would let go of it. It was not that they were converted to Buddhism: they shared the same purpose, of gaining enlightenment, and the Buddhist masters helped them to go one step close to their goal. Similarly, when we have discussions amongst us, it is important to have a similar intention. You are not here to hear me speak and believe what I have said. I am sharing what I know with confidence to help you. Sometimes I do not know things that you know, so I should learn from you. That way we both will benefit. That is the purpose of discussion.

One disciple meditated in the wrong way for twelve years and as a result he was born as a meerkat – after twelve years of intensive meditation being born in the animal realm! It is a lesson that if you do not meditate in the right way it will result in more danger than benefits.

Meditating without renunciation mind

Say you are practising shamatha meditation without the renunciation mind; you meditate without understanding the difficulties of samsara. You do not have an intention to free yourself from samsara; you meditate because you want peace, tranquillity, serenity. If you meditate shamatha with that purpose, the highest you can reach is the formless realms. The second best you can end up with is in the form realms. And the third best is you can end up in the single-pointedness of the desire realms – you cannot go beyond that. Your engine capacity only takes you within the mundane sphere; you have not developed an engine that takes you beyond samsara. So, in the Mahayana point of view it is a big obstacle. Once you are in those comfortable realms you do not want to come out and you are delaying the possibility to reach buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. From the Mahayana point of view, they are also poison, because when you are in such a state you will not be interested in the mind because you feel so wonderful. If we look at ourselves, sometimes we have stress, we have concerns, we have worry. It seems these are bad things to have, yet they motivate us to become interested in doing meditation or other kinds of spiritual practice. In that sense they help us. But then, once you get what you want, you feel pretty much ok with your life and forget about the Dharma: ‘oh, I know about this, I read this book, but now it’s not so important to me because my life is ok.’ You need to

understand this good life is an obstacle to practising more Dharma. These are the three unfavourable conditions.

Nature and disadvantages of the wandering mind

When your mind is distracted, it is very unstable. Having an unstable mind is like riding a wild horse; the horse is constantly jumping; you can fall easily. You cannot hold yourself steady. You have all sorts of difficulties riding this wild, crazy mind horse. When you are not stable yourself, you will not only be disturbing yourself but also affecting others, especially people close to you. That is inevitable. It is painful to identify this, but it is good to realise that when your mind is unstable it affects the people who care for you, people who love you. You disturb them also. That is the disadvantage, the faults of an unstable mind which you need to recognise. Furthermore, this destabilisation tends to grow and becomes stronger, because you become used to it. Once such disturbance is embedded in your mind, it totally controls you. That is a big problem – it can cause physical damage, economic damage or emotional damage: physically, because you are so unhappy that you lose appetite and destroy your health; economically, you lose interest in working and earn a living; emotionally, you lose interest in anything – just brooding on your sadness and unhappiness. These are the disadvantages of the wandering mind in this life.

Do you want this kind of mind? As I said earlier, no one can tell you what you want in your life. The only person that can choose for you is yourself. From the scientific point of view, you can understand that if you leave your mind to wander, these are the results. None of us want this kind of life. So, we should not let our mind wander; we need to do something about it. Out of this knowledge we now have motivation; we have more reason to meditate, have more courage to meditate; have more purpose to meditate. This motivation makes our meditation much more effective. On the other hand, if we just want peace of mind from our meditation, it is a shallow reason and we are going to get only a shallow result. The effect we obtain is in direct proportion to the cause: the deeper effort we put in creating a cause, the deeper result we can attain. We really need to give time to think about this. The more we think about it, the more we realise that what *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* says

is so true. We will believe and respect what it says. That is real devotion: we can see the truth in it and resolve to do something about it.

Disadvantages in future lives

Once we become used to our mind's wandering habit, it is very difficult to stop it. It is like consuming alcohol. Initially, you think it is easy to stop, no problem. It helps you socialise and relaxes you. You have less worries after getting drunk. It becomes a temptation. When you have some worries, instead of dealing with them mentally, you take the lazy step of going to the pub. The pub becomes your temple to solve your problems. The bottle becomes your buddha – 'this wine rescues me from my worries. I attain liberation from alcohol.' So, you take refuge in alcohol. But this object of refuge gets you into more trouble in your life – not just you but your loved ones. That is because you have taken refuge in a wrong object.

We all know how difficult it is to stop something that we have become addicted to. The mind is the same. It is easy to stop a bad practice before it becomes habituated. For this reason it is very important to have a teacher who constantly encourages you; it is very important to have a sangha where everyone shares the Dharma and everyone meditates. In the beginning, when you are so low, so weak, you cannot break the habit by yourself. It is necessary to be close to your teacher and hear more Dharma from him or her, and practise with the sangha. That environment gives you an opportunity to break your bad habit. Once you have gained more control of yourself and feel self-sufficient, then you can become a more independent practitioner. It is like illness: when you are very ill, it is better to be in hospital and be cared for. But once you have gained enough strength to do things by yourself, then you do not need to stay in the hospital – return home and resume your normal life. Mind and body are the same. Habit is very powerful, like a steep waterfall, as I said before. The problem is not about the mind just wandering; such powerful habits very easily cause non-virtues, and cause many sufferings from them.

Nature and disadvantages of incorrect meditations

You have heard about emptiness, and how it is essential to study it. I will discuss emptiness in detail when we come to the wisdom chapter. If you just

feel emptiness and think it is some kind of phenomenon; you may grasp at it, cling to it, and think that everything is empty, without proper knowledge of what emptiness is. And if you meditate on emptiness as another form of existence, that is not the correct meditation; such a view of emptiness creates a strong idea of nihilism, nothingness. When you have this powerful habit of nihilism, your meditation causes you to be reborn in the lower realms instead of liberating you. I mentioned the disciple who meditated on emptiness for twelve years and as a result was born as a meerkat: born in the animal realm rather than gain liberation. Emptiness is a great Path; it is the only Path that frees us from samsara; it is the only Path that leads us to buddhahood. But one can make many mistakes unless one knows emptiness properly, so one should not hastily meditate on it and fall into nihilism.

Right meditation that will not lead to buddhahood

Loving kindness and compassion are the right meditation – wishing others to have happiness, to be free from suffering and the cause of suffering are really good. But that will not free one from samsara: it is not the Path to gain buddhahood. In order to gain buddhahood, one must have emptiness when meditating. If you practise loving kindness and compassion, the highest it will take you is to the formless realm state. You cannot go beyond that. The reason is that, when you practise loving kindness, there is the subject, which is your mind wishing others to be happy. There is also the object, which is other beings whose happiness you are wishing. This means your meditation is in the dualistic state. A dualistic mind is a samsaric mind, and a samsaric mind can only give you the best of samsaric results. For this reason, love and compassion alone cannot take you to buddhahood.

How, then, can we transform our loving kindness and compassion into a Path to gain enlightenment? To do that, two things are required: one is to join the view of emptiness when practising loving kindness to think ‘I am practising loving kindness to all sentient beings, and the absolute reality is emptiness.’ If you think this way, your loving kindness becomes the Path to gain liberation, because you are not practising individually but your practice is based on the right view of emptiness. That is one way that contributes to take you to buddhahood.

The other is to practise with the bodhicitta mind 'I am doing this loving kindness not just to wish them happiness and the cause of happiness, but I am doing this to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.' Bodhicitta is like a glass of water, and loving kindness a spoonful of sugar. When you put the sugar into the water, you cannot separate them – all the sugar dissolves in the water. Same with bodhicitta. When you mix the loving kindness with bodhicitta, it turns into bodhicitta. Your loving kindness becomes something much greater.

We tend to think about practices and concepts individually, but we do not know how they mix and turn into something more than the sum of each. Loving kindness with bodhicitta is more powerful than loving kindness without bodhicitta; there is a vast difference between loving kindness by itself and loving kindness with the view of emptiness. It can be compared with a spoonful of sugar that is put in a glass of water and when it is put in a cup of cappuccino, which is more expensive. The same sugar, when put in different substances, becomes more valuable. Likewise, separate practices and concepts can change depending on how they are used. If used in the right way, they create things that are more valuable. For this reason, if you use loving kindness with bodhicitta or without it, you give different values to loving kindness. This is why we need to be smart when practising the Dharma. Two people make exactly the same effort, but with two different minds, and the result will be very different. If you are smart and skilful, you can get great results. So, even the right meditation, if practised without bodhicitta, without understanding of emptiness, it can only give you a mundane result. With this awareness, when we meditate, we need to make sure we do not fall into any of these three types.

Antidotes to the cause

We will discuss antidotes to the cause of those three types of faulty meditation. First, the cause of wandering mind is two kinds of attachment: attachment to sentient beings and attachment to material wealth. As antidotes, we need to think of the disadvantages of attachment and abandon it. We also need to

think about the advantages of a secluded place, a quiet place.

Antidotes to attachment to sentient beings

In order to abandon our attachment to sentient beings, we must develop an understanding carefully. If we try to just reject something we are attached to, without good understanding, it would not work. Rejecting like when we are upset with something does not work, because it is not judgement with wisdom; we need to free ourselves happily, rather than rejecting angrily. Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* gives many examples of attachment to sentient beings, but I will talk about just a few things.

Right now, many of us want to understand emptiness, altruism, the truth. But we cannot understand them. What is preventing us from understanding them? It is our attachment to our deluded mind that will not let us go beyond the mundane. Our deluded mind is like a black cloth over our eyes. The moment we remove our blindfold, we do not need to go looking anywhere; the ultimate truth exists right here, in front of us. We are blindfolded by our attachment.

I will give you an example. When you are strongly attached to someone, you do not see the person's mistakes; whatever he or she does is right. On the other hand, with someone who is not connected to you, you can see his or her mistakes clearly. We are blind to our loved ones' faults. This is how attachment works. Śāntideva says that our attachment to our loved ones is an obscuration from seeing the absolute reality. Attachments cause us to not see the faults of samsara. Samsara is not a place, but is a state of the mind. If we look into our desire mind, jealous mind, arrogant mind and so forth, there is no pleasure at all. It is like when we are drunk, we do not see danger and think everything is fine. Likewise, we are so completely drunk on our attachment and taking enjoyment out of it, that we are not seeing the disadvantages and dangers. Indulgence in our attachment blocks us from seeing the reality of danger. This is another problem.

As we cannot see the danger coming, it is not until the result arrives that we feel discomfort. By that time, it is too late. We cannot reverse the result; we have created the cause, so we are experiencing the result. Perhaps we can learn from the experience and not repeat, yet we are not learning; while

we feel bad about the current experience, at the same time we are creating more cause to repeat it. It is like we marry someone who treats us badly so we leave the person but as we did not learn from the experience, we marry another person who tortures us again: a bad marriage karma. We have a bad karma to marry our own mind, which tortures us, yet we remarry the same mind. What we need is understanding 'this mind is not helping me, and I need to be free from this mind.' Once we know more about this reality, then we can develop our mind in a way to be free from the old one – to renounce it because it does not help us. This is detachment. It is not a negative rejection but understanding 'this mind is not helping me, so I need to be free from it.' Now we can make a decision, like in science, not in religion.

These decisions must not come from a feeling or excitement. Decisions must come from your wisdom. When it comes from your wisdom, whatever decision you make is the right one. But if you make your decision out of your feeling or out of excitement, most of the time it fails. Many of us make decisions based on our feeling: 'I have a really good feeling about this, so I want this' or 'I'm so excited, I want to do it.' We talk about our feelings and excitement, but we do not talk about our wisdom. We do not give wisdom a chance to make decisions. Instead we give the power to our feelings or excitement to decide, then they fail us. When you suffer due to these mistaken decisions, you feel miserable and pity yourself 'poor me, I can't do anything.' While you are thinking that, time is ticking away. Time does not wait for you. It is ticking day after day, week after week, month after month. Time passes and one day you have grey hair, wrinkles in your face, your teeth are falling out. It is time to go. And you still think you are smart.

If you are suspicious of someone, you would always be spying on the person – watching what this person is doing, and finding this person's problems. We should use the same method to spy on our own mind that is causing trouble. Then one day we want to be free from this mind. We tend to spend so little time on something really important for ourselves, while spending a lot of time on something much less important. We need to shift our focus from the wrong one to the right one. Attachment keeps our focus away from what is important.

Dharma tells us that our relationships are only temporary – they constantly change, never stay the same. As a parent, you love your child so much you give up everything for the child. Then the child grows up, and the very child you loved so much takes your life or turns into your enemy. With friendship, you love a friend so much that when you part from him or her for an hour you miss him or her a lot. Yet the next thing you do not want to see the person you cherished – you do not want anything to do with the person for the rest of your life. Relationships are very fragile – you never know what comes up next. Why, then, do you invest so much and attach yourself to these fragile relationships? It is very easy to make friends, very easy to cast away that very friendship. I have seen many instances of that. When I grew up, things were different. I think people had more stable mind, and once they formed a friendship, they maintained it for their entire life.

I have been running the centre for many years and I have observed that, sometimes people are very excited when they meet and become friendly to each other. But when they come together next time, they do not talk to each other. One minute this person is my best friend, and next minute I don't want to be a friend of this person. Modern society is unreliable. Same thing was happening in Śāntideva's time, and he writes about it. But the difference is that at the time it was rare; today, it is very common – easy to make friends, easy to break friendship. A cheap friendship is cheaply lost.

Another thing about human beings is that, when you give someone good advice, chances are that the person will not be pleased but instead get upset with you telling him or her what to do. Fortunately, people who come to the Dharma listen to the teacher. But within a sangha, if you visit and try to help others they get upset. It is very hard to please human beings; that is the nature of sentient beings. Some of us put a lot of effort to make someone happy, and we develop expectations that this person would reciprocate. When we find that the person is not happy, we get upset. This upset comes from our lack of understanding of human nature. If we understand human nature, we would be happy to have done our best, and if the person is not happy that is human nature. Understanding reality helps us not expect beyond the reality. It is a good therapy, because if something goes wrong, we would not blame

ourselves or others but accept it: 'why should I worry, why should I be upset?' And we can move forward. The chapter is finished, and we will start a new chapter.

Another difficulty with us sentient beings is that, when we meet someone a little better than us, we become jealous – without reason. Then when we meet someone of similar level to us, we feel competitive and want to be better. When, on the other hand, we meet someone below us, we feel arrogant. This is the strange nature of human beings. If you say something unpleasant to people, of course they get upset; if you say something nice, they become suspicious. It is better not to say anything!

What I am saying here is about untrained minds. If your mind is trained, if you are an advanced meditator, of course you will not be affected by whatever happens out there. You have control of your mind. You are in a better position to help others. But when you do not have control of your mind, if you remain in such an environment you will get more troubles. You are already not stable, and the troubles of other people contribute to even more unfavourable conditions. For this reason, it is good to give yourself some space and time to strengthen yourself by moving away – but not completely, or you would lose your bodhicitta. One thing you should never give up from your mind and heart is all sentient beings.

Nevertheless, when you face so many challenges, it is good to remove yourself physically from sentient beings. Keep a good distance until you feel stronger. But mentally you always wish all beings the best – whether they are nice to you or harsh to you. Never move them away from your heart. Often, physical distance helps us develop a better relationship with others or make the relationship stronger. When our environment is full of anger or disturbance, it is very difficult to help other sentient beings. We end up corroding each other, make each other angry or upset or try to defeat each other. These create more negative karma. To prevent that, it is good to keep distance for a short time.

Sometimes, you cannot leave: 'I cannot be away from her, because I love her, she cooks for me, loves me, cares for me' and so on. You are attached to these things. When one day you lose her and you feel grief. You miss her for

many years. While grieving, you have no energy to do anything. On the one hand, it is not nice; on the other hand, you love to watch this horror movie all the time. It is important to understand the faults of attachment, because sentient beings have many desires yet none of them are certain: one minute someone says she likes chocolates, but the next minute says she hates it and wants something else. If you do not know what you like yourself, how could you expect others to know what you like? It is very difficult to please people. For instance, our partners care for us and love us and we try to please them with nice presents. But then, they say 'why did you buy this? I don't like it.' We feel so sad because we put in a lot of thinking, but they don't like what you gave them. Then we need the therapy again – understanding human nature: 'I did my best, so I should be happy about it. If he isn't happy, that's the reality. Human beings are like that.' When you understand reality, it does not upset you. Truth is the best therapy; truth is the best medicine for the mind. It does not let you down.

Śāntideva's teaching is so wonderful. He shows the reality of human culture. Once you understand the human nature, you know how to how to deal with it, how to handle these things. Think about it – I try to make everything comfortable, but still I get so disappointed. But I see some great practitioners do similar things and he or she is still happy. Why the difference? We both live in the same society and do similar things – we love the sentient beings and try to help them, yet while I get disappointed, the other person is still happy. This is because we think differently and see differently. And the difference is vast. So, we need to train our mind to see the reality.

Stories of stubborn arrogance from Buddha's time

There is the story of the Buddha's cousin Devadatta. When Devadatta became very ill, the Buddha blessed him and he was cured. But instead of thanking the Buddha, he was rude to him. Even when the Buddha helped, Devadatta returned ingratitude. So, when we do something good to someone who returns our kindness with rudeness, we can remember this story. This is the nature of sentient beings. Those who are so caught up in their arrogant mind, selfish mind, do not see beyond their own mind. They do not know they are hurting others either. One lesson in mind training is that, when

someone has a problem, do not take the problem to yourself. Just see the problem, recognise it but do not make it your problem. When people repay your kindness with resentment etc. do not be upset but remember that such is human nature even in Buddha's time, so it is more common in this time of degeneration.

There is another story, an ancient Indian story, about Lekpay Karma, a naked Jain practitioner who lived during the time of Buddha. He considered his Jain teacher was the most omniscient, the most perfect in the world. He had a right to think that way because he believed in his religion; every religion has the right to consider their teacher is the best. Buddha had the omniscient quality, and he told Lekpay Karma that his teacher would die in seven days with indigestion. Lekpay Karma went to his teacher and told him what Buddha said, and that some people thought it was Buddha's omniscience but he would not accept it. So, he said to his master 'you should not eat for seven days.' His master fasted for six days. But on the seventh day, which he had miscalculated as the eighth, he ate molasses, which caused indigestion and he died. He died on the seventh day. After death, he was reborn as a hungry ghost – eating, vomiting, eating. He met Lekpay Karma and told him Buddha's omniscience, and told him to respect the Buddha because what he said was true. Lekpay Karma approached the Buddha, but he lied. He told Buddha that his teacher did not die. Buddha said to him "do you not remember that he died, was born a hungry ghost and talked to you?" Lekpay Karma had to say yes, but he lied again saying that his teacher was reborn in the heavenly realm. Buddha said, "no, no. he was born as a hungry ghost." Then Lekpay Karma was quiet. Yet, he still would not accept Buddha's omniscience. Likewise, sometimes one's arrogant mind refuses to accept someone with so much knowledge. In such a case you do not need to try hard to prove that you are good or you are right. There are people who would not accept what you know, so there is no point getting upset about it because it is the nature of human beings.

Acceptance of reality is antidote to depression

In the past, the Tibetan community has been through many difficulties: losing their country, losing their loved ones – there was so much tragedy in

their life. Yet, I never, ever heard of one Tibetan getting depressed at that time. The reason is because they embrace the Dharma; they knew those things happen to anyone's life. We cherish our body, but one day we have to part with it. Whatever disaster, when it happens, we have to accept it. Just accepting is the Tibetan's therapy, so these things never led them to depression. Whether we are practitioners or non-practitioners, if we all bring this idea into our mind, whatever we go through in our life, it makes it a little easier for us.

But we tend to take things so personally. We think 'why is this happening to me and not to others?' Yet, the fact is, it is happening everywhere, but we do not see that; we only see our problems and are blind to others' problems. Because we take our problems so personally, they make us feel down, which leads us to depression. This is due to the lack of understanding of other people's conditions. You do not need to be a great practitioner not to be depressed; even just a general sense of understanding is good enough to avoid depression. We human beings are all sentient beings; we are controlled by our karma, and most of our karma is controlled by negative karma. We are not immune from suffering. We need this awareness that we are not isolated from others, and if others are facing difficulties, it is not right to expect we should be exempt from them. It is selfish – a wrong, unwise kind of selfishness. Many problems we face are caused by this unwise self-centredness; many problems we face are caused by our lack of understanding of others. We need to become wisely selfish – to understand other sentient beings better. This kind of understanding, even if we are not Buddhist practitioners, will give us a little room to relax – like cleaning and tidying our own bedroom to make a little more space, a little more comfortable. To do this, we need to look into our mind which is very messy. Just picking and discarding one thing, we make some space in our mind, which makes us more relaxed. So, these are the faults of attachment to sentient beings.

Antidote for attachment to material wealth

The second fault is attachment to material wealth. Material wealth creates many non-virtues in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. In the beginning, when we are accumulating wealth, people often criticise or complain. We also need to upset our loved ones as well as people we dislike.

In terms of relationships, your partner may say ‘you spend so much time on your job and not making time for me’ ‘you love your job more than me’ ‘you love your money’ and so on. These rifts can fracture your family life. When you are successful, the people you dislike become jealous of your success. You can imagine how much negatives you accumulate when you begin to make wealth. As a result of those non-virtues in this life, of your making bad relationship to everyone, then in your next life you will be born in the lower realms. That is the non-virtue in the middle. And then in the end, while accumulating non-virtues these burn out all the good karma from the virtues you have committed in the past.

In summary, in the beginning, creating wealth entails a lot of negative karma; in the middle, maintaining wealth causes many difficulties; and in the end, since you have invested so much negativity it burns up all the good karma from your virtuous deeds. At the end of your life, you are karmically bankrupt. Your wealth is like an autumn cloud – it is there, then next minute it is gone. It is like spring ice: as soon as it melts, summer comes. The fruit of all your effort you have put in disappears in the end. Nothing left. The only thing that remains is the karma you have created, which follows you like a shadow. One of the sutras says that when the time of death comes, even a king has to part with all his subjects, his possessions, his wealth. He has to go alone. The one thing you cannot part is your karma.

Of course, we as human beings need to be practical in the sense that we need to have a good place to live. It is important we have a comfortable life with things to wear, eat and so on. Beyond these, if we accumulate so much extra wealth, such wealth does not just come by itself – we also acquire non-virtues. At the end of the day, you cannot take anything with you when you die. You die alone. That is why it is said that wealth does not give you what you believe but instead brings you more negative karma, more suffering. With the understanding of the disadvantages of attachment to wealth, you can make yourself less attached to it.

When we discussed generosity, we talked about the difficulties of wealth: suffering of creating wealth, suffering of protecting it and suffering of losing it. It is difficult to create wealth while living a virtuous life. Most wealth

is easy to create through non-virtues. An example of small gain for huge disadvantage is a chariot horse. While working it gets distracted by grass and eats a mouthful, but then the driver beats it up for punishment. Small gain with a lot of negative karmic consequences: it is not worthwhile.

It is not right to blame material wealth. All of this is about motivation. If you believe that material wealth is the cause of happiness, then your attachment becomes the cause of all your suffering, not your wealth. But you change this mind and think that you are creating wealth for direct or indirect benefit for others. As I said earlier, direct benefit means that you think 'I'm creating this wealth so I can use it to benefit others' then it is not self-attachment and so it does not bring you suffering. You accumulate the same wealth but your intention is different. Indirect benefit means 'I have no courage to give my wealth away now, but I'm going to leave a will so that in the future someone is going to benefit'. This way, you will keep your wealth until you die, but you make sure that someone else will inherit your wealth. But, as I said in the discussion on generosity, if you make wealth, do not use it yourself or let others use it, then this wealth becomes a cause of suffering. Śāntideva said, if you use your wealth it brings happiness to you; if you give it to others it brings happiness to them; but if you do not use it for yourself or others, then it is a useless wealth. That brings us suffering. So, wealth has its benefits but much greater disadvantages.

It is important to investigate these arguments, rather than just believing what Śāntideva said or what the Buddha said. Reflect and contemplate what we are doing right now and ask ourselves 'what I'm doing how, is it helpful to me or harmful to me?' You need to spend time to contemplate. When you do, one day you will realise that you are so caught up with this attachment which does not bring you any happiness but instead it causes many negative things, brings suffering. When you are aware of this, then you become motivated to do something about it – this something has to come from your own heart. This is a real practice. When it comes from your heart and not an influence from someone else, that is genuine – that is the real Path that liberates you from attachment. That is why we need to study to get the idea. Then, the idea needs to become reality – that is the practice. That is the antidote to

the attachment to sentient beings and attachment to material wealth – to consider their disadvantages and abandon them.

Advantages of a quiet place

Next, we consider the benefits of a quiet, secluded and peaceful place. Śāntideva said that when you are in a forest, what you meet will only be wild animals. I think, many parts of India have vicious animals – tigers, leopards, elephants – that are not so friendly and may attack you. But in Australia, the forests or bush is very gentle. There are snakes, but they are not going to chase you. Dingos, if they have cubs can be a little dangerous. But generally, wildlife leaves you alone. Once you become used to a quiet place, it makes you mentally relaxed and physically healthier. There are many advantages. In this place, Tilba, we breathe fresh air. But if you live in the city, the air is dirty and toxic, although it is much better than the air in India. There are many chemicals in large cities that you cannot see but cause many diseases. So, those quiet places have many good qualities.

It is said that, if one lives in a cave or temple or in the forest, it is so enjoyable that one forgets samsara and will have no interest in returning – why go back to headaches when you have so much joy in that environment? This is why many yogis choose to stay in very secluded places, because there they get everything – healthy mind, healthy body. Why did Buddha, who had everything in the palace, leave the palace and go into the forest to meditate? Had he stayed in the palace he would have been in samsaric environment with many people. It was because he left for the forest to meditate, he reached enlightenment. Śāntideva says that in a quiet place no one will bother you, so it is very beneficial. One day you will die there, but no one will notice. No one will be sad for you. Otherwise, when you die people mourn and worry about preparing for funeral, who would be coming to the funeral – a lot of worry about unnecessary things like that. While you are alive and have a good life and when you die no negative baggage to carry with you: happy in life lived, and happy in death. This of course is down the track – I am not talking about doing these things right now. This is an opportunity; Dharma offers opportunities and possibilities in your life, giving you choice. The decision must come from you. You must decide, not based on feeling or excitement,

but based on your wisdom mind. That is very important. In those quiet places, you have beautiful things like stars or flowers and really very little disturbances and more favourable things for increasing your practice. These are the advantages of quiet places.

Antidote to the result

The result of attachment is wandering mind. The antidote to the wandering mind is meditation. There are three types of meditation: worldly meditation, Hinayana meditation and Mahayana meditation. These are the three medicines for wandering mind.

Worldly (samsaric) meditation

Worldly meditation is single-pointed meditation such as shamatha. Single-pointed meditation helps our mind wander less, and ultimately stops wandering completely. When we are free from our wandering mind, what is left is virtuous mind. As long as we have virtuous mind, we have peace in this life and in future lives. But this virtue is exhaustible. We do not create inexhaustible virtue because the cause is limited to our desire to be happy in this world.

The advantage of single-pointed meditation is that if we manage to attain this virtuous mind, it is tremendously beneficial. As long as we have this mind, we do not experience the two kinds of suffering: suffering of suffering and suffering of change. When our mind is free of these, our mind is happy. The disadvantage, on the other hand, is that we think we have everything therefore we are not interested in developing our mind further. When, one day, the benefit runs out, we fall back to our normal suffering. This is the disadvantage of the worldly or samsaric meditation; as I said before, the highest level one can reach in the desire realm is single-pointedness. One feels like one is enlightened, but in reality, one is not – far from it.

One may go higher, which is the form dhyana state: first, dhyana, second dhyana, third and fourth dhyana. These states are also like the enlightened state – blissful and tranquil. But one is not enlightened: one is still in samsara, still self-grasping. One enjoys being in the state, feels wonderful and free; one

is hiding there and not free from samsara. Then one continues to meditate to go beyond, to the formless realms, also of four stages. These are the stages and limits of the worldly meditation.

Śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha meditation

The second meditation, beyond the worldly meditation, is that of śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha. They think of the faults of samsara and look into the nature of self and of the five aggregates through meditation. There are many types of this meditation – on samsara, on suffering, and the like. Once practitioners see the nature of suffering, they are motivated to work on renunciation to free the mind that is the cause of suffering. Once the motivation is developed, they seek methods for gaining liberation. There are two methods: preliminary practice or meditation, and main meditation.

First, the preliminary meditation: in order to practise the single-pointed meditation, one has to examine one's mind as to which thought is more dominant in one's life. One or few thoughts are more dominant than others. Think about our mind. In our life, we are dominated by so many wandering thoughts – every minute they keep coming without reason. When in that state of mind, we cannot meditate – it is impossible. Only when these busy thoughts are quietened down a little, we have a chance to do some kind of single-pointed meditation. One method for reducing thoughts is breathing meditation. You watch your breathing – exhaling and inhaling. When you are focusing, you do not need to find out why you are breathing. The moment you start asking these questions, your mind gets distracted. You do not need to investigate anything but just watch. Just let yourself play with the breath. When you try and engage just with your breath – exhaling and inhaling – that stops all other thoughts, and in a little while you might become calmer. When your mind is calm, it is time to train the mind with single-pointed meditation. That is one of many preparations.

Sometimes, your attachment to sentient beings or material wealth does not allow you to meditate. If your attachment to sentient beings is hindering your meditation, think about impermanence – nothing is going to last forever. If you are attached to someone you love, meditate on the person's skeleton, then you feel less attached. Then your mind is not going too far away from

meditation. So, first do something about what distracts your mind. If you are attached to wealth, again think that wealth comes and goes, that wealth is not a real cause of happiness. Remember the teaching of the Buddha; you need to do a little analytical meditation as well as single-pointed meditation. When you realise that there is no value in thinking about wealth, come back to single-pointed meditation. As we discussed earlier, for attachments think of impermanence, skeleton and so on; for ignorance, think of dependent origination; for arrogance, think about different realms – form and formless realms. With these methods first subdue the gross wandering mind. When your mind is calm and quiet, you are more stable to do the single-pointed meditation. This is the preliminary part.

The main part of the meditation has thirty-seven factors of enlightenment practice, which I will not discuss here. The thirty-seven factors of enlightenment meditation are some of many things: four mindful meditations, four correct endeavours meditations, four miracles meditations, five powers meditations and five faculties meditation, eight noble Path meditation and seven branches of enlightenment meditation. Altogether, there are thirty-seven factors of enlightenment meditation. This is the Theravada perspective on main meditation.

Mahayana meditation

The third is Mahayana meditation. Within the Mahayana meditation, there is the Cittamatra tradition and the Madhyamika tradition. Here I will not comment on the Cittamatra tradition of meditation. The Madhyamika tradition was expounded by Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Śāntideva and others. The Madhyamika tradition is bodhicitta meditation. The preliminary for this is the Four Immeasurables. This is stated in the Mahayana sutra. The Four Immeasurables is what we chant all the time: the first, loving kindness; second, compassion; third, joy; fourth equanimity. These four are the Mahayana objects for meditation.

Then, how to meditate on the Four Immeasurables? The reason we say ‘immeasurable’ or inconceivable, or infinite – four infinite meditation – is because the objects are infinite. The objects are sentient beings, the number of which is infinite. ‘May the infinite sentient beings have happiness and

the cause of happiness' is the first infinite loving kindness meditation. The second, compassion, is the same object 'may they free from suffering and cause of suffering'. The third, joy, the same object: 'may they not part from sorrowless joy' and the last, equanimity, with the same object 'may they dwell in equanimity'. Sometimes, people recommend that you do equanimity first, because if you do, then the others follow more easily. Otherwise, you may become discriminating when doing loving kindness and think of your loved ones first, and it is more difficult to think of strangers or enemies.

Meditation on equanimity: from the relationship point of view

Let us look at equanimity. If we meditate on equanimity just because Buddhists believe every being is equal, that is not good enough. We need to understand the reason that every being is equal. This can be explained: first, from the relationship point of view; second, the sentient being's interest point of view; and third, the dharmic point of view.

First, the relationship point of view. In our normal life, we do not see everyone as equal because someone is your partner, some you dislike and there are others who are strangers to you. In meditation, you consider these relationships as only temporary - in your past lives, these people had different relationships with you, and in your future lives they will have different relationships with you. Your loves ones, your enemies and strangers are always in flux – always changing. In one life, your loved one may become your enemy. In this sense, there is no real, fixed differences.

One of the sutras describes a mother, holding a baby, eating meat and beating a dog. The point is that the meat she is eating has been her father in a previous life, the dog she was beating has been her mother, the baby she is holding has been her enemy. Now, her enemy becomes your child, her mother becomes her enemy who she beats up, and her father becomes her food. Dharma opens our eyes so we are able to see the past, present and future. When we understand this, we will not be caught up with small things. So, from the relationship point of view, we are all equal. This is logical.

Meditation on equanimity: from the sentient beings' interest point of view

From the viewpoint of sentient beings' interest, every one of them wants to be happy; none of them wants unhappiness. So, you and all sentient beings

are the same in this regard. Think, then, what is the difference – between me and others, between enemies, strangers, friends? They all want the same thing – happiness. Once you accept this logic, implement it in your mind and change your view of others, you will be able to see everyone as equal. This will help you achieve equanimity. Ask yourself if you have the right reasons to love someone, to dislike someone and so on; do you like or dislike someone for the right reasons?

Buddha did not tell people to just believe what he said; Buddha spoke truth with reason. The reason is right in front of us, so let us use the reason to prove what we think is true. We realise that we do not have right reasons for liking some and disliking others. We just feel close to someone, label those who we do not know as strangers, and label those who we do not like as enemies. But the moment an enemy does good things to us, we change our mind and the person becomes our friend. So, from the sentient beings' interest, we are all equal.

Meditation on equanimity: from the dharmic point of view

From the dharmic point of view, there is no reason that your loved ones give you an opportunity to gain enlightenment and your enemy does not. They all equally give you opportunities to gain enlightenment. A beggar gives you an opportunity to practise the Perfection of Generosity; enemies give us opportunities to practise the Perfection of Patience. Without them, we cannot practise the Six Paramitas. From that point of view, how can we think they are different? In terms of our practice of loving kindness and compassion, they are also equally important. If we miss one sentient being, then our loving kindness is not complete. All these reasons are so important to implement in our mind. They change our view of sentient beings. They contribute to our equanimity.

Once we see, or feel, that everyone is equal, then our practice of loving kindness becomes much easier. We will not have divisive thoughts, because we understand that we are all same. Then, why not think about all sentient beings? When we say 'may all beings have happiness,' what we mean is 'may all beings have truly virtuous mind' because the happiness that comes from virtuous mind is the true happiness. Other happiness is false happiness that

brings desire, disappointment, anger and other negative things. Virtues do not bring negative things. We wish all beings to not just dwell in the virtuous state but also accumulate virtues consistently. The more virtues they get, the happier they become. This is what we call loving kindness. Wishing them to have a good holiday on the beach is not loving kindness. They may enjoy their holiday today, and tomorrow they want to go again but worry about losing their job if they just stay on the beach. That is not real happiness; the real happiness is a virtuous mind and virtuous activities.

Then, we wish sentient beings to be free from suffering. Suffering does not mean poverty; even if they are free from poverty, they still have suffering. How many people do we know who are rich and suffering? Suffering comes from non-virtues. We wish whoever is creating non-virtues to be free from non-virtues, from creating non-virtues. This is how we wish them free from suffering and the cause of suffering.

And the third. All of us, no matter how bad, have some kind of virtues in our life. These virtues, no matter how small, bring some kind of joy. We wish that they never part from that joy. Never parting from any joy they have. These are the four immeasurables. These create a solid foundation for the mind path. They establish a very healthy seed for bodhicitta. For this reason, if you want to have healthy bodhicitta, you must train yourself in the four immeasurables first. Once you have solidly established four immeasurables, you will be able to cultivate real bodhicitta mind.

Practice of engaging bodhicitta

Here, we are talking about the four prime foundation meditation: loving kindness meditation, compassion meditation, joyfulness meditation and equanimity meditation. The purpose of these four is to cultivate bodhicitta. Of the two kinds of bodhicitta – wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta – we are discussing engaging bodhicitta, which consists of equalisation meditation and exchanging meditation.

Consider the disadvantages of the selfish mind

The method of practising equalisation meditation and exchanging meditation is to know how disadvantageous the selfish mind is to us. Once we know the shortcomings of the selfish mind and the advantages of cherishing others,

we have the right reasons for putting effort in helping other sentient beings. Just saying selfishness is harmful is not good enough. Śāntideva says that unless one trains one's mind with equalisation meditation and exchanging meditation, it is only serving oneself. This self-cherishing mind is the root of all the problems one faces. Therefore, one's job as a bodhisattva is to defeat this selfish mind – not in a negative way, but in a positive way.

The selfish mind has two disadvantages: one is that all the negatives we have committed have been created by our selfish mind; the selfish mind is the only creator of non-virtues, and non-virtues are the cause of all sorts of suffering of the six realms. The other concerns wise people who realise that samsara is full of suffering and practise to gain liberation. Even when they are liberated and attain arhatship or pratyekabuddha state, as I said before, being in this state delays them from attaining buddhahood by forty great eons. This is a result of a selfish mind.

What I mean by changing the mind in a positive way is to change its flavour rather than trying to push it away. The existing selfish mind is bitter. We need to change this bitterness to sweetness. It is like when you squeeze a lemon, the juice is very sour. You do not need to throw out the sour liquid. Just add sugar into it. Sugar changes its taste. So, when we talk about getting rid of this selfish mind, all we need to do is change its flavour from bitterness to sweetness.

The point is that we need to tame this mind to help other sentient beings. Give it a job to go out and help others. Use its self-serving nature in a different way. For example, if you buy a car for your own use only, it costs a lot of money – petrol, registration, insurance etc. Instead, you can use it as an Uber car to transport others. It is still your car, but now it produces income by using it for others. So, change your mind into an Uber mind.

Benefit of exchanging self and others

Once you establish the faults of the selfish mind, you can gradually, skilfully, and gently turn your mind to help others. Do not rush, but bring the awareness into your meditation. Your wild, wandering selfish mind is so established that it is not going to listen to you easily. So, at first, you need to be a little forceful in order to break the habit, in order to break the laziness. If

you think you need to practise equalisation or exchanging meditation because your teacher said you should, the selfish mind would not be convinced. Instead, you need to think more often about the benefits of equalisation and exchanging meditation. Keep the benefits buried in your mind. Having the awareness of the benefits within your mind makes it easier to practise. The practice is new to you, so it is important to familiarise yourself with it. It is like riding a wild horse. At first, the horse will not obey you because you are a new rider. As you become more skilful in controlling it, it will start obeying you. We are wild beings and bodhicitta is the rider. We will not be comfortable at first. It will take time.

Changing self-cherishing mind

When your mind resists what you are trying to do, tell your mind: 'I've always given you what you wanted, yet what have you given me in return? From beginningless time, all you've given me is suffering.' We have given our mind a free rein, and it has only given us trouble. If we are not happy with our mind, why let it run freely for the rest of our lives? Now is the time to tell it 'I'm going to take this freedom away from you and from now on I'll use you to help other sentient beings.' You will be investing not in the self-cherishing mind but in one that helps others. This way, you change your mind's attitude – from stinginess to generosity.

Another form of meditation deals with jealousy. When we see someone has better things, we become jealous; when someone is better than us, we become jealous. We are always jealous of others. Now we change that to be jealous of ourselves: 'I'm so happy. Others are not so happy. I'm jealous of myself.' 'I have a high position. Others are lower than I. I'm jealous of myself.' Thinking this way humbles us. 'I'm helping others, but these people are not helping others. So, I'm jealous of myself.' When we are jealous of someone, what is our goal? Our goal is to be better than that person. So, when we are jealous of ourselves, others want to be better than us. This awareness is an antidote to our arrogant mind; it is an antidote to our selfish mind. The less selfish our mind is, the less the fuel; the less the fuel, the less the fire and less heat. Likewise, the less selfish our mind is, the less negative karma; the less negative karma, the less our suffering. These are the benefits.

Another practice is not to blame people for their mistakes. We are used to talk about others' mistakes. As soon as we tell others of someone's mistake, we become a cause of trouble. The person who made the mistake is not our problem; that is his or her karma and does not cause us any harm. But the moment we tell it to others – gossiping – it becomes our problem. That is why we should not disclose someone's problems to others. It will not help anyone but instead disturbs other people's minds. If we tell ten people, we are disturbing ten people's minds. This is an important point from the Dharma point of view. Our mind always sees other people's mistakes. But the buddhas and bodhisattvas do not see mistakes of others. The reason is that mistaken mind does not exist for them. They do not see any problem, so they are not disturbed. So, in order to train our mind, always see only the good aspects of people. Even if you do not find any good things in a person, at least you can think that this person has \ buddha nature. This good nature, the buddha nature, is the seed of a buddha. This person will one day attain buddhahood. That is the reason to be optimistic and not see negativity in other people.

Similarly, check your body, mind and speech. If you find any negativity in one or more of them, think, 'these negativities are causing me to remain wandering in samsara and inflicting me so much suffering. The creator of all this suffering is my negative body, mind, speech.' Sometimes, it is good to feel ashamed of yourself, because shame discourages your body, mind or speech from doing wrong things.

Śāntideva said, "you may be impressing people with good things, which sometimes makes you arrogant. If you get praise for your good qualities, of course you should accept it. But at the same time, if you look at other aspects of your life, you are not perfect. You make many mistakes. If you recognise these aspects, you realise that you are an ordinary human being. Do not get carried away by what people say about you. Look at the reality of who you are. That makes you humble."

All your fears come from the three-poison mind, or negative karma. As long as you have the three-poison mind and negative karma, whatever you do, nothing will help you overcome your fear. Poor people have the fear of not having things, but wealthy people are also full of fear. Some of us feel we are

uneducated, so we go out to do courses and get certificates, but still have fear of not getting a good job. Whatever the world tells us would protect us from fear, does not protect us. None of them do. The real protection from fear is the virtuous mind, the bodhicitta mind. As long as you have the virtuous mind, even if you are poor, you do not have fear. The Buddha said that you only have fear when you leave your virtuous and positive mind.

To become free from negative mind, when someone harms you, or disturbs you, or causes you trouble, think that your past harmful actions are coming back at you. Your negativity or anger is your own creation, which causes negative karma. The harm the person inflicted on you is small in comparison. If you think that way, it is easier to tolerate others' wrong doing.

It is worthy to put effort into this practice

In the past, we always cherished ourselves. The bodhisattva's practice is to cherish others more: 'he did such good things, she is a kind person.' The mind that promotes others is the positive mind. And this positive mind is the very cause of happiness. It is the protector of your life. It helps you overcome your fear. For this reason, whenever there is an opportunity, say good things about others. In the past, we were thinking what people could do for us; now we think what we can do for others. When you do from your heart, it brings genuine joy.

How can we go through this life more purposefully? It is noble things that make our life purposeful. Buddha said that real happiness comes when one does noble, valuable things – helping others, benefitting others, changing someone's suffering into happiness. So, always look for good things and talk positively about others. To respect the gurus and the Triple Gem, to respect sentient beings – these are the noble activities.

To sum up, once we manage to turn our mind to helping others, this helps us abandon our selfish mind. Once we abandon our selfish mind and begin cherishing others, we are on the Path. We will be fulfilled. The reason we will be fulfilled is because abandoning selfish mind and cherishing others leads us to attain buddhahood. Śāntideva said that the main path to attain buddhahood is to exchange self and others. Once we attain buddhahood, all our wishes will be fulfilled. So, it is worth making effort in cherishing others.

Had we done this practice long ago, we wouldn't be in samsara facing all these challenges. As I said before, we existed in Buddha's time. We were all there. But, because of our laziness, we are still in samsara while Buddha has attained enlightenment.

Not ready to meditate on emptiness yet

Even if we have done equalisation meditation and exchanging of self and others meditation, we are not yet ready to meditate on emptiness. To meditate on emptiness, two things are required: first, one needs to hear the teaching on emptiness; and second, one needs to analyse what emptiness really is. One has to truly understand emptiness before one meditates. Without listening to teaching or analysing/examining what emptiness is, one will have a wrong idea of emptiness. If one makes it up and thinks merely that everything is empty, instead of developing the wisdom mind, one will create an enormously ignorant mind. A result of ignorant mind is rebirth in the animal realm. Nagarjuna said that taking emptiness in a wrong way is more disadvantageous than advantageous.

That is because emptiness is like a poisonous snake holding a wish-fulfilling jewel. In order to obtain the jewel, one has to catch the snake. If one catches the snake in the correct way, one will get the wish-fulfilling jewel, but if one tries to catch the snake in a wrong way, it can kill one. Likewise, if one knows how to meditate on emptiness correctly, it frees one from samsara and one can attain buddhahood. But if one does it incorrectly, it will cause one more suffering. Khenchen Migmar Tsering Rinpoche says that it is very easy to make mistakes concerning emptiness. One needs to be very careful, because right and wrong ideas of emptiness are very similar. There are many requirements for correct understanding of emptiness: one has to have a virtuous mind; one has to have a teacher who knows about emptiness; one has to have the right intention such as the renunciation mind and bodhicitta mind. Only when one has all these is there a possibility to understand emptiness. If any of the above conditions are amiss, one is not in a position to understand emptiness, because emptiness itself is a result of cause and condition. One needs to have the right cause and condition to achieve the result. When one has studied it, analysed it and formed an idea of what emptiness is, and the

teacher says one's understanding is right, only then one has an understanding, or the view, and is ready to meditate on it. I will discuss emptiness in the wisdom chapter.

How to practise the perfection of meditation

Four qualities to achieve

As with the previous perfections, the right contemplation requires four qualities and seven attachments to be abandoned. The first quality is, whatever meditation you do, make sure it is free from the obstacle of the wandering mind. Second, all meditation must be based on the view of emptiness. The third quality is that, once you have meditated without wandering mind and your meditation is based on the view of emptiness, the meditation fulfills your wishes; it will free you from samsara and lead you to attain buddhahood. And the fourth, once you have fulfilled your wishes and attained buddhahood, you are capable of leading others – whatever the level of the student – through the Theravada Path, Mahayana Path, or Vajrayana Path. When Buddha turned the wheel of the Dharma, he gave teachings equally to all beings, to suit each individual level: to those who are suitable for the Theravada Path, he gave Theravada teaching; to those who are suitable for the Mahayana Path, he taught Mahayana; and those who were suitable for the Vajrayana Path received Vajrayana teaching from him. Each one received teaching according to his or her capacity. You will have the capacity to teach everyone. That is one of the perfect qualities of the buddha. With the four qualities, you are free from distraction, you realise emptiness, you are fulfilled and you fulfil others.

Seven attachments to abandon

The seven attachments to abandon are: first, attachment to the wandering mind; second, procrastinating practice; third, not making full effort and being satisfied with a limited result; fourth, practising for wrong reason such as praise; fifth, attachment to a future result. The sixth is attachment to the cause of the wandering mind, that is, distraction. The seventh is two types of distraction. Distraction usually refers to the mind without a focus. But

even when one meditates with a focus, if it distracts from the Mahayana focus to attain buddhahood for the sake of sentient beings, the mind is still wandering. That is, if one practises virtues to attain happiness for a future life, or does the Dharma practice to gain self-liberation. It is distracting one from compassion. The second type is distraction from the Mahayana focus of being free from three identities: me, other, and object. If one practices exchanging meditation, thinking 'I am the bodhisattva, he/she is a sentient being', then one is grasping on the 'I' as the bodhisattva, he/she as a sentient being and bodhicitta as object. In this case, one's practice is not based on emptiness; one is distracted from the view. This is wandering mind that distracts one from wisdom.

The Mahayana Path is method and wisdom. This is the Path that leads us to non-abiding nirvana: method frees us from nirvana and wisdom frees us from samsara. So, whenever you practise, make sure your practice is not distracted by self-interest or by existence of phenomena. These four qualities and abandonment of seven attachments apply to all the perfections.

BENEFITS OF THE PERFECTION OF MEDITATIVE CONTEMPLATION

Temporary benefits

Benefits in this life

Now, the benefits: temporary and ultimate. There are two temporary benefits: in this life and in future lives. In this life, as a result of good meditation, we can have good shamatha. Good shamatha reduces our afflictions. When our afflictions have been reduced, our practice becomes non-worldly Dharma. With the worldly Dharma – gain or loss, praise or criticism, happiness or unhappiness – if someone praises us, we get excited and do more practice; if someone criticises us, we are discouraged and give up; we are concerned of what people say about us. If we are concerned with what people say about us, our practice will not be genuine. Genuine practice means doing what one believes to be good. People can say good things in

a dishonest way. We need to know whether or not we are doing it right, rather than relying on others' opinions. When someone says nice things to us, we are excited; if someone says terrible things about us, we feel miserable. That's why we are so unstable. One moment I am god, the next moment I am a demon, depending on what people say about me. We must be content in ourselves and we must not disturb others. As long as we know our own ground, that's good enough. It does not mean we should not listen to others. But we must know ourselves. People saying good things about me does not make me a good person; people saying bad things about me does not make me a bad person. If I do bad things, that makes me a bad person. We must look at ourselves and not rely on others' comments.

So, good meditation reduces defilements and frees us from worldly Dharma. As a result of meditation, we can remove the gross three-poison mind. Without the gross three-poison mind, we have peace. Peace is the foundation of happiness, and the foundation of peace is established by shamatha meditation. This is the benefit. In addition, when we have enough shamatha, we can have clairvoyance. We have this telepathic power within us, but due to our defilement, it is obscured. Once we have cleared of defilements, we can read other people's minds. Sometimes, it is said that when we can truly help other sentient beings is when we have this spiritual mind. This is because, then we will know the exact personality of the person and be able to help him or her accordingly. Right now, we have to communicate to get some idea of what to provide to help. Clairvoyance is a very important method for helping other sentient beings. It comes with shamatha meditation. These are the benefits in this life.

Benefits in future lives

The benefits in future life are that meditation purifies our body, mind and speech. Once these are purified, we have more flexibility of our mind. Right now, our mind is inflexible; we do not have control of our mind. If we tell our mind to concentrate for ten minutes, it would not listen to us and gets distracted even after a few seconds. Through shamatha meditation, the mind can be more stabilised and we have more control. We can meditate for one hour without a problem.

As a result of meditation, we can have right speech. Before we reach that state, we do not have control of our speech or actions. We say wrong things or take wrong actions and regret later. This is because our afflicted mind controls our speech and actions. When shamatha removes afflictions from our mind, we have the control of our mind, speech and actions. When we have the control, it is very easy to practise virtues. That is the benefit in future life.

It is also said that, when you have good shamatha, you will have good circulation of blood, oxygen and energy. You feel so comfortable that you can sit for months without moving. Right now, we have a lot of pain while sitting. There are different causes of the pain, but many are due to circulation blockage. That is why we need to get up and stretch. But when there is a free flow of oxygen, blood and energy, nothing causes us pain. This is the flexibility of the body.

When the mind is flexible, your mind is completely free of the three-poisoned mind. Absence of the three-poisoned mind makes you comfortable and relaxed. These are the future benefits of meditation. You will have all the clairvoyance: eye-clairvoyance, ear-clairvoyance, body-clairvoyance... all types of clairvoyance through shamatha meditation. When you are at that stage, you will not need to go to India to receive teachings from the guru. Your mind can go there to receive teachings. It is incredible. We have this incredible capability, yet our defilements shut us from it. Once we remove them, we would not need to buy air tickets to go to India. Our mind can go.

Ultimate benefit

The ultimate benefit is, of course, buddhahood. When you attain buddhahood, everything will be perfect. Your mind is perfect, your speech is perfect, your actions are perfect, your knowledge is perfect, and your qualities are perfect. Your activities are perfect. Everything is perfect. There is not even a slightest fault. This is also the result of meditation. This completes the fifth perfection.

The Perfection of Wisdom

The last of the Six Perfections is the Perfection of Wisdom. Again, there are three topics: first, the definition of wisdom; second, the reality of the Perfection of Wisdom; and third, the benefit of cultivating the wisdom mind.

DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

The general definition of wisdom is the mind that realises its own reality, the nature of phenomena, of their own truth and their own reality, without fabrication. It means that the mind does not exaggerate by putting one's thoughts onto objects one sees, or underestimate objects one does not see. The wisdom mind is free from both exaggeration and underestimation and sees how things exist in their own reality.

The Mahayana definition of the Perfection of Wisdom is the mind that realises the nature of all phenomena for the sake of all sentient beings. To make wisdom the Perfection of Wisdom three things are required. First, when we listen to the Perfection of Wisdom, or contemplate it or meditate on it, the motivation must be bodhicitta, that is, to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Second, we need to understand the absolute truth of all phenomena; while listening, we hear the words as sound, but the nature of the sound is free from inherent existence; when we listen, we have an opportunity for clarity but we cannot grasp it because its nature is emptiness. Third, when we cultivate wisdom, it must be dedicated to buddhahood to help all sentient beings. These three things transform wisdom into the Perfection of Wisdom.

The advantage of cultivating wisdom is that, whatever you know about wisdom, however small, the knowledge is like a piece of diamond. It may be small, but is a pure diamond, not an impure one: if you know even a little of the Dharma, it is a complete Dharma, not a half-baked Dharma. You must dedicate this Dharma to attain buddhahood for the sake of sentient beings. Each time you listen, contemplate and meditate, you are training the mind so that it is the Perfection of Wisdom. One needs to be mindful of this.

WISDOM ITSELF

In order to know what gold is, one needs to know what fake gold is. Fake gold can look like gold but it is not real. Likewise, there are many types of wisdom, so unless you know what fake wisdoms are you will not be able to identify the real wisdom. I will discuss: 1) incorrect wisdom or obstacles to recognising correct wisdom; 2) antidotes to the obstacles; and 3) correct understanding of wisdom.

Incorrect wisdom

Obstacles to correct wisdom

The first obstacle to correct wisdom is foolishness or ignorance. The foolish person is not interested in searching for wisdom. Such a person believes wrong actions such as killing someone to be the cause of happiness; unfortunately, some think that harming others is virtuous from their religious perspective. But such belief is based on total ignorance, not wisdom. Ignorance creates suffering; wisdom removes suffering. Logically, we cannot see that killing someone is positive; it does not make sense. But a person with afflicted mind does not see things logically. Perhaps due to the influence of religion or their own ignorance, some believe their wrong actions are the right ones. This is called incorrect wisdom mind: to think harming others is a right thing to do. If we truly do right things, we are in a much better position to reach buddhahood, but because of our incorrect wisdom, we are still in samsara. We need to be able to identify incorrect wisdom and avoid it;

we should not waste our time believing in incorrect wisdom.

The second obstacle to correct wisdom is the wrong spiritual path. Some people may believe ascetism and being harsh on their body – like hurting the body and covering it with blood – is the path to liberation. Some religions promote negative views of non-believers or believers of other religions and think they should rid themselves of them. Those people may consider their belief to be wisdom but we call it incorrect wisdom. The Buddhist definition of wisdom is the mind that knows the reality of all phenomena. The mind with wrong views as mentioned above is not seeing the reality of all phenomena. Incorrect wisdom mind creates harm which results in negative consequences. Religions can create in us incorrect wisdom mind, which we need to identify. I am not only talking about non-Buddhists but also within Buddhists – some teach wrong things in the name of Buddhism.

The third obstacle to Mahayana correct wisdom involves the right wisdom, of the sravakas' and the pratyekabuddhas' realisation mind. They realise the truth of selflessness and the truth of the five aggregates: they realise the right wisdom, but their wisdom falls short of attaining buddhahood. Correct wisdom is free from the four extremes: 1. existent; 2. non-existent; 3. both; and 4. neither. Their wisdom realises that existence is free from self and free from other. But it does not realise that existence is also free from both self and other, and from neither self or other. Lack of awareness of all four extremes is not the correct wisdom that leads to the attainment of buddhahood. Their wisdom will only take them to self-liberation. From this perspective, compared to the Mahayana perspective, the Theravada perspective is incorrect wisdom.

These are the three obstacles or incorrect wisdom minds. It is very important to identify them because, for instance, if you want to buy something but if you do not have any idea how to look for the right thing, you may end up buying a wrong thing which either will not work, or will not give you the right result. Likewise, in order to recognise correct wisdom, you need to know wrong minds.

Interpretive and definitive Paths

Buddhism has two kinds of Path: interpretive Path and definitive Path.

The interpretive Path is that, when we just enter the Dharma, we are in the habit of seeing everything as truly existent. Based on this view, we work with karma and good and bad. Because our mind still sees everything as existent, the teachers tell us: 'you should pray to the Buddha and he will bless you and provide what you want' or 'you should recite the mantra, it removes your obstacles.' These teachings are interpretive, not definitive: if praying to the Buddha removes your suffering, all Buddhists should be free from suffering, but they still suffer! The Buddha will not remove your suffering, and chanting a mantra will not remove your obstacles. What really removes obstacles is the wisdom mind. Beside wisdom, nothing will remove your suffering. Prayer or blessing is just a way to generate our positive mind. If you take the interpretive Path as the definitive Path, that is a wrong view. Such view exists both inside and outside Buddhism. We should recognise it.

Disadvantages of incorrect wisdom mind in this life

There are two kinds of disadvantages when you lack the correct wisdom mind: in this life and in future lives. The disadvantages in this life are: first, lack of wisdom leaves you uneducated. When you feel uneducated, you feel low, thinking 'I don't know anything' and feel embarrassed. Second, we become unsure whether we are doing the right thing or wrong thing; lacking in wisdom mind, there is more chance of doing the wrong thing than the right thing. This is because we are creatures of habit. If our habit is based on a mistaken view, there is more chance to do wrong things than right things. Third, human society is very judgemental: if you are not wealthy, people will treat you as if you are worthless. If you are not educated, they scorn you. Living in such a judgemental world, if you lack wisdom, people discriminate against you. This makes it very hard to fit into the society and causes you to feel low. When you go into an environment with intelligent people, you cannot fit in there. You feel left out because you do not follow their discussions. They are not necessarily excluding you, but you do not understand their language. So again, you feel left out due to your lack of wisdom mind.

If you do not have wisdom you are almost like a blind person: when you cannot see, you can easily fall or keep bumping into things and hurting

yourself unnecessarily. A blind person cannot find proper directions. Likewise, with lack of wisdom you cannot find the right Path. Also, when you are not educated, you tend to congregate where you find people who are similar to you and enjoy their company. That is living like an animal without four legs. One shastra says that, even if we have two legs if we do not have wisdom and live almost like animals then it is not worth being born as human beings.

Disadvantages in future lives

Śāntideva says in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that the disadvantages of having incorrect wisdom in future lives are like someone who has been sick for a long time. A chronically sick person does not have much energy. Likewise, if you have built up afflictions in your mind, such mind is very weak – too weak to help yourself, let alone others. In contrast, someone with correct wisdom can do many things – whatever he or she does is effective. With someone who does not have much wisdom, even if he or she works tirelessly, the result will not be effective. These are the shortcomings of the lack of wisdom mind.

If you cannot do things effectively today, tomorrow it will be worse. In your next life, you go from bad to worse: you have not studied in this life, so in your next life you carry the habit of not interested in studying. This can go so far that, next time your rebirth can be in the animal realm. Once you are born into the animal realm it is hard to return to the human realm again. It may take a long time. So, if we look from the perspective of the present or future lives and in the long-term, there are many disadvantages of not having wisdom mind. Ignorance is the root of all afflictions, and the afflicted mind does all the damage. We need to be careful not to fall into this ignorant state of mind.

The main reason Buddha taught wisdom is to free us from our ignorant mind. If we do not free ourselves from this ignorant mind, then we are never going to be free from samsara. This is the main point of Buddhism, and is unique to Buddhism: no other religion talks about the specific importance of wisdom and the reason for its importance. Buddha taught that the cause of our suffering is our afflicted mind, and taught wisdom specifically to uproot the afflicted mind.

What is the wisdom mind?

Vasubandhu stated in the *Abhidharmakosa* that the wisdom mind is the mind that is capable of distinguishing between what is right and what is wrong - what is positive and what is negative.

Wisdom is not a principal mind; it is a secondary mind. The principal mind and secondary mind are not separate, but work together: when the secondary mind works it is concomitant with the principal mind. If your secondary mind works it is concomitant with the principal mind. If your secondary mind is wisdom, then your principal mind turns into wisdom mind; if your secondary mind is ignorance, then your principal mind become ignorant mind. The principal mind does what the secondary mind tells it to see or hear. It can't do anything else. Seeing or hearing differently is all done by the secondary mind.

Abhidharmakosa states that the lack of wisdom mind increases the affliction mind. When affliction mind arises and there is no wisdom, there is nothing to subdue or tame it. Through the affliction mind all the suffering of samsara arises; harming self, harming others, destruction to the material world, are created by this affliction mind. It is the biggest destroyer and is extremely powerful.

This powerful affliction mind needs a very powerful antidote. Science cannot destroy it. Even the most powerful weapon – a nuclear bomb – cannot destroy this ignorance mind. The only thing that can destroy it is the wisdom mind. Wisdom is far more powerful than any country that produces nuclear bombs. We need, therefore, to attend to our own minds rather than spend millions creating a powerful bomb. Due to the lack of this powerful antidote, wisdom, this afflicted mind is roaming in samsara from beginningless time. If we do not cultivate wisdom, this affliction mind is going to overcome us and we will be wandering in samsara for endless time. This is the disadvantage of the lack of wisdom mind.

Disadvantages of lacking wisdom

Without wisdom, we do not know what to adopt and what to abandon. Because of the lack of wisdom, we adopt what we should abandon, and we abandon what we should adopt. If we look into our mind, there are many things that are good but we do not adopt them – because they are not attractive

to us. It is like with food: many foods that are not good for us, we love to eat them. Many foods that are good for us but we do not eat them. As a result of taking wrong food and not eating right food, we get unhealthy. It is the same with our mind. If something is healthy for our mind, we reject it; if something is harmful for our mind, we always go for it. As a result, our mind becomes unhealthier and weaker.

With a weak mind, whatever we do damages our life; even if we take a positive action, it has only a little effect. Then, when we are reborn, with lack of wisdom we take a lower form with inferior faculties. Due to the low faculties, even if we do some Dharma practice, we are more likely to do wrong actions rather than right actions. Also, with lower faculties, we are easily used by others: when people tell us something pleasant, even though it is not genuine, we believe it, because we do not have the mind to distinguish whether it is right or not. Such a person is easily controlled by others.

Most leaders are intelligent though not always in the right way. But they are clever and their cleverness make them leaders. Those who are less clever become subjects or followers. We need to ask ourselves that 'every one of us has the buddha nature, so why should I be a subject, not a leader?' This kind of pride is valuable because we are not trying to defeat others but are taking up our own rights: our right to practise the Dharma, our right to gain buddhahood, our right to be teachers. These are our inherent rights, so why not assert them? Why succumb to the power of ignorance, life after life? We have many rights to be a better person, an intelligent person. Yet we are not taking up that right. We insist on unnecessary rights like the right to have a cup of tea or two plates for lunch and fight for it. We have this valuable right to practise the Dharma, the right to study the Dharma, the right to develop wisdom and the right to attain buddhahood. We should exercise these valuable rights.

When we lack wisdom, we are born with lower faculties, life after life. Wherever we go, we hear the Dharma, but we tend to practise more wrong than right. Many of us have these regrets: 'I thought I was practising the Dharma, but always in a wrong way.' It is not the teacher teaching wrong things. The teacher teaches us the right actions but through the lack of

wisdom we do them the wrong way. We are the ones making the mistakes. If we do not improve this wisdom mind, even if we realise and regret our wrong practice, we can continue to do it wrongly for the rest of our lives.

Dangers of meditation without wisdom

Without wisdom, when we meditate, we meditate the wrong way. The main purpose of Buddhist meditation is to reduce defilements and eventually uproot the defilements. Without wisdom, we may think we are meditating, but what we are doing is increasing our defilements, the affliction mind. Some people, after practising for some time, think 'I'm a senior meditator' or 'I can meditate more than others.' And if some can do better, they become jealous. Meditation is supposed to remove such defilements, but due to the lack of wisdom they are increasing their afflictions and meditation becomes the creator of defilements rather than destroyer of it.

How, then, can you check whether you are doing the right meditation or not? To check it, at the end of your meditation, examine the state of your self-grasping. If your self-grasping is still strong, it means you are not doing the right meditation. If, on the other hand, your self-grasping becomes less and less as a result of meditation, you are doing the right meditation. Therefore, if you cannot reduce or uproot your grasping of self, due to your lack of wisdom, no matter how long you may meditate you are not going to have any benefit. Wrong meditation is a wrong medicine – it cannot cure the disease.

Even if you do right meditation, your focus may be to attain self-liberation – such as sravakas or pratyekabuddhas. As I explained in the Perfection of Meditation, once you attain arhatship, or self-liberation, it will postpone your attainment of buddhahood by forty eons. In this respect, it is a disadvantage. So, why take a wrong path? The more you contemplate on this, you will realise that you cannot afford to waste your time by not developing wisdom when you have the chance.

Many of us think we are Mahayana, but if we look into our intentions, we are not even fit to be Theravada. Theravada will enable liberation, but ours is tomorrow's happiness or next year's happiness. We will not free ourselves even from samsara, so how could we be Mahayana? We may be feeling like Mahayana Buddhists, but we are actually taking a worldly path. Then we

get disappointed: 'I've been practising Mahayana, but all I got is only small benefit.' Such disappointment is not because of the Path but is caused by the lack of wisdom mind. These are the obstacles of wisdom that we should identify. So, the three types of wrong wisdom are: foolishness, creating the wrong view, and the wisdom aimed at self-liberation. We need to make sure not to fall into any of these three.

Antidotes to incorrect wisdom

Antidotes to the cause of obstacles

Now I will talk about the antidote to each of these obstacles. There are the causes and conditions that stop us from cultivating wisdom. The cause of obstacles is ignorance. There are many forms of ignorance: when we talk about the three-poison mind, that is one form of ignorance. Another is the first link of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. This first link is grasping of self, which is the root of samsara while the three-poison mind is the cause of non-virtue, therefore suffering, but not the root of samsara. In other words, grasping of self is more dangerous than the three-poison mind.

This is stated in *Pramanavarttika* by Dharmakirti, which is a very logical, important text. Dharmakirti says that ignorance is the root of all faults: all of our faults are created by ignorance. We will not discuss this in detail here, but just think about the different beings – enlightened beings have very few faults, and buddhas have no faults at all, while we are all faults! What makes the difference is wisdom: enlightened beings are the embodiment of wisdom. We, on the other hand, due to lack of wisdom, are always making mistakes. The cause of mistakes is ignorance. How many times we recognise our mistake and say we would not make the same mistake again, but we do?

The only antidote to ignorance is to have more wisdom. That is why Dharmakirti says that the root cause of all the mistakes is ignorant mind. This ignorance comes from grasping the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness of a person) as real. When we see the five aggregates as real, grasping of self follows. This is stated in *Madhyamakāvātāra* by Chandrakirti:

As long as you see the five aggregates as real, you have grasping of self. When you have grasping of self, that creates karma. The creator of karma is ignorance, the grasping of self. When you create karma, it keeps you in samsara – you will be reborn in one of the six realms. This cycle never ends: you are born, live a life of ignorance which creates karma, you die and will be reborn – you are caught in this cycle of no beginning nor ending.

Dharmakirti also said the same. One needs to know these drawbacks: the cause of ignorance, the cause of improper or incorrect wisdom. While you have ignorance, you cannot have correct wisdom.

Condition of obstacles: the wrong teacher

The condition of the obstacle is the wrong teacher. A wrong teacher will never lead you to the right wisdom. Dharma teaches us not to disrespect anyone nor discriminate against any beings. But it is important to say the truth; when you say the truth, your motivation is not to be rude to anyone or to discriminate against anyone or to let down anyone. In our society – in the modern times as well as at any time – there exist so-called ‘cults’ in which the teacher claims ‘I am an enlightened being’ or ‘I am the messenger of so-and-so.’ Such a teacher never teaches anything that helps you overcome your defilement or self-grasping. But many people fall under the spell of such a teacher; they are impressed by him or her because they see the person as an extraordinary being, and if someone, out of concern, tells them to be careful with that teacher, they get upset. Such a teacher can do a lot of damage to their students. One can recover from physical damage, but when one is damaged mentally, it is very difficult to restore the mind – it takes many years or many lives because the mind is much more sensitive than the physical body. Śāntideva said: “when you are travelling to some unknown place, you feel insecure and need someone to go with you. You would choose the person carefully, even if you are travelling only a short distance. And when you are sick, you would choose a doctor carefully. So, when it comes to your mind, you should be extra careful, because this person will be guiding your mind in the long term. It is not good enough that this person makes you feel good today. The person will be guiding you to enlightenment, helping you to be free from defilement. For this reason, finding the right teacher is so

important.”

If you fall under the influence of the wrong teacher, you will return to this world not in the right conditions but with a dull mind. With a dull mind, you can be easily controlled by others – like humans control a tiger which is physically more powerful but with dull mind. If you are smart, no one can control you. One sutra tells that the Buddha asked one animal ‘you suffer so much. What has caused such unbearable suffering that you have been through for such a long time?’ The animal replied, ‘it is due to my wrong teacher I had in previous life.’ Instead of discouraging the three poisons of the mind, the teacher encouraged the students to increase them. As a result, they developed their ignorant mind and as a result they were reborn in the lower realms.

Then, how can we define the right and wrong teachers? We can consider a teacher who teaches us how to develop the wisdom mind as the right teacher. A teacher who teaches us to increase the three poisons of the mind, we consider the wrong teacher. So, we need to have the mind that can differentiate the right teacher from the wrong teacher. Once we are trapped by a wrong teacher, then we will have many disadvantaged lives in the future. Now, how can we avoid such wrong teachers? What methods can we use to avoid them?

The method is to study and contemplate; we need to put more effort into study and contemplation. As one sutra says, “study develops wisdom, and wisdom avoids unnecessary things.” ‘Unnecessary things’ are results of the wandering mind. So, first we need to learn wisdom from teacher. As human beings, our mind is constantly wandering, daydreaming. While our mind is wandering, our time in this life is running out. As Śāntideva said, the wandering mind is the doorway to afflictions. When our mind wanders, it collects all the unnecessary things such as desire, anger or ignorance. When we study and train our mind, we learn to focus and concentrate, which stops our mind from wandering. There are three types of training of the mind.

Training of the mind – 1. Meditation

The first is meditation. When you concentrate, you are training in meditation. Many of you come from western background and have been

through the school education where study means intellectual understanding. Dharma study is different: while you study the Dharma, as well as developing intellectual understanding, you are experientially training your mind by learning and focusing. This is what we call training of meditation. If you do not train, you cannot meditate. People think that if they sit on the cushion and close their eyes they are meditating. It does not happen like that. Only when one is trained, one can meditate successfully. The first step of meditation is not sitting on the cushion and closing the eyes: the first step is to listen to the teachings. Pay attention while listening. When you become good at listening, your attentive mind will bring you to meditation, and as you train more, you will gradually progress with your meditation. That is the first step.

As a benefit of this training, you can become free from non-virtues, because, when you listen to the Dharma, you realise that the cause of suffering is non-virtues. The suffering we normally experience, that is, the suffering of suffering, does not arise from wrong causes or lack of causes: it arises from its own causes such as desire mind, anger mind, or ignorance mind. Whatever we do out of the poisoned mind is non-virtuous which, in turn, bring us suffering. So, once we become aware of that, even though we will not be able to abandon non-virtues all at once because they are deeply ingrained in our habits, we can begin to think about them as harmful. This awareness becomes part of our thinking, of not committing non-virtues. Then one day, possibly, we can abandon them. Controlling wandering mind and abandoning non-virtuous actions are two of the many benefits of the study of the Dharma.

Training of the mind – 2. Ethical discipline

To stop committing non-virtuous deeds we need training in ethical discipline: disciplining our mind not to allow coveting, harmful thoughts and wrong views to arise; disciplining our speech not to lie, speak discursive words, speak harsh words or engage in idle talk; disciplining our body not to kill, steal or commit sexual misconduct. To do all these, we first need to train our mind to know: 'it's not right to think this way', 'it's not right to say this' or 'it's not right to do this'. First, we develop this discipline in our mind, then we can gradually apply these disciplines to our mind, body and speech. This is the training in ethical discipline.

Training of the mind – 3. Wisdom

The more we listen, the more we study – listening and study are the same thing – we increase our wisdom; each time we listen or study, we have better understanding of the Dharma. This is the training in wisdom. Buddha gave so many teachings; his teachings in sutras consist of 84,000 discourses. These discourses can be divided into three groups: Vinaya, Abhidharma and Sutra Pitaka. Each group consists of specific topics: Vinaya of ethical discipline; Abhidharma of wisdom; and Sutra Pitaka of meditation.

When we actually do the three types of training – in meditation, ethical discipline and wisdom – we are virtually practising the entire sutra taught by the Buddha. On the one hand there seem to be so many things out there to practise that we do not know where to start. But on the other hand, if we summarise them it is not very complicated. We only need to train in three things: meditation, ethical discipline and wisdom. Meditation and ethical discipline reduce our defilements, and prepare us to train ourselves in wisdom, which uproots our defilements and liberates us. When we have wisdom, it takes us to three levels of buddhahood: sravaka buddha, pratyekabuddha and great buddha. Our goal is the last one – to attain maha-nirvana, not body nirvana. All the buddhas in the past reached their state by beginning with study. Without study, the method, none of them would have attained the ultimate goal of enlightenment. The benefit of study is to attain buddhahood or non-abiding state. Study, therefore, is the crucial antidote for meeting wrong teachers, because if you have a good knowledge, you know who are right teachers and who are wrong teachers. If you do not have the right wisdom, you cannot choose.

So, study is very important. When you study, it develops vipassana. The main source of developing vipassana is shamatha meditation, but the single most important basis to attain vipassana is study. It is the unique basis, because no amount of meditation alone will lead you to vipassana. When you do vipassana, what you are meditating on is the ultimate view. If you have not studied, how could you know what the ultimate view is? If you do not know, there is nothing to meditate on. Some people claim they are doing vipassana. That means nothing unless they have the proper knowledge.

Of course, doing meditation is better than not doing it, but that is not the right vipassana that the Buddha taught. Study reduces our defilements. For example, if we leave a metal container in the rain for a long time, it will fill and rust. The rust becomes thick and it is difficult to wash it off. Like that rust, our defilements and ignorance are so thick. The only way to reduce the thick layer of defilements and ignorance is to listen to the Dharma and improve our understanding.

Finding the right teacher

The more we improve our understanding, the thinner the layer of defilements and ignorance becomes. This is the benefit of study: it helps us avoid the wrong teacher. But we need to know who to study with; the qualifications of the teacher are crucial. The Tibetan word for teacher means 'virtuous friend'; a virtuous friend is someone who lives a fully virtuous life, and through his or her way of living guides others to live a virtuous life. Hence the term 'virtuous friend' for teacher. To find the right teacher, you need to look for someone who is teaching the three baskets or tripitaka – vinaya, sutra and Abhidharma – if that teacher is a sutrayana teacher. For a mantrayana teacher, check if he or she is teaching kriya, charya, yoga and anuttarayoga tantra. So, whatever sutra or tantra he or she is teaching, you need to make sure that all the teachings are not contradicting what Buddha said in the tripitaka and all the tantras.

You need to have some wisdom in advance to know about the contents of sutrayana and mantrayana. If you do not have the contents or knowledge of tripitaka or mantrayana, you just go with whatever the teacher tells you. After you study from the teacher, look into trustworthy texts such as Sakya Pandita's *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* and check either what the teacher said is close to the teachings or contradicts them. If what the teacher said contradicts what Sakya Pandita says, then the teacher is not giving the right teaching. *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* is an authentic book. Without such books one cannot check what one is hearing is correct or not. Many so-called teachers say good things that sound great. But when you compare what they say against the contents of an authentic book, you can tell if someone is teaching the right wisdom or not. If the teaching contradicts what the book says and

is only the teacher's personal opinion, such teaching is wrong wisdom. If you learn wrong wisdom, it will damage your mind. So, you need to be very careful.

Some teachers may behave very properly, but behaviour can fool people. Students can be deceived by nice, kind actions. But the point is whether they are giving you wisdom or not. There is an example of someone selling donkey meat, which no-one eats, as deer meat. To deceive people the seller shows them deer's tail. Likewise, some spiritual teachers claiming they teach the Dharma does not necessarily mean they are teaching genuine Dharma. If the teaching boosts your arrogant mind or increases your defilements, that is not the Dharma. Dharma completely subdues or tames the mind, because the mind is the root of all the problems you face. Sakya Pandita warns of the fake teacher wearing Dharma robes to deceive the disciples, like a hunter wearing animal skin when hunting. There were fake teachers in Sakya Pandita's time, in the 11th century. In today's new age there are more of them. Like people putting food in traps to catch animals, fake spiritual teachers give you things you like, but their prime motivation is for their benefit, not yours.

Recognising incorrect wisdom

So, you need to have some knowledge of the tripitaka and four tantras which help you recognise the wrong teacher. This knowledge is the antidote for the obstacle, that is, ignorance. The result of ignorance is wrong wisdom. We need to reject incorrect wisdom and adopt the right wisdom. To do that, we need to identify wrong wisdoms; one kind of wrong wisdom belongs to other schools and the other kind belongs within Buddhist schools.

In the time of Sakya Pandita, the primary philosophical debate was between Hinduism and Buddhism. Many debates took place between them. A good thing about these debates was that there was no violence – they were philosophical debates or arguments contesting whose view was the perfect view. In our times today, debates can be very sensitive; when we argue with people in different religions, they can easily have negative thoughts towards Buddhism. Negative feelings against Buddhism is not damaging from the Buddhist's point of view; but the opponents who develop wrong views of the Dharma will stop listening to the Dharma: it is said that those people will

not find the Dharma for thirty lifetimes. So that is to their disadvantage. We need to explain very carefully, without making it personal or emotional, that if one holds that view, that mind is not the right mind; if one holds this view, that mind is the right mind. Make the discussion about the mind, not about cultures or religions.

In ancient times, spiritual practitioners tried their best to gain liberation. They knew that samsara was suffering and wanted to gain liberation, but, due to lack of good teachers, they were not holding the right view and were stuck. When Buddhist practitioners knew what they were seeking but being blocked from reaching beyond certain points, they would debate them in order to break their wrong view, to help them rather than to defeat them. These debates were not about Hinduism against Buddhism; someone with the right view was defeating the wrong view that was not helping the person seeking liberation. Such debates were motivated by loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta.

If one debates others without loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta, it is not a Buddhist debate: it is an ordinary, non-virtuous argument. Whenever you debate you must do so based on these three: love, because you are wishing that person to be happy; compassion, because you are debating this person so as to free him or her from suffering; bodhicitta, because you are debating this person so he or she can attain buddhahood. It is like a surgeon with a scalpel to cut into the patient. The scalpel can harm someone's body, but the intention of the doctor in using it on the patient is to remove the disease. Similarly, when Buddhists debate, they use wisdom to defeat the opponent in order to remove the lump of the wrong view from the opponent.

