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Seeing Negative People as Treasures (unedited)
Osel Shen Phen Ling, Missoula, MT, USA
18 February 2012

Introduction and Refuge

Alright...can I see you all back there? Can you all hear me; because we haven't got a mike, have we? Have to get a new one... so, can you hear me, though, back there? Let's hope I don't lose my voice.

Alright. May I have that poster, as well? So, just remind ourselves why we're sitting here, let's decide on a nice kind of, focused reason, you know, we sort of tend to assume whatever's in our mind is what's in our mind; but actually, we can put new thoughts into it – quite simple, really. So, we can put in good thoughts, put in some altruistic thoughts; and we're thinking we're going to listen to these teachings about Buddhism, coming through the filter of the Tibetan tradition; in particular about this series of verses that are related to the cultivation of compassion -- love and compassion. So, we're going to listen to all this to hopefully take away some tools into our lives so we can use them to develop exactly that; for our sake and the sake of others...kind of thinking this way, and we'll express that in a little prayer.

*Sang gya cho dang sog kyi chog nam la
Jang chub bar du dag ni kyab su chi
Dag gi cho nyen gyi pe so nam gyi
Dro la pen chir sang gye drub par shog (3x)*

*(I go for refuge until I am enlightened
To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.
By the merits I create by listening to the Dharma
May I become a Buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings.)*

Okay, so, on Thursday I think it was, wasn't it; on Thursday we talked about the first of these eight verses in this little – deceptively simple little kind of series of verses called – really creatively – The Eight Verses; usually Tibetans are very creative with their titles but somehow this one – lost! They missed it out... So, anyway, the thing is, so what we did on Thursday, partially, we've given it a bit of context, looked into how it fits into the bigger picture, you know; this is something to remind us about a spiritual path; because if this were a cooking class or a music class or a carpentry class, one of the first things you would have asked before you came was, 'What level is it?' Isn't it? I mean, if it was sort of a post-graduate carpentry and you haven't even learned how to hammer a nail, you'd be interested but it wouldn't really be your thing, you know. We don't often think of a spiritual path this way. We tend to think, oh, we'll hear all these nice teachings about compassion; get a gooey feeling and then we have something spiritual, you know?

'Lam Rim' – the Gradual Path
4:03

But it's, surprisingly, the Tibetan packaging of the teachings is unique to the Tibetans. This packaging of the teachings – like His Holiness recently referred to it as, like an education course; which is really what this '*lam rim*' as they call it in Tibetan, this kind of arcane, medieval term, 'gradual path' – we use the word 'course', you know –but that's literally the way the Tibetans have presented all the teachings of the Buddha: in a very orderly, structured way, according to the capacity of the student, like carpentry, like music, and like everything else. Like anything you're trying to learn, it's at levels, you know.

So, strictly speaking, this discussion of love and compassion in the Buddhist packaging is actually advanced; it's actually like university level – not kidding. Surprising to us because we tend to think of a spiritual path is all about love and compassion; it kind of is, but the Buddhist approach very much is that we've got to do the junior school and high school first; which is the work we have to do on our self. Because here we are, using the Buddha's way of talking about it, caught up in our own neuroses, our own attachment, our own ego-grasping, our own fears and jealousy and depression and anxiety; and these are why we suffer, why we harm others and why, therefore, we don't have much love and compassion. Or even indeed, the love and compassion we *do* have is kind of polluted by all our own nonsense, you know.

So to really practice this kind of more pure level of love and compassion – and the way they describe it in the Buddha's teachings is quite radical – we need to be a 'suitable vessel', as Pabongkha Rinpoche says. In other words, you need to have been to junior school and high school before you enter into university. That's pretty reasonable, isn't it?

But of course, we can take – I mean, we can listen to this teaching for the first time; maybe we've never heard one Buddhist teaching before; nevertheless you can, even though the level of it is, actually, like university, you can also apply it at your level, you know. That's the difference here. You can apply it to the degree that you possibly can; but to really understand it to the degree that the Buddha's teachings are saying we can actually accomplish it, it's quite profound, actually; it's quite intense, quite radical.

So, that's the context here; this is actually from the more advanced level of teachings; and it's about these particular ways of cultivating what's called 'love' and 'compassion'; which is really the essence of this aspect of the path. There's a nice analogy in Buddhism that a bird needs two wings – wisdom and compassion – and the wisdom wing is junior school and high school; all the work – and that's pretty immense -- that we need to do on ourselves to sort out ourselves out; know our own minds really well, you know, and then so we can be qualified to be of benefit to others, instead of making a mess like we do half the time now. As Lama Zopa says, 'Meaning well is not enough.' Compassion is not enough; we need wisdom – which is what you get from working on yourself; getting rid of your own attachment, your fears, neuroses and anger and the rest of it and *then* you can really have very focused, appropriate, stable compassion and an ability to benefit others. This is the kind of idea, you know?

The Text

7:05

So, this text; we'll just give some context now to what this text is, this little verse, these Eight Verses. It's from a Tibetan master -- probably twelfth century or something -- a student of Atisha; a student of a student of Atisha. And Atisha was this one who kind of first presented this *lam rim* in Tibet; he kind of, got to Tibet in the eleventh century; Dharma had been there for a couple of hundred years, and I think he kind of figured that they'd kind of lost the plot a bit, you know? There wasn't any really kind of, stable kind of packaging; any really coherent presentation. So it was he who wrote a simple little text -- another one -- which was used as the basis by all the main traditions in Tibet for this packaging in this orderly way of these teachings.

So, this particular text is a grandchild of Atisha, like a student of a student of Atisha; his name is Langri Thangpa; and it's kind of quite famous in Tibet and is used as the basis for the practice of compassion. It's one of the many, many texts in this genre.

So, like a lot of these texts, it's deceptively simple. If you read it, it sounds quite cute, you know? As we discussed on Thursday, when we really look at it more deeply, it's indicating quite an outrageously radical level of love and compassion. So, if we haven't done much work on our own minds, we understand the words 'love and compassion'; we have a good heart, we want to help others, we want others to be happy, you know? There's no doubt about it. But much of the time, when we look into our minds, the way Buddha's talking, if we haven't done much work on our mind, we're going to see that our love and compassion is really limited, and it's polluted; it's polluted by our own attachment, our own neediness, our own expectations, you know -- first point. But second point, the objects of our compassion and love are quite limited; we only have love and compassion for our friends, for *our* people; or for victims, usually children and animals. That's about the best we can manage, you know; as long as they're innocent victims, we're prepared to have compassion for them, you know; but as soon as there's any kind of indication of somebody maybe being a bit wicked and naughty, they don't deserve compassion; sorry, mate, forget it.

So, we've got compassion, now; we have love now; but it is really, really limited -- or as Lama Zopa puts it, it's unstable; it's based on attachment. So, kind of, how would that look? Let's -- before we get into this verse -- let's just look at how that would be, you know? So, right now, let's say, we have children, we have a husband, we have a boyfriend, you know; we have dear friends, we have a sister we love -- something. Family, people we're responsible for or to, you know? So, we know we have all the dramas with those people; we have a lot of attachment for them, which is a lot of neediness to have them in our life; and so that neediness, which is an expression of our own neurosis, then does really pollute the love and compassion we do have.

So, okay; what is love, what is compassion? Well, the way Buddhism defines them -- quite clearly; love -- you can define it at the most bare-bones level is this

wish in the heart – a wish: ‘May you be happy.’ Or, when you see someone happy, you delight for them: ‘I’m so happy you’re happy.’ You know? So, we kind of hear that already; it’s like with no strings. *Real* love is not dependent upon ‘As long as you do what I want, then I’m happy you’re happy.’ This is how we tend to have love now. So, if I’m in love with my boyfriend, absolutely I also love him – altruism -- I want him to be happy; but if he gives me up for someone else, it’s going to be quite hard wanting him to be happy, isn’t it?

So, our love immediately stops, you know? If he doesn’t do what I want, then I’m not going to keep loving him. That’s how we tend to be. Our best friends turn into our worst enemies, you know; it’s very common. And we tend to think this is logical. We think this is normal. So, it’s quite a shock when we hear the Buddha says there is no logic at all to it; just ego’s logic.

Recap of the First Verse

11:11

So, okay, let’s just read the first verse that we did talk about Thursday, and then we’ll go to the second one and then I’ll give a bit of background to attachment and aversion; and then we’ll discuss the second one. So, the first verse – there’re two different versions here, and I rather like one of them, which says – and we discussed this on Thursday –

‘Determined to obtain the greatest possible good from all sentient beings’ – or ‘benefit’ – ‘who are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel; I’ll hold them most dear’ – or ‘most precious’ – ‘at all times.’

So, as we discussed, you know, this idea of obtaining the greatest benefit *from* sentient beings sounds quite sinister, like you’re going to use them up or something. But the idea here is quite specific, it’s the way they talk. Given that what we’re trying to do here is cultivate love and compassion – so the definition of love: ‘may you be happy’; the definition of **attachment**: ‘may you not suffer’. So, compassion is in relation to suffering, and love is in relation to happiness; this is the way they talk about it in Buddhism. It seems quite a clear way to put it. So, delighting in people’s happiness, wanting them to be happy; that’s love. Feeling pain when you see others suffer, wanting them *not* to suffer; that’s compassion -- and we can see that they’re flip sides of the same coin. You know?

So, this idea of obtaining the greatest possible good from sentient beings, like I said, sounds a bit weird. The meaning of it is this: that given that here we are, trying to cultivate compassion and love; then obviously, the people we need, the grist for our mill are suffering people. If you never meet a suffering person, it’s not possible to have compassion. You have to see people suffering in order for that to energize your compassion. So, given that the world is full of sentient beings – and here we are in the midst of this craziness, trying to cultivate compassion – so to get the best, to make the most of these sentient beings who are suffering, we’ll see them as most precious; ‘most precious’ simply because without them, I wouldn’t be able to get compassion. This is the thinking, you know; it’s kind of weird way, we wouldn’t think this way normally. So, it’s got a lot of logic when you’re really trying to sincerely cultivate compassion, that all sentient beings out there, all the crazy ones, all the nutters; all the ones who do

the harm – which is surprising for us – to have compassion for them as well; and we're going to talk about that. Why? -- the logic of this.

The Second Verse -- a Radical Point of View

13:40

So, the second verse, the one we want to go into now; this is pretty shocking.

This is what I mean by 'radical'. You listen to this:

'When in the company of others'-- you know -- 'I will always consider myself the lowest of all; and from the depths of my heart hold others dear and supreme.' And that's a bit shocking. We're going to say, 'Well, excuse me, mate; I already do that. I always think of myself as the 'lowest of all. How is that spiritual? You want me to have even more self-hate?' And it's so easy for us -- if we haven't done some work on our own mind, and we don't have any context for this -- that's quite a shocking instruction. 'See yourself as the lowest of all'; that really doesn't sound good in our culture *at all*; and the reason is because we do have so much self-hate already.

We have self-hate; which is because we've got attachment; which is surprising to us...and what are we attached to? The function of attachment is this bottomless pit of dissatisfaction. It's deep in our bones. It's at the level of assumption that somehow we don't even hear it articulated in our mind; it just is expressed as a deep feeling that somehow, 'I never have enough.' 'There never *is* enough.' 'I am not enough.' 'Whatever I *get*, it's not enough.' 'Whatever I *do*, it is not enough.' So, that really is an expression of self-hate: 'I am not enough'; and that's the irony that that's really what attachment is -- because what it gives rise to is always thinking, 'I must get some more.' 'I must get this.' 'I must do that.' And then even as we get it and do it, still the default mode of never being satisfied doesn't change.

So, this is really our kind of main mental illness in daily life. It sounds kind of weird to say it this way; but really it's a good way that we could say the Buddha talks about this unhappiness in our minds. And it's not as if you have a thought, 'Oh, I'm dissatisfied...let me have a piece of cake.' There's just this aching feeling -- I mean, check your life, you know -- this aching sense that somehow things aren't right; and when it's really severe, we actually have panic attacks. You know? We can't quite put our finger on it sometimes; we do all that checklist: 'I've got a reasonable husband, reasonable kids, money in the bank; I'm fairly intelligent, I've got a fortunate life...' We still wonder why we're dissatisfied, you know. The point the Buddha's making is this: this is the function of this deep sickness called attachment. It sounds cute to call it 'attachment'; we wouldn't link that word with dissatisfaction, but this is exactly what it is.

The aching feeling of not having enough or not being enough is what drives us then to think, 'Well, what will I do? What can I get?' It's obviously through the sense objects, and then it's -- the deepest one, the deepest attachment that we have is to approval by others; and this they talk a lot about in this more advanced level of trying to understand how to develop love and attachment -- love and compassion. Because this -- the deeper level of attachment is really a massive obstacle to us, a massive obstacle. And so the deeper way it works, you

know, is in this strong – again, an assumption that somehow, until I get praise from others, until I am approved of by others; I’m somehow not valid.

We can even think about the loneliness we have. Loneliness is based on this assumption; loneliness somehow is, ‘If I’ve got no one to talk about my things to, I’m not a worthy person.’ And that’s why we feel lonely; that is what loneliness is; but it’s this awfully wrong assumption that I’m not worthy. If you think about it this way, it kind of stops you in your tracks, you know?

It’s really quite shocking how we are this way. Really; an assumption that if I haven’t got someone to share my thoughts with – we call that ‘loneliness’; but what we’re really meaning is, ‘I’m not valid on my own. I’m not worthy unless someone hears my thoughts and, like, validates them back to me’; which also can show us that we’ve got no confidence in what we think. If what I think is not worthy – you think about it – until someone else hears the thoughts and says, ‘Yes, Robina, I understand,’ then -- my god – that’s really awful, isn’t it? How fragile we must be! Because that is what loneliness is. The Buddha’s saying that when we’ve really lessened our attachment and grown this marvelous potential he says we’ve all got, just sitting here waiting to be developed; you’re going to be blissfully content! You *will be* blissfully content. Whether you’ve got fifty-seven friends or zero, it won’t matter. Because – and this is just showing us the attachment – right now, we need, crave other people really badly because we don’t think we’re worthy on our own. Whereas if we didn’t have much attachment, you’d be content – like I said – whether on your own or not; and the people you did have in your life, it would be genuine love, because there’d be no strings attached. You’d genuinely see them for who they are; you wouldn’t need anything *from* them in the neurotic sense so you could have genuine love for them and genuine compassion. And this is what drags us down now; we *do* have love and compassion; but only for those we’re attached to, and as long as they keep doing everything I want all the time, I will keep loving them and having compassion for them.

So, to listen to this one – because this level of compassion we’re trying to cultivate is quite a radical level; it’s really going beyond the usual, simple views we have of compassion; because Buddha’s suggesting we can have love and compassion for all sentient beings without exception. I mean, that sounds insane, doesn’t it? I mean, look how hard it is to love just one person – it’s so exhausting. It’s only exhausting because we have attachment; and then because we have attachment, we have anger; and then we have jealousy so we have all the dramas. So, of course it’s tough – it’s hard work loving one person, because of all the other nonsense to deal with. But if you didn’t have any of this, and you were blissfully happy yourself, and fully content then love and compassion’s easy; I tell you – even for the ugly people. It wouldn’t be a problem at all.

So one wonderful practice – you know, so this one of in a crowd of people thinking you’re the lowest of all – it’s so totally *not* the way we think now; because it’s the ego’s way – right now, being self-piteous, having low self-esteem, having all this neediness, having all this discontent, this dissatisfaction, not thinking I’m worthy; when we’re in a crowd of people, all we’re doing is seeing

how other people are prettier than me, other people are more beautiful than me, other people are happier than me, and we're actually quite resentful about that; we're not happy for it at all, it hurts us; we take it as a personal insult to me – do you understand? Because we are so needy to be all those things and we think we're lacking them; so we see people through the filter of this, and we're overwhelmed by other people and we think they've kind of 'upped themselves', as we say in Australia. You don't have that phrase here, do you? Quite insulting phrase, actually – 'upped yourself' – you've got to analyze it carefully... Body parts and all, that's exactly right... It's quite a common phrase in Australia...a bit rude, actually, 'Oh, God -- he's really upped himself...' you'd say. 'Full of himself', that's a more polite way of putting it. So, are we communicating so far, folks? Are we communicating, so far? Okay.

So this practice, -- you know, as Pabongkha Rinpoche says, you need to be a 'suitable vessel' to be in the midst of a group of people and to actually look at each person and to delight in their good qualities. I mean, you think about it, it's really reasonable; it's only a confident person who could do that, isn't it? If you've got a lot of low self-esteem, it's too painful to delight in other people's good qualities because you're struggling to be feeling that you're worthy, you know? And then the way we *do* see them as being better than us is like an insult to us, and anyway, it's an exaggeration, you know, because we're taking it, 'Oh, look at her; who does she think she is. She's so much more beautiful than me;' and you're assuming that you're more ugly. So, it's referenced to the unhappy 'I'. This is how we are now, this is the way we are now; so this is *not* what Langri Thangpa is asking us to do.

'Self-cherishing' – Our Main Obstacle

21:50

What we're trying to do in this whole approach to compassion and love here – the main obstacle – the way they talk in this tradition – the main obstacle is said to be – this actually very sweet phrase in Tibetan – it's called 'self-cherishing'. Well, we would call it 'selfishness'; and we know when we hear that, it's not comfortable. If someone accuses you of being selfish, you're really quite hurt. You know? You insult another person, 'God, he's so selfish,' we understand that exactly. Well, so the whole – you know, in the wisdom wing, the main problem is this attachment we have; this bottomless pit of neediness to get what I want every split second, like a junkie. You know? And whether it's the sense objects or even -- at the deeper level – praise from others or a good reputation and so on and so forth; but in the way they talk in the compassion wing, the main obstacle is this selfishness, or 'putting self first'. So, this whole approach here -- in these verses here – this whole approach is within the kind of practices and teachings called 'exchanging self for others'.

So, this is what we're trying to do here, and I mean it as a radical thing. We're actually trying to cultivate this attitude – such that when we've got it, from this practice – we actually would put others ahead of us; we would actually cherish others more than self.

And that for us in our ordinary models of the mind, in our culture, almost seems unnatural. Not even almost; it *does* seem unnatural, it doesn't seem mentally

healthy. It seems psychologically not very sound, I think; because we, in all the models of the mind in our culture, the assumption is that there *is* a very solid, concrete, independent 'I', and we need to support it strongly. This is what's considered 'normal'.

But the Buddha's view is more radical; that's why we have to be very cautious to practice these things according to our own level. Buddha is saying you actually go beyond ego altogether and *completely* eradicate any neurotic sense of self whatsoever and actually only think of others. So, the way he's talking about it quite an advanced level. So, we should hear it very correctly; hear it cautiously; not just hear it as some kind of cheap, kind of cute feeling, 'Oh yeah, love others more than me.' We've got to know where we're at, in other words. It's quite advanced to be this way.

A Simple but Profound and Beneficial Practice

24:07

And so, all we can do is practice. So, my feeling is, a really nice practice of this particular idea – 'considering yourself as the lowest of all and seeing others as supreme' – my goodness! – would be that in a group of people, you know, let's say even this group – we'll have a break in a minute; we'll have a break at some point, you might notice each other, maybe there's some people you don't know – and normally what happens – you know, a couple of hours group, there's not much you can do; if you spend a *day* together, but even in a very short period, all of us have divided a group into three categories -- which is the way we divide the universe: the objects of our attachment are called 'friends', the ones we're attracted to; the objects of our aversion, who we can call 'enemies', the ones we don't like – they talk too loud, or, you know, there's something about them we don't like the look of; we do this quite quickly – and then there's a third group: they're called the 'strangers', and within three days of doing this class, you won't remember ninety percent, because ninety percent will be strangers. This is what we do. We have attachment, aversion, and ignorance. We have friends, enemies and strangers; it's the way the world works, you know. So, a really marvelous practice of this little thought is just to make a mental note, you know, without being rude by staring at each other, a mental note of something about each person that's better than you. It's a really good practice, you know? So rather than taking it as an insult, 'How dare they be prettier than me,' or thinner or whatever; or have nicer eyelashes or better fingernails or – it can be a very small thing, you know; we get worried about very small things; well, maybe as you get older you don't, you just don't care anymore. Or how many double chins you have, you know: 'She's got less double chins than me!' I must say, that's something I always do notice: I notice chins. I notice, like, Sophia Loren; I can't believe this insane kind of neck that she's got; she's like L-shaped there. You know? Do you understand?

Anyway; alright...I remember – I always tell this story – that when I used to do kung fu – martial arts – I would never – I'm confessing, now; I would never admit it then – you know, because feet are quite important in martial arts; you use them as your weapon, you know; feet are a big deal, and I was always very arrogant about my feet. I always considered they were the *best* feet. You know?

But I would never dare say it; of course, I would never admit, you know, because feet – I always used to think I had really good kung fu feet, you know; short, fat feet. My toes are kind of short and fairly equal size – and I've been noticing everybody's feet; making my own judgments about the feet, you know; 'Huh -- those long, skinny ones over there...' you know. Of course you'd never admit it, would you; but we're like this all the time. And that's something very interesting too – even when we're with our own best friend, chatting away, you know, we've got the little negativity in there: 'She's talking too much,' or, 'Her lipstick's a bit red today...' or, 'God, she's got a bit fat,' or *something*. We can't help it, you know? Our mind is always referencing ourselves to others; and it's because we have this self-cherishing – and it's very hard to admit this, we don't like to think it; it's embarrassing, you know; we're always wanting to put 'me' up slightly; kind of comparing, you know. It goes to ever such subtle levels, so it's either – in the low self-esteem way – always seeing everyone else as *better* than me, but actually you're quite upset by it: 'How dare they,' you're not happy...or, you're putting yourself first in a way. We can see like this; so it's a really nice practice just to mentally note something about each person, you know, even a few people. On the street you can do it, at work you can do it: something that's better than you. It's a really good practice, it's a very humbling practice; and then delight for them. Delight for them, in your own mind. Don't go up and tell them; that's just you wanting to get their approval. It's your own personal little trip in your head, you know. It's really helpful; it's really a nice little practice – in other words, to see them as superior to you in that area. Quite helpful; really a nice little humbling practice, I tell you. Does this make sense?

Director: I don't remember where it was, but one of the commentaries or a teaching or something; they said – I think it was Geshe Phelgye said – that if people have problems seeing themselves as the lowest of all, another way to look at it is to see themselves as the 'least important'.

Ven.: He said this as a good thing or a bad thing? I'm confused about what you're saying.

Director: Just a different take on that.

Ven.: I think it's just the same – for us, you mean in the way of seeing it as a negative thing as opposed to seeing it as good? So that might be helpful to see that? I think either way, 'least important' or the 'lowest'; don't know, both sound pretty horrible if you've got self-pity. Isn't it? Of course, whatever words work for our mind; but I think to understand the psychology of it, you know; we think we're the lowest of all now because – this can be quite painful to hear this; the only reason we think we're the lowest of all now is because we've got arrogance. So, this is another take on it, because all these different states of mind are quite similar; we've got to really check in our mind which is working. First of all, all the neurotic states of mind, according to Buddha, have this very distinct characteristic of being – of exaggerating, of making mountains out of molehills, as our grandmas would tell us; and they are also quite disturbing. So, the positive states of mind are reasonable, much more reasonable; and they're not disturbing, they're very pleasing and very appropriate.

Humility, Contentment and Self-Esteem

29:43

So, you can have love for somebody and really think they're the most marvelous person; and that doesn't need to be attachment; whereas attachment is kind of needy and a bit desperate, and then makes them more magnificent than they really are, but then you grasp at – want them, because you need them to make you happy; so, the delusions exaggerate. Anger or aversion exaggerates the bad things about people; guilt exaggerates the bad things about your self; it's the same problem, different object. And pride – arrogance – which we don't like to think we have exaggerates certain aspects of myself and thinks that they're better than others. So – my feet as an example. I had arrogance about my feet, you know -- comparing with others. So, low self-esteem is just the flip side of arrogance. So, we wouldn't have low self-esteem – I would suggest – if we didn't have arrogance. What we would be, would be fairly content with who we are; we'd be quite humble. And 'humble' and 'low self-esteem' are very, very different. 'Arrogant' and 'confident' are very different. In other words, a person who is arrogant – in, let's say, a group of people – would really be watching like a hawk to make sure – let's say they're a beautiful person – to make sure there's no one more beautiful; and feeling rather fearful, always comparing, it's not comfortable; and if they did meet someone who's considered more beautiful, it would be taken as a personal insult, and then their arrogance would be deflated and would become low self-esteem. Do you understand what I'm saying? Whereas a person who's humble, is actually a person who's content with themselves. Let's say they're beautiful; and if *they* meet a person who's more beautiful; they're happy. 'Oh, I'm so happy for you!' They can rejoice, because they're not threatened by it. That means they're also humble. So, low self-esteem and arrogance go together; humility and confidence go together. It kind of sounds surprising; but if you think about it – does it make sense what I'm saying? If you're a humble person, you're content and you're confident in who you are.

I always remember – I quote this a lot – I always remember, years ago, before I was a Buddhist, watching some television program about famous people; and one of them was one Australian guy, sort of like an Australian Babe Ruth, but he was in cricket. His name was Donald Bradmud – in the thirties; super-famous as being like this amazing cricketer, you know? And then the other one was that English – that famous English ballet dancer, Margot Fontayne. I was into being a ballet dancer when I was a little girl, so I always remember Margot Fontayne.

But I remember, what struck me about both of them – there they were, the top in their field; I mean *the top*; and I was really impressed by how humble they were. So there they were, the top – and to be the best, you'd have to be confident, wouldn't you, to be the best? Confident, but humble; praising other people...of course, because they're humble, everybody adores them. But you see some sportsmen who are arrogant, everybody hates them, you know -- because – and you look at arrogance; it's like there's a little child in there, actually, desperate to be seen as better; desperate that others praise them and offended if you dare not. So, we can see again, all these delusions, these negative states which are causing

so much pain to us and therefore block our love and compassion, are very – they're not happy, they're very fragile; we're very neurotic, they're all 'I' based, very strongly. Do you understand what I'm saying?

So, we've got to catch these voices inside us...they're so subtle, you know? So then, first of all, there's this 'self-cherishing'; this constant – and you can say it's a mixture of attachment, a mixture of arrogance; it's a mixture of all those things, it's a very generalized kind of approach of putting yourself first; desperate to put yourself first; frantically – in other words, thinking 'If I don't, who will?' or this fear we have of being squashed, or this sense of competition -- that if I don't compete, I'm going to get trampled on. So this fear is very strong inside us. This is the way ego works.

Ego-grasping, The Root Delusion

33:47

So, because we have attachment to our own needs, because we have this ego-grasping – the root delusion of all; attachment is its main voice – and because we have this arrogance, flipping between that and low self-esteem; and all this neediness and dissatisfaction; because of this, we put *me* first. We cherish *me* first. And actually, the more we think we think of this, the more it seems almost -- we think it's impossible not to, because we would go -- in our materialist world – that that's normal, we'd say; it's natural. That's why we've really got to think about it carefully, the Buddhist approach to it. How it actually is a symptom of attachment, a symptom of neediness, of dissatisfaction. So, again, what I want to say, is being expressed quite simply in these sweet words here is really quite advanced, you know; a quite radical level of compassion that they are suggesting we are trying to cultivate, completely smashing this neurotic sense of a self, you know. Not so easy. Are we communicating? Are there any questions? So far? Yes?

The Logic of Loving Hitler

Q: If I could practice to learn to love everybody in this room, how do I learn to love Hitler?

Ven.: Well, that's very much – this is – all of the wisdom wing – one of the main things we do in the wisdom wing is go very deeply into Buddha's view of the world and why things happen, which is this view of karma. So, that's what we have to understand. And that's – you see, in the normal world view, the materialist view; we take the view, don't we, that we didn't ask to get born. Don't you agree? That mummy and daddy made us, Hitler's mummy and daddy made him, and therefore we, in other words if – what's your name?

Q: Patrick

Ven.: Patrick. So here's Patrick, so, in the materialist view – maybe this is your view as well, I don't know – is that your mother and father made you. Do you agree with this? Okay. And there was nothing of Patrick before then, was there? Wouldn't you agree?

Q: I'm not sure...

Ven.: Well, no; I mean just normally speaking of the materialist view that --

Q: Oh, yeah...

Ven.: Isn't it? Well, Buddha's view is quite different. So, here we are, taking Buddha's view as our hypothesis here, and he would say that Patrick's consciousness is Patrick's; the body came from his parents, but his consciousness goes back – it's like this river of mental moments; that is not physical, the Buddha would suggest; and goes back and back and back, well before this life, before, before, before, before, before; Hitler the same, everybody the same. So Buddha is saying, there's trillions of sentient beings, all with their own continuities of consciousness, which is *minds*, like a river of mental moments, and the law that runs these minds – for the Buddha, it's a natural law, just like gravity, like botany; it just occurs. He didn't make it up, he's observed it; he calls it '*karma*'; and it's the law of cause and effect in relation to the way minds work.

So,, basically the idea goes, for the Buddha, every microsecond of whatever Patrick experiences, or whatever Hitler experiences, or your dog – whatever; he's a sentient being too, your dog – is the result of things you put into your mind in the past; because Buddha's saying every thought we have sows a seed in the mind, leaves an imprint in the mind; it's like we're programming our minds every second. One of the most basic ideas about karma is that we are programming ourselves by whatever we think and do and say. Now, we kind of know this in this life; if you're really good at, say, piano; we know it's because you've practiced it hard, right? You might be very good at carpentry or something; but why are you good at anger, someone will ask you and you'll say, 'Oh, that's not my fault, it's my mother's fault,' or my dog's fault, or my wife's fault. We're happy to own the music, but we're not so happy to own the anger, you know. And indeed, we don't own the love, either.

So, the Buddha's saying whatever's in our mind – if we're good at it – it's because we've practiced it before – whether it's carpentry or anger, whether it's killing or whether it's being kind. You know? So, we can suggest the Buddha's view of Hitler: he programmed his mind from past lives, brought all this junky stuff with him, and then acts it all out in this life as the result of having done it before. But the interesting point about karma, too, is that the Buddha would say that we create – because you know, we do everything in relation to other beings, don't we? We have love and hate and compassion in relation to others; we don't have love and compassion for walls and things; it's human beings or animals or creatures, isn't it? Mind – the term in Tibetan is 'mind possessor', sentient beings.

So we always have this history with sentient beings: your mind goes back and back, mine goes back and back, Hitler's goes back and back; and generally we act out that history: you rush to that mother – your mother, you've got strong history with her. The people who don't like you in this life; you've got some history with them: you've harmed them in the past; honey, they're paying you

right back. You know? We've all got this history with each other. And no one's pulling the strings up there, the Buddha says; karma is just a natural law that kind of runs itself, you know.

So, the Buddha's approach is quite different, as you can see; and this is what he's suggesting is the way things are. So, the consequence of this is that everything – not only what arises in my mind is the result of what I've said and done and thought; but whatever you do to me is the result of what I've done to you. So, if you're loving and kind to me, it's the result of my past kindness. All the good things are the result of our goodness in the past: our own generosity, our kindness, our goodness; we tend to take that stuff for granted. It's only when the bad things happen that we have a problem, you know? We ask the question, 'Why?' But the Buddha would say whatever happens to us, whoever we meet, all the friends, all the enemies; there's some relationship there and because we've all got these countless lives we're all experiencing the results of our past actions.

So, on this basis, Hitler, as a result of all the negative things he has done to countless millions of people – we know this – out of his completely insane mind, he is creating incredibly negative karma for himself and can only suffer unbearably in the future. So when we can really grow our compassion strongly, we can afford to have compassion for Hitler for this reason. That's the logic. It takes time – one step at a time, you know?

So, that's why in the wisdom wing, we've got to start learning to have compassion for ourselves first, and – the whole idea in the wisdom wing – they talk about we have to develop renunciation, which means really getting to understand that whatever I do, say and think brings consequences to me; that I brought my own junk with me, I brought my own goodness with me; so it's up to me to be accountable, stop blaming other people, stop feeling like a victim – which is really hard work – and really know that this is the result of my own past rubbish, and the good is the result of my own good, and what can I do with it; how can I change? Because the Buddha says we've got this amazing potential to get rid of all the rubbish and to grow all the goodness; this is what he says.

So, in the first stages of practice, we're working on our own minds in this way; using meditation, being our own therapist – as one of our teachers said – so we really can cultivate these amazing qualities we've got; which means lessening our neuroses, lessening anger, lessening fear, lessening blame; therefore becoming more accountable, more content, more fulfilled, more brave; and meaning – in a way here what you'd get here is a strong sense of, like, compassion for yourself; because you realize you're the result of what you've done. Then you start to open your eyes and realize everyone else is in the same boat: all the crazies, all the victims, we're all either acting out – we're experiencing the fruits of our own past actions. So, this is the basis of compassion. We've got to have it for ourselves first. It's not possible to have it for others until we have used karma as a basis for the experience – for interpreting our own lives. That's the thinking.

Q: So, it's possible to forgive Hitler...

Ven.: Oh, easy... once we've got the thinking clear, step by step; I mean, easy, based on the view of karma; I mean, I remember – I'm not saying it's easy; but this is why it's got to be very progressive; we've got to really psychologically develop ourselves in a very orderly, progressive way; it's not just some emotional thing, you know; it's very stable.

So, I remember one time – because I worked for many years with people in prison, and one year, when I went to New York Richard Gere had invited His Holiness to teach; and he also invited about twenty or so ex-prisoners, all of whom had done some kind of meditation in prison, right? And a few people like me were invited who'd worked with people in prison.

So, it was a very moving experience; all these, you know, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans and blacks and whites and males and females; the whole cross section of Americans, all dealing with their own suffering and how they dealt with it and they met His Holiness; it was wonderful to see. And they also invited – Richard also invited a couple of young Tibetan nuns who'd been imprisoned in Tibet for a couple of years and tortured and sexually abused. So, everybody could see from when they talked that their experiences of suffering were worse than everybody else's; what was very clear to everybody by looking at them – they weren't kind of full of all this kind of anguish and pain and drama. They were kind of peaceful; but they were sad, obviously; tears were coming, but they did not have anger, you know? Because so deep in their bones is this view of karma; it's what they're brought up with, it's their view of the world, it's like their natural default mode, you know?

So, the consequence of that, of course, is it brings a lot of strength in the situation where you can't change it. There they were, locked up in prison being tortured and abused daily; so every bit, every ounce of them was working on their practice...at the end of the talk, they were very humble, very quiet. They said, '...and of course, we had compassion for our torturers, because we knew we had harmed them in the past.' So, that's the basis of it. It doesn't come naturally; one has to work on that, you know. It's the one of accountability; and the Buddha says we're all in the same boat, all experiencing the results of our past actions; all the good and all the bad – and all harming each other, thinking everyone else is the blame, increasing our own suffering, which is the basis. It's a bit like, you know, you had a kid who's a junkie. Everybody else can't stand him; but your heart breaks for him because you can see he's harming himself. That's the idea, you know. Do you understand?

Q: Yeah...

Do We Need Ego?

43:28

Ven.: So, slowly, slowly... Go on, darling?

Q: ...and part of it may have been answered by you saying 'having compassion for yourself'....

Ven.: The Buddha wouldn't say it that way, but it's a great way for us to say it because we get the point, you know, because we hate ourselves beautifully now; we're really good at hating ourselves.

Q: So, my initial sense in talking about the second verse; 'the lowest of all', my immediate sense was 'humble'...

Ven.: That's good... that's good...

Q: But in this whole discussion that has ensued, in talking about the ego and 'I'; in the process of becoming a confident, content person – I don't even want to say 'self-realized' but as we grow from children into adults and we kind of get our sense of self and stability in our world, we do have to have that process...

Ven.: Which process?

Q: Of some ego-building...

Ven.: Well, we're just looking at words here, aren't we? Developing the goodness in ourselves, developing our sense of worth, our sense of connectedness with others in a correct way; absolutely, of course we do. There's no question. This is the point. I mean, right now, why we suffer is because we haven't done this. Why some kids are so fraught and distressed, you know, brought up in garbage dumps of houses and homes, who're already coming into this life with a lot of suffering and then having a situation where it's just reinforced; we all end up with this kind of tortured sense of self, don't we? So of course we need this, this is the point. Absolutely.

Q: So if we have a pretty stable, supported childhood...

Ven.: And we have a stable mind ourselves...

Q: ...and enter into our adulthood, then the work somewhat begins to – what I'm hearing is then the work begins to get unattached from that...ego? But we still need... a sense of self?

Ven.: Okay... the key thing here what we're getting to is the use of words, okay? And this is where we have to be very clear the way Buddha uses these terminologies; it's quite different from how we use them, you know. One of the key things in Buddha's psychology – which is not *anything* like we think; it's quite distinct – is that he makes this *absolute* distinction between what he would simply call 'negative' states of mind or 'positive'; whereas we in the west would say, 'Well, a reasonable person is made up of some anger, some jealousy, some kindness, some compassion, a balanced person has a bit of all of those.' In other words, the assumption would be that you'd be unnatural if you didn't have any anger. Right? Unnatural if you didn't have jealousy or depression; so that is an assumption, I think, very deep in our view, in our culture in all our models of the mind. Are you with me? So then – then we hear Buddha say – and he's really outrageous; he would say that they are all mental illnesses and they *do not* belong

in the mind and we can rid our minds of them. This is what he means by 'nirvana', quite simply. So in that sense I am saying he is really more radical. He is saying the negative ones are only the cause of suffering and we do not need them and we can rid our minds of them.

So when we hear words like 'ego' and 'getting rid of self' we can easily misunderstand; so that's the way we use the words in our culture; but if we look at the characteristics in the Buddhist understanding of it – the characteristics of these negative states – and we become really more and more familiar with them by being our own therapist – the way Lama Yeshe puts it – through meditation and knowing yourself well, you're going to observe that anger, jealousy, low self-esteem, arrogance, pride are painful in their nature and are fear-based; and are delusional – a term they use in Buddhist psychology -- they're delusions: they exaggerate, they distort, they're not realistic, they're not accurate in how they're assessing things. And they're the source of all pain and the harm we do to others. And all Buddha's view is, is that we can rid the mind of all of these -- which is a bit shocking, actually. We can't almost understand how it would be to have no attachment, no anger – it seems so crazy. So, we've got to be really cautious when we hear this because – in the end – what we tend to think when we hear that; the superficial interpretation is that you're getting rid of all ego, getting rid of all self, and you become some kind of boring person with no feelings and detached – so misunderstanding; it's so wrong. In other words, how you'd be, if you did not have any attachment or anger or even ego-grasping – in Buddha's view – you'd be blissfully content. You'd be utterly connected to others, with infinite wisdom, infinite love; infinite compassion – you'd be whatever person you were: funny, you'd be a multimillionaire if you needed to be, it wouldn't matter; you wouldn't be this holy person looking boring. You know? Totally not like that. You'd be a really – you'd be the best version of yourself. Do you understand what I'm saying? So it's important to hear the words in the right way.

Q: Thank you.

Ven.: Yes?

'Is It Possible To Remain Eternally Ignorant?'

48:28

Q: This is a question that came up here in discussion here recently and we decided we should wait for you.

Ven.: Okay! Can you hear back there?

Q: And the question was whether there's an inherent idea in Buddhism that all sentient beings will eventually reach Buddhahood through – if all sentient beings have an essential Buddha-nature, and then through the working of karma and diverse experiences eventually the logic of karma will kick in at some point...

Ven.: I don't agree. I mean, my feeling is, first off, I mightn't agree; but it's not really the point. The better point – if we're trying to cultivate compassion for

others, the thing that propels the bodhisattvas, you know, is the fact that *everybody* has the potential; so therefore they will never give up.

Q: Well, the flipside of the question is, is it possible to remain eternally ignorant; eternally bound to samsara?

Ven.: Obviously not, because things change. But what's the point of the question; I don't get the question. What's the point of it? In other words, from the point of view of a practitioner what is helpful in terms of your cultivating love and compassion in thinking, 'Well, they'll all get enlightened eventually.' How is that going to help you? That's the point. That's the real point of the question, not some abstract interesting intellectual idea.

Q: Well, at some point I had picked up the idea that it's taught that eventually all sentient beings will reach Buddhahood.

Ven.: I hear that. But how's that help you if you're trying to cultivate bodhicitta? How does that energize you to want to practice bodhicitta? Because that's the point of the question -- it has to be a question that helps you practice that; otherwise it's just intellectual and of no meaning. So, how's that help?

Q: The practice of compassion, the practice of a bodhisattva is to hasten that process because ...

Ven.: Hasten what process?

Q: The process of all beings...

Ven.: No. No. The job of a bodhisattva is to have enormous compassion for others, to see the unbearableness of their suffering and to never give up working for them because they know they've got the potential. That's what the bodhisattva cares about. The intellectual idea 'they'll all get enlightened eventually...' is kind of like watching your watch, you know? 'Come on, you people; I'm working for you. Get enlightened, please.' What's the point of it? There's no benefit in thinking it. Logically, you could argue very nicely about this, but it's not much help. The point of a bodhisattva is to think, 'I will never give up. I will never give up.' And the reason you won't is because they've got Buddha nature. That's the way to think about it. That's the point. That's the one that should be energizing a person. This one, 'Will they not all become enlightened,'

Q: But the person who's not giving up is because there is suffering now, and you have...

Ven.: What?

Q: Because there is suffering now; out of your compassion you have to do something about it now.

Ven.: That's the point. So therefore...? And so what; so then? Conclusion?

Q: Well, whether...I guess then the question becomes whether the idea of an inherent Buddha-nature implies that all beings will eventually become...

Ven.: I thought we answered all that. We got rid of that question; we're gone full circle back to the first point... Okay. May I ask you to contemplate that what a bodhisattva *should* be thinking is: the fact that they *do* have Buddha-nature means it's possible. Therefore, their suffering is so unbearable I will never give up, even if it takes eons. That's what should be in your mind. That's more important. Okay? That's my suggestion. Yes, sweetheart?

'What is it About Suffering That Clears Them...'

52:19

Q: So, when you're talking about some of these Buddhist nuns who have been through the prison... I was thinking that frees them to have compassion for their...

Ven.: Frees them? I missed that part. What frees them?

Q: Thinking about how they've hurt the people who are hurting them now...

Ven.: I see. Right. Sure, sure.

Q: Something that helps them. My question is, some people who have been through immense suffering like maybe in the concentration camps or something, who aren't Buddhist and don't have this...what is it about that suffering that clears them because I've heard of so many people that become these amazing compassionate beings and have this humility. What is it about that?

Ven.: Well, I think we can look at it both, you know. Look at what it is -- it's not meant to be cruel -- but look at what it is why, when we get upset by other people -- forget torture -- we become so tortured and full of self-hate and want to kill ourselves and think everything -- and need counseling for forty-two years. That's because of ego. Because the deep assumption... Okay, I'll put it this way: a person who *can* learn from being tortured is a person who doesn't have much attachment. It has to be, logically. Logically, why we suffer so much when people upset us -- forget about being tortured -- and why we can't forgive them and we hold onto it -- you understand what I'm saying -- is because we have this bottomless pit of neediness to be approved of by others.

Q: So, some of these people have a natural propensity...

Ven.: They brought it with them. They've got less attachment to approval, more courage in their mind, more capacity to work with what's happening in their lives and to grow from it. Absolutely.

Q: It just doesn't seem like there's a pattern of -- that more people who are going through these incredible painful things end up being more compassionate...

Ven.: I don't think that's true. I don't think that's true. I mean, I could look at lots of people I know who are in prison; who've had really shitty lives, you know, come from garbage dumps of families and drugs and violence and never heard a kind word in their lives; due to all that being in gangs and prisons and then now as a result have become incredible practitioners like -- and have become more compassionate, more wise. But I think the vast majority of people in prison; they're not becoming more compassionate. They're becoming more angry, more tortured, more suicidal...unbelievable. I don't think it follows. I think there's two things here, in terms of karma: one is the karma -- the karma you have for your own tendencies: kindness, whatever they are; that's called 'actions similar to the cause' -- stuff that you bring with you in your own mind; your personality and your tendencies. Then you have the other kind of karma called 'experiences similar to the cause' which is the stuff that happens to you.

So, because in our culture we see a direct relationship between how a person feels and what's been done to them in this life -- you understand what I'm saying here? -- we think, 'Oh, why Robina is so tortured and so mean to other people is because her daddy hurt her.' That's the logic we use. But then, in the Buddhist approach there's not a direct relationship between these, you've got to look into the tendencies in a person's mind. So, a person can bring with them lots of love and compassion and wisdom, but be treated badly because of another track of karma; but they have learned to use that as grist for the mill -- because of their tendencies, not because they've suffered.

Q: The suffering's not connected then to...

Ven.: I'm saying the suffering they're getting now is not directly result of their own stuff; or what they're feeling isn't a direct result of their suffering.

Q: That's happening now....

Ven.: But it's a catalyst; a person with a lot of low self-esteem, a lot of self-loathing, a lot of anger, a lot of arrogance will suffer terribly when they're tortured; and will have mental breakdowns and not get over it because they're holding onto the anger and the bitterness and the resentment -- do you understand? -- because their own mind can't cope with it, can't interpret it properly.

If You have the Capacity, Suffering Can Be a Catalyst

56:08

Q: So it's not a tool, suffering itself is not a tool...

Ven.: Oh, of course it is, it can be a catalyst if you've got the right approach, *if* you've got the right approach. So, I can see my friends in prison, the ones who've really used it as grist for the mill; they've got that capacity. There's some other guys I've known for the same period of fifteen years who still write to me, still

sad, still depressed, still low self-esteem, hasn't learned how to work with it. Do you see what I'm saying?

So, if you have got these potentials, then suffering's great – not that you want it, but you can really learn – like with the friends I know – this is a wake-up call, they say. They're the ones who really can grow from it, you see? You've got to have the stuff inside, though; do you understand? Otherwise, it just becomes a tool to turn you crazy and get more angry and more violent and more bitter and kill yourself and kill other people; look at the world.

Q: It's the ones we hear about that have taken the opportunity...

Ven.: Exactly, of course, that impresses you, you notice them because it impresses you. I mean someone else who's an old gangster who thinks it's good to kill people thinks they're idiots; would notice them but think they're stupid. But you happen to think it's a good thing because there's something in you that recognizes and delights in it, you know. Do you see what I mean? I mean, you take examples; I always remember those Columbine kids, you know those two kids? Look at the tortured minds they had. They had the most tortured minds...and everybody assumed immediately, 'Oh, it's their parents,' and all they could find was nice, white, Christian parents. They could not find *any* mistake. People were kind of infuriated because it has to be the family, you know? But they were these nice, white, innocent, Christian parents, who were as shocked as anyone else that they'd got these wacky boys, you know. It's not as simple as that; but the key thing in Buddhist psychology is, you know – the key thing in materialist psychology, we *assume* that the parents made the child. So we look to the events, we look to the parents, we look to the past, always, for why things are happening.

The Buddhist approach is, you look into your own mind. You look into the mind of the child. You look into the *child's* mind to see why they are what they are. It's good to know what their parents did to them; but the thing – why they are what they are is *their* mind, *their* tendencies; and their mother did not give them that mind. They brought it with them. When you do this, it's a very different way to understand people, and therefore to help them, you know. Do you understand what I mean? It takes time to think of it this way; this is using the Buddhist model of the mind, you know? That's all. One doesn't have to, of course, but it's the one we're talking about here. Any more questions? Yes?

Is It Ever Appropriate To Sacrifice Your Life?

58:42

Q: I'm curious concerning what Patrick was saying about Hitler. It got me thinking about karma and self-defense. Is it ever appropriate to give up your life...

Ven.: To give up your life?

Q: ...to give up your life if someone's coming at you.

Ven.: Give up your life or theirs?

Q: Give up yours.

Ven.: What do you mean by that?

Q: Just to be passive.

Ven.: It would be stupid to be passive, wouldn't it? Silly. It doesn't follow.

Q: But if that action is coming to you because of something you've done in the past...

Ven.: But if you can avoid it too, why not? It's helpful, there's a million things – just because you sow a seed doesn't mean you have to let it grow. Just because you broke something doesn't mean you have to fix it. I mean, if it is appropriate and the best thing to do at that particular time, a person who's got wisdom, yeah, they'd give their life, no worries. Otherwise; when you've really developed your mind, you can still be violent with a very clear mind and with compassion, can't you? Like tough love, you know? You can't pretend to have that one, but it's absolutely possible, of course it is. And this is something that's very relevant to the people I've worked with in prison, especially the ones who've really been heavily involved with the gangs; where the laws of the gangs are so kind of – like you can't escape them; and the worst crime is to be weak. The worst crime is not retaliate. Like in the Mexican gangs, they told me, in California, if you're just *seen* to not instantaneously repay someone else's looking at you wrong, your gang will turn against you. It's the worst crime; you've got to respond.

So, to learn how to know how to live in that situation is quite tricky, you know? So, for the prisoners that I knew, really wanting to cultivate love and compassion, not harm anybody; but also learning to be – to show, like, strength – and actually, in the end, anyway, the Buddhists would say when you've really worked on your mind, you'd naturally look strong. You can't pretend to be strong, you know; so it's strength that would – and then of course you could – you'd even be – you could even try and stop somebody, for *their* sake. That's what martial arts is all about; it's based on the Buddhist teachings. Martial arts first began with all these monks up in the mountain caves using techniques to stop the murderers and the thieves, you know? And so the whole idea of martial arts based upon bodhicitta was to use the stuff of the people against them to prevent them from harming, for their sake. That's easy to cultivate if you can understand how you can cultivate real love and compassion, you know. Do you understand? It would be for the sake of the other person. Genuinely, it would be this. You've got to work on your mind to get to that point. No fear; and really what would be wise for the sake of that person. Do you understand? So then, whatever it would be, you'd do the thing that's appropriate, including give your life up if you had to; wouldn't be a problem. You wouldn't be passive, necessarily; you'd be quite proactive.

Q: So, it could be appropriate to give your life up at a certain situation.

Ven.: Well, yeah, I mean, there's nothing wrong with it because it would be to not – yeah, I mean, you hear all the stories of bodhisattvas, actually, who do this all the time because of their compassion for the other person. Oh, gosh, you hear amazing stories; outrageous, over-the-top stories of really advanced bodhisattvas – no thought, giving up their lives rather than harming another. I mean, there's stories of a meditator in Dharamsala who let these creatures eat away at his bones in his nose because he didn't want to harm the creatures, you know. You hear many stories like this. That would be genuine compassion; not pretending, you know, 'Oh, look at me. I'm giving up my life for people.' I'll tell you a story in a minute... Go on, yes?

Q: I was just going to bring up – I mean, you have two examples that you have to respond when you're being attacked with wisdom et cetera in order to, like, deflect the attack and then you also have Gandhi, who did the opposite of that. But again, it's somebody that did this, it wasn't something that he just said, 'Oh, today, we'll die!'

Ven.: That's right, exactly.

Q: ...and they have each time the wisdom.

Ven.: That's right, exactly; the wisdom to know... Well, folks, something coming out of this, because already there's so much – yes, Al?

What Do You Do To Cultivate Self-Joy?

1:03:03

Ven.: What do you do to cultivate self-joy?

Ven.: Sweetheart, the more – in the wisdom wing – we learn to see the painful parts of our mind, which is first this bottomless pit of dissatisfaction – 'I'm always wrong' – learning to lessen that attachment, thus becoming more content; *that is what happiness is*. Right now, we're not happy because we always think something's wrong, always criticizing; and it goes way deep down in our bones. It's not some superficial thoughts we've got; it goes way deep down. And because we have a tendency to see the bad; find fault – in ourselves and in others and the world. So, the more we cultivate wisdom, the more we lessen attachment and this constant negative critical mind, the more blissful we become. It's a natural, logical progression. Does that make sense?

Okay, so...okay... One of the trickiest things, I think, is to just -- when we're working on our minds in this way we're describing – is to distinguish – it's easy intellectually but difficult experientially – to distinguish between attachment and love; to distinguish between, for example, compassion and then the anger we feel with the person who caused the suffering, you know? We actually even think they belong together; and that's the tricky part. It's easy – it's like you're learning botany, you know; you learn all about these weeds and herbs and flowers. You can draw them all very distinctly and nicely on their individual sheets of paper, and you can recognize them. But when you see them all growing together as a

big mass of overgrown green stuff, it's hard to distinguish. You get my point here. So, our mind is the same. We can be very precise and we need to be when we study Buddha's psychology, exactly the definition of each of the negative states; how they function and what their job is; the way they distort; the way they exaggerate; this is quite – you know, Buddhist psychology goes quite deep into this, and this is the key to understanding Buddha's view of the mind; and then, to distinguish between those and the positive states of mind, and knowing what *they* are like and how *they* function.

So, right now, you know, even just distinguishing between *liking* a piece of chocolate cake and *being attached* to it; we think they're literally the same thing; we don't even distinguish, you know. But if we'd be very precise about it, from the Buddhist psychological point of view, to *like* something, meaning to prefer something over another thing is just a cultural – you know, Tibetans prefer yak cheese; I mean, you eat their yak cheese, it's like a rock. Australians like their Vegemite, you know? I mean, it's something you're brought up with and so you have a – your culture, so you get used to that thing. So, you could say the taste buds of the Tibetans, you know; you could say that. Of course, the mind plays a massive role...but in general to like something is not technically wrong; the attachment to it is the problem. Or even, to say, 'I want something'; we then chuck the baby out with the bath water and think, 'Oh, I shouldn't want anything because wanting is attachment.' Completely mistaken. Wanting something is the first step in the mind before doing anything, isn't it? I have to have the thought, 'I want to walk out the door,' don't I, before my legs will pick me up. This is really obvious. We sort of take that for granted. So, that's not attachment. If it were attachment, that means I'm not allowed to think I'm going to walk out the door; which means I'd be sitting here for eternity! I mean, it's plain dumb, you know; it's too extreme, it's throwing the baby out with the bath water.

So we have to learn to distinguish clearly in our mind what Buddha means by a *delusion*, a negative state, be very precise about it. We can be very clichéd and we can have this really big misconception about what being a Buddhist is; it's so inappropriate.

So, you know, I *have* to have the thought 'I want to walk out the door'. But obviously, if I'm also *attached* to walking out the door, I'm going to be very rude to you people in my way. Do you understand what I'm saying here? Because 'attachment' is a neurotic need to get what I want. That's what attachment is. 'Wanting' is merely wanting to walk out the door. 'Attached' to walk out the door; that's the problem. Can you see the difference? So then, you know, if I'm attached to walking out the door 'cause I've got a – rushing, late and I'm completely focused on what I want in a neurotic way, I'd be very rude to you people in my way; I'd push you outside, you know, because attachment desperately wants what it wants. But 'wanting' is merely a statement, and then if you're not attached to it, you know, I'll be very kind and talk to people on the way out and eventually get out the door if I'm lucky. You understand my point?

So, to like chocolate cake, 'Oh, yes, how wonderful. Let's have chocolate cake,' you know; and then Patrick and I go to the café and we both look like we like chocolate cake, right? 'Oh, that's nice; they like chocolate cake.' But look what happens when carrot cake comes: in other words, Patrick might go, 'Oh, that's cool, I can handle carrot cake,' and he proceeds to enjoy it. I might go, 'Excuse me! I ordered *chocolate cake!*' and get all upset. So, we might – in the beginning, we looked like we just like chocolate cake; but my response proved I was *attached* to getting chocolate cake, because attachment is needy, neurotic; it makes a story, it manipulates to get it; it *expects* it, and then it's disappointed when it doesn't come. That's the way attachment works; that part of our mind. You understand my point? And that's *hard* to distinguish from the other parts of it; like liking cake and all the rest.

So, it's when you get upset about something; that's the proof there was attachment. If when attachment doesn't get what it wants, there isn't annoyance, frustration, irritation, anger, et cetera; that means you don't have much attachment. That's the way to say it, quite literally. And that, for you, sweetheart, that's the kind of people you're talking about: who've learned to deal with that pain and suffering – they didn't have too much deep, deep unhappiness and neediness and therefore weren't so – didn't have so much rage and anger and fear when the bad things happened. That's not trying to criticize people; but that's just explaining it from the Buddhist point of view; because the response -- anger is the response when attachment doesn't get what it wants.

So, we go between these two like a thousand times a day. This is what Buddha means by being 'samsaric'; the constant default mode, and it's really ingrained inside us; not even at the level of a thought, you know, although it is finally thoughts, way deep down is this deep assumption based upon that dissatisfaction that somehow 'I must get what I want every second.' And the second it doesn't, all these polite versions of anger: 'irritation', 'frustrated', 'annoyed' -- do you understand what I'm saying? They are versions of anger, versions of aversion.

So, there's 'attachment', which is this neediness; and when it gets what it wants we run towards the thing -- get all excited. And that's what we call 'happiness'. Buddha says it's just getting the fix; it's the junkie mind getting what it wants...

Attachment is Unsatisfiable

1:10:08

Q: Which will ultimately lead to suffering...

Ven.: ...which inevitably, inexorably leads to suffering: either the suffering of continuing to eat the cake until you want to vomit; or the suffering – the worse suffering – of craving even more of it. As my mother used to say, 'The more you get, the more you want.' That's the real suffering of attachment. We actually – when attachment gets what it wants, and that's where it's again really tricky – even the simple one, the example of the cake; there's a whole bunch of things happening there. It's not just a simple thing, you know? There's attachment, which is the one that really does run the show; this huge neediness, this frantic

kind of craving based upon not feeling 'I've got enough', based upon the sense of being bereft. So then, first of all, the way attachment works is – which is dissatisfaction – then the attachment starts to think about, 'Oh, yeah, chocolate cake...' Then you manipulate to get it, and then, the more needy you are, the more delicious the cake will look; and this is what's quite astonishing: the attachment in our mind *is what makes the cake look so delicious*. This is a big surprise to us; it's quite shocking, actually, because we really believe the cake is delicious itself, and I'm just sitting here like an innocent victim. 'What can I do? It's forcing me to eat it. It's not my fault!' You understand? That's how it feels, isn't it? 'Poor innocent victim me -- the cake's delicious; don't blame me!'

That's how we feel; but it's our huge dissatisfaction, our habit with cakes, so it comes in the mind when you're thinking, 'What can I have? Oh, yeah. Cake!' get all excited, all over-excited, and then you anticipate it, then all you build it up and it feels delicious, right, that anticipation's quite fun. The anticipation, and then you get the cake, and then it looks so divine, you're like a three year old in there; but you don't show it that way because we're a bit more mature now, but you're like a little girl and all excited – can't wait to get it in the mouth, you know. Isn't it?

And then what happens is, that attachment part is waiting for the satisfaction to come. Now, the cake hits the tongue, and there is an experience – and you can't argue with that -- and it is a pleasant one; nothing wrong with pleasure. 'The more pleasure; the better, dear!' as Lama Yeshe would put it. So, pleasure is not a mistake. Liking cake is not a mistake. This is not necessarily negative; please hear the point. It's this attachment that kind of creeps itself in, and pollutes all the other experiences and takes it over so that we think the whole thing is attachment; but it's just the attachment part that's the problem. Of course, it's almost impossible to extract the attachment out of the mix until you're really quite advanced, you know. But at least we can intellectually understand what's going on.

So, there's the simple preference for chocolate cake. Then, there's the pleasure when it meets your mouth – inevitably, it does; it triggers a good feeling. Nothing wrong with good feelings, folks; but the one that's running it now is this massive attachment, and the more delicious it looks – because that's your rose-colored spectacles – your attachment makes it look so delicious, and then what that brings is this really excited anticipation of that amount of happiness; and the more delicious it looks, the more hungry you are, the more happiness you're expecting to come, isn't it? You kind of put your needs up and up. Then when you get the cake, it's so divine; it's so delicious you can't believe it, it's so delicious that even as you're eating it, already you're anticipating the next mouthful. That's the junkie mind that's not satisfied.

And so, the attachment part of you is desperately believing that, 'When I get the next mouthful; that will bring the satisfaction;' so, you're eating the second mouthful and it's still divine, you're still excited; and already the third mouthful, because you're not satisfied yet; and then the fourth mouthful, and then before you know it the third *piece*. And now, you're getting quite distressed, because the

stomach is getting fuller, okay; which means everything is getting duller and duller – you understand – the excitement is waning; you know, the stomach is getting stuffed, the excitement is less, and you're now moving towards disappointment because you know you're not any more satisfied than you were in the beginning, because *cake cannot bring satisfaction; it's a mental state*. Cake fills stomachs; it can't bring satisfaction because satisfaction is a state of bliss and contentment *in your mind*. Can you hear me, people? It's quite a precise point. So, satisfaction doesn't come, the excitement is waning, the taste is no longer so good, the stomach is getting fuller, you're getting more depressed and if you kept eating you would definitely vomit.

So, the only choice is to stop eating 'cause now you're stuffed, you're not satisfied, you're feeling guilty – already mentally noting, 'Well, I won't be eating this many calories tomorrow and I'll avoid' – you want to make up the extra weight. Already you're miserable, so, that's samsara, Buddha says.

So, pleasure: cool. Liking cake: cool. Cake: cool. Attachment's the problem. And of course, it's so easy to describe it like this, and it's impossible for us now – and this is quite the fact – impossible to have that pleasure without any attachment; you can lessen the attachment by having some control, by having discipline. You know yourself if you don't stuff it in; if you're more disciplined, more polite about it you do actually taste it better; and therefore you have slightly more pleasure. That is a fact, actually. Do you understand? If you eat it like a pig – all due respect to pigs – you, 'Oh, did I have any cake?' You don't even remember, because you're just so greedy, you know. So, we've got to distinguish this attachment from 'liking'. Now, of course, attachment and love; that's far more tricky, far more intense. If I say, 'I love Patrick,' it's *impossible* to distinguish the difference in the beginning, because you're *so* blissed out, *so* full of incredible bliss for this divine new person you've met who's now the answer to all your dreams; you've *finally* found happiness; you've written this entire novel for the rest of your life, you know -- and he's the central player in it. So, can you imagine the anticipation *there*; forget the little piece of cake! Oh, poor Patrick! I mean, it's the cruelest thing to do to somebody – all that anticipation.

Of course he looks totally divine, because you've got your best rose-colored spectacles on; nothing ugly about him; he's totally perfect. The expectations are so massive, it's like you're practically having a mental breakdown... And so of course, it takes more than just a cake to get disappointed; but eventually, attachment has nowhere to go but to indifference or boredom or anger. So, you wake up six months later either hating his guts -- as we say in Australia -- or, 'Who is this boring person next to me?' You know? Because attachment can only go to – there's either attachment, which overinflates the deliciousness; aversion, which overinflates the ugliness; and indifference, which couldn't care about either. This is samsara, you know.

So, there is love there; if there were no love in the beginning with our relationship, we'd be eating each other for breakfast, like vampires basically. But luckily, we have some love in the mix, which tempers the attachment. Hopefully. And if a relationship is going to last, it's because love is there; not because of

attachment. I remember Billy Bob Thornton and Angelina, when they were together, it was so amazing an experience to read about; because I read all the papers, you know... She's now with Brad, as we all know, with seventy-nine children... But with Billy Bob Thornton and her, it was most fascinating to watch it; they had this just like bottomless pit of attachment. Every photo, they were together like *this*. They drank each other's blood – lord knows what else; they wouldn't confess to anything else. But they literally had so much intense attachment they could never be separated, and you could see it was just massive, unbelievable attachment. So, it didn't last long. The bubble burst and there was nothing left, you know? It's very interesting; you see that -- so intense.

Or you see the one of – I remember, I read about Nicole Kidman, when she was with Tom Cruise still; and she was interviewed in Vanity Fair, and she said, 'We *will* be together until we're eighty.' And then she said, 'Of course, if we won't be, I will be devastated,' because that's another function of attachment: it makes it permanent. So, because she was feeling blissful with Tom *now*, you assume it's going to last forever. That's what we mean: 'finally I've found happiness'; we lock it in a thing and make it permanent, believing truly it must last forever; because we're so desperate that it *will* last forever. We can't imagine it *not* lasting forever. That's another fantasy we make, you know; this one of making it permanent. So, the expectation was massive. So, inevitably, when he did leave her, all that expectation, that enormous inflation, fantasy, can only go crashing down, can't it? There's nowhere else to go.

So, the whole thing, in the Buddhist approach to working on your mind is like learning to distinguish the facts from the fiction. Buddha's big thing is all the delusions, the neurotic states of mind have these huge exaggerated, distorted opinions about things, and we think they're true. That's the worst part. That's the worst part. You know, let's say after six months I can't stand the sight of Patrick because he keeps looking at my girlfriend and then he finally leaves me for a younger version; so now I look at Patrick – before, I looked at Patrick he looked like the ant's pants; now he looks like this *creep*. And in both cases, I thought it was true. I thought he was the most divine man I'd ever met, at one point; and now I think he's the most evil. I mean, excuse me, which is true? It's so absurd, isn't it? Patrick's the same bloke. Nothings much changed – not much more grey hair, no more wrinkles, you know; he was who he was when I first fell in love with him, but I couldn't see it because attachment blinded me from seeing everything else, because I didn't want to see. And then when I have aversion for him, I only remember the bad things. So, this is one way they really do exaggerate. We can see this in our own life; all the time, we forge these traps, you know. Yes?

What Would The Story of a Healthy, Loving Relationship Look Like?

1:20:24

Q: What would the story of a healthy, loving relationship sound like?

Ven.: Oh, wonderful! Patrick and I would have some karmic history with each other; we'd have the best sex in the whole world, because – we've got bodies, so therefore – when you've given up attachment to cake, it's not as if your tongue

drops out of your body, you know; it doesn't. Your tongue and your cake have a very nice time. But there's no *drama*, you understand. Your body – we still have bodies – so we're going to fall in love, we've got some karmic history, let's say, and we're both advanced practitioners, let's say; and you've got all the pleasure that comes from physical contact – because that's just the nature of a body – but there's no grasping, there's no neurosis. There's no distortion, there's no expectation, there's no manipulation; therefore there's no disappointment, therefore there's no anger, there's no guilt, there's no blame, there's no low self-esteem, there's no aggression, there's no – ah, there's no depression, there's no arrogance; we will be very clear with each other, we'll be strong, be confident, we'd just be the best versions of each other. We'd be having a happy nice bit of life.

Q: In the beginning, there was no exaggeration...

Ven.: What?

Q: And in the beginning, there was no exaggeration...

Ven.: If you've given up attachment, there *can't* be. There *can't* be. There can't be.

Q: Just appreciation...

Ven.: Delight. Pleasure. Joy. Fun. The best you can ever have.

Q: Who would be a good example of that?

Ven.: The Dalai Lama, seems to me...except he doesn't have sex... I mean, anybody you know --okay. It's hard to tell, because when you do meet people who aren't even very attached and very angry or very proud; they just seem so ordinary, you can't – they don't seem very exciting, you know... It's – we can't – yeah – I mean, they're not going to be – we wouldn't notice, actually. But if a person, you know, a person who gets upset easily when things go wrong – join the club; that's all of us, I suppose – that means we have attachment. And we just think, well, that's normal. And then we get stressed; stress is just attachment. Anger is a result of attachment. Jealousy is a result of attachment and anger. Arrogance – you wouldn't have that if you didn't have anger. So, these all would just fall away. So, you have your own personality. You might be a quiet kind of person; well, you'd be a nice quiet person. Maybe you're a very charismatic person like the Dalai Lama -- he's very powerful – people who are around him -- he blows people's minds, he's so powerful, you know. But he's so clearly humble; he says 'everybody's my best friend', if you see him, you can tell, it really is true. He doesn't seem to get thrown by anything; he cracks jokes about his torturers, you know. He doesn't seem to be – he doesn't go up and down like a yo-yo. He cries with compassion, but he's stable like a rock, you know; you'd be stable like a rock.

In other words, there'd be no fears; and this is surprising, because all the delusions, as far as Buddha's psychology is concerned – and the more you look

at the mind, the more you see this – they are completely riddled with fear. They are in the nature of fear.

So, when you've cut ego-grasping, when you've realized emptiness, as Lama Zopa says, 'There is no fear,' because if you look at all the delusions – it's like, attachment desperately wants to get everything 'nice'. The second we meet the thing that isn't nice: 'Oh my god – why is this? How? If only! Why is it? It shouldn't be...' – all the *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts* and *why* and *how dare...* instead of just 'this is what it is'.

So, a person who doesn't have attachment would greet whatever arises – even being in prison – they'd greet it, they'd accept it, they'd walk into it, they'd see it for what it is; there wouldn't be a drama, there wouldn't be, 'this shouldn't be happening, how dare it happen, why is it happening'; which is our usual view of the world. So, the level of their mind doesn't go up and down like a yo-yo... We're *all* bi-polar; I'm not kidding – it's just a question of degree. Attachment and aversion is bi-polar; I'm not joking now. It's just 'normal' behavior – it's called 'being in samsara', Buddha says.

So, the more you get rid of attachment, the more blissful you become, the more content you are, and by this I don't mean 'blissful' meaning 'hyperventilating'; but just deeply content, deeply undisturbed, you know; and whatever personality you have, you'd be that personality. You could be very powerful and charismatic; you might be very quiet, peaceful; skinny, fat – whatever you are, you know. Multimillionaire, poor, monk – doesn't matter. Whatever you do, you'd be stable, you'd be loving, you'd be connected; you'd be very wise, you wouldn't put up with nonsense; but you wouldn't be rude, wouldn't be arrogant – not possible; because they're all the voices of ego, and they're all the source of pain. You wouldn't have *that* kind of suffering. You'd be free of *that* suffering.

When you have compassion, you cry, you see the pain, you empathize; but it doesn't drag you down – you'd have the wish to help those people and you'd never give up. Who wouldn't want to be like this? Don't you think? This is Buddha's take on it. I find it quite helpful, quite practical; and I think pretty marvelous that he actually suggests that it's possible to be like this. I don't think our materialist models would dare to be so arrogant to suggest they've got methods to do this because they all *factor in* attachment, anger, pride, jealousy as *normal*. You understand my point? When you hear it this way...

Buddha's View is Clear: Negative States Do Not Belong in the Mind

1:25:34

Q: What is that? What did you just say? What is all those things? Sorry, I missed what you just said.

Ven.: So did I; I think... I'm saying, all the materialist models of the mind – our models in our culture – based upon the assumption that mummy and daddy made me, based upon the assumption the mind is the brains, the genes, the DNA; therefore assumes that anger, jealousy, ego-grasping and panic and drama are *normal* – so, you don't hear anyone in our models of the mind give us

techniques for how to be genuinely more happy. I mean, just like I said, we do more things these days -- therapy is marvelous; there's lots of wonderful people out there doing good things in our culture -- but Buddha's view is so clear, you know: they do not belong in the mind; and all Buddha's methodology is to get rid of these things and achieve one's own potential and then help others. But so often, you know, when we mystify The Buddha's teachings and make it sound all, like, holy and religious -- but if you talk about it like this in a very down-to-earth way, which is psychological, we kind of go, 'Oh, wow; this is real.' Do you understand what I'm saying? This is how we have to hear Buddha's teachings. Yes?

Q: So, you were talking about trying to work on the attachment and not clinging and so on, if we make -- the people who are able to make some real progress and have some contentment, then when their own death approaches, they would...

Ven.: Part of that, too, is dealing very particularly, specifically with impermanence. So, as you know, from Buddha's teachings, he focuses in very specifically on certain approaches, you know. So, *because* we have attachment -- primordial grasping at this sense of a self, which gives rise to the neediness to get what I want -- we then dump this other mistake onto things: we make them permanent because we can't bear to think they'll change. So, that's one particular mistake we need to eradicate from the mind, because it's just not realistic, isn't it? So, it needs its own specific work; thinking about how things *aren't* permanent. But at the same time, what you say is true. Every time you lessen attachment -- and the only time to lessen attachment, because it's so tricky, is when it doesn't get what it wants; *that's* the moment of practice. Do you understand what I'm saying? The second the carrot cake comes, *that's* when you notice your attachment. That's when you work on it. So, you deal with it, you accept the cake, and then finally see it as good, you know? So then, of course, because that's also about change, indeed, even just dealing with it this way, then death won't be some freaking-out thing. That's exactly right; it'd be more -- because what you're learning to do, in all this approach of lessening the delusions is you're becoming more flexible. You know, the mind is very fixed and rigid... fundamentalism, when it's really extreme is the way the mind is when there's delusions. We want them to be the way *we want them*. That's why we crash up against people and things. The more you give up *that*, the more flexible you are; and that means the more you deal with what's in front of you more easily. Exactly. Not some view in your own head... That would include death, yes.

Get Some Perspective About Your Practice: Do the Right Things and Don't Fret 1:28:37

Q: But, I was also thinking as well that, you know, if we think about the long term view and future lives, maybe if we try and practice the dharma we can not be so nervous about the negative karma we're creating...

Ven.: Oh, I think it's very true, you know – this is a very interesting point for me actually – because we're so used to mystifying what we call 'spiritual', when we talk – if this were cooking class, or even an esoteric mathematics class, it's still kind of 'real'. But as soon as we hear 'spiritual', we kind of lose our common sense and get a bit la-di-da and weird, you know? So, my feeling is – and then also because our own attachment, our own neediness is so primordial and we're so addicted to this discontent and I'm never enough and always worried about things and always finding fault, our own fault – that no matter what we do – it's as if we've been... You know, even if you've been practicing only for a month – and what I mean by that is genuinely trying to become a better person – this is stupendous already. You should be blissed out with yourself; but all we do is think we're getting worse.

So, it sort of is, when you start -- when your garden's sitting over there, all kind of – nothing's happening. It doesn't look very messy, but you've done no gardening; and now you start digging. It's going to look a lot worse, isn't it? But it's a good sign, not a bad sign. But because we have so much addiction to being miserable, even if we *have* made progress, we can't *see* we've made progress. So we're always confused and always worried and always thinking, 'Oh my god, I'm so bad, all the negativity, I don't know what's going to happen...' We're always neurotic, you know, because fear and panic are just the way these delusions are.

So, in the same way that you have a decent method for how to get a beautiful garden, and you know it's going to take you a year to get it going, you don't *mind* how long it takes you; you don't *mind* how messy it gets, and even though it looks worse, you know you're making progress. But with our spiritual practice, it's very hard for us to see this. And if we compare ourselves – I'm not trying to be arrogant about it – but if we compare ourselves with the world of really suffering, suffering human beings: the psychos, the miserable ones, the murderers, the rapists, the people completely junkies; I mean I'm talking about the most intense suffering minds; excuse me, I mean we should be blissing out with happiness every day with ourselves. Just like we're sitting in this boring Buddhist center, not even with proper chairs...you've got to understand my point! It's not like a club with cigarettes and wine and delicious -- I mean, I love beautiful places, gorgeous hotels; I think Buddhist centers all ought to look like gorgeous hotels, actually – lovely lounges and personal service; with waiters and café latte orders before you have your class; that's my vision of Buddhist centers; I'd have a lot more customers... You know what I'm saying. I'm not criticizing; but look at the fact that we are prepared to come and sit on the floor, you know, for a couple of hours, you know, with no obvious immediate result except techniques to help you work on your mind. I mean, you should be so blissed out, you know; you should be so happy with yourself. You should be patting yourself on the back like you can't believe; but you walk out of this room as miserable as you walked in! All the time remembering the bad things: 'I'm no good', and worried and anxious... My mother used to say, 'you're your own worst enemy' and she is so right; we are our own worst enemy, you know.

So, it's so important to get some perspective; and that, again, is the first point I made when we started – that if you see – certainly, the Tibetan way of presenting the Dharma is like a nice, orderly course; and even then, even if we've been hearing it for years, we still can't quite hear it – we've really got to know – if you've got a course, and even if you've done *one week* in music, you know where you are in that course; you may be, you know, the beginning of grade one; then you're in grade two, and you know you've *come from* grade one and you're going to grade six; so, you know where you are, you know where you've come from, and you know where you're going. *You've got to have this sense of perspective, you know.* But we could be practicing for thirty years and still feeling 'I don't know where I am on the path and what am I doing, and I'm so hopeless', because this is our old junkie view, our old junkie habit; and it's so inappropriate. So, there's no reason at all if we – and then the other point is this, to get to the point that you made: if you've got a good system for growing a garden – you've got good botany, you know – you know that there're laws, you know laws are reasonable and predictable; and once you've got the laws down, you just follow the laws and relax – and you will get the roses, you will get the trees. You get my point? You don't live in panic, having mental panic attacks about your garden not growing, you know? You relax, and let karma take care, and let botany take care. That's how we should be; the same with here; if we have some confidence in Buddha's teaching – and that's up to us – because it *is* a set of laws, and they *are* predictable, and they *are* reasonable, and they *are* do-able; then you check mentally if you've done the right things every day and you can relax! I'm not kidding, you know? But who relaxes? We don't. We think we're doing wrong, bad, no good, oh god, I'm hopeless...I'm worried, negative karma... Ridiculous. We should be blissed out – not kidding. What else? What time are we finishing? What time did it say on the thing? We didn't! Oh? I might do a Lama Zopa on you and keep you here 'til one in the morning! I value my reputation too much, believe me... Go on, darling, yes?

Attachment to Our Habitual Negative Self-Image

1:34:10

Q: Just what you were saying, that whole, 'oh, I'm so neurotic', isn't that just, like, attachment no different than the chocolate cake – 'I am so attached to...

Ven.: That's it. That's how we are. This is the old voice inside us, shouting away a thousand miles an hour, that's true; and that's why we just – when we understand that much of being a Buddhist is being your own cognitive therapist – and I really am not joking here. Here we come, fully programmed with all these ancient habits which, when we break them right down, come down to being an elaborate conceptual story – it's quite hard to hear them as conceptual stories – and they're just racing on in our heads the whole time; and everything we do in our lives, we reinforce these stories; and so we just don't stop saying them. So, we've got to put in the new story...*literally*, re-program our mind – and I'm just not kidding here; you've got to *think new thoughts*.

It takes time to see the results, but don't underestimate thoughts; Buddha says every thought sows a seed. So even just sitting there – I'm really not kidding – and let's say you – there're all these different ways you can practice having

positive thoughts, like, before you eat your dinner, before you stuff the food in, you can think of offering it to others. Even for example, just that. It's a bunch of thoughts, right? So, that is *unbelievable*. You just put new seeds into your mind; and every thought you have will sow seeds and will ripen in the future. So, every day, you put in positive thoughts. Even if you're sitting there being miserable, but you're putting in positive thoughts every day; we just think, 'Oh, it's only the mind. Who cares?' but you're putting new seeds in your ground, you know. They *will* ripen. When you have confidence in this, you might – because we're such junkies for good feelings, unless I have a good feeling *now* from those seeds I plant, then I don't think I've done any good; and that's really wrong. The criterion of success isn't that you feel good. When you go to the gym, after being, you know, fat and overweight and no muscles, you won't feel good, I promise you. But you really did well; you should be rejoicing. In other words, pain can be a good sign, you know. So, we've got to stop being like children and basing everything on *how we feel*. This is very childish. Are you understanding my point?

Then, you know the power of karma, which is Buddha's view – that every thought does count, that every thought is you programming your mind – then, be delighted with yourself because the results *will come*. You've got to have patience and humility and wait for the results, you know. I'm not kidding. It's very important. Like your garden – you've got to wait fifty years for an oak tree – you don't mind; you enjoy the process. But attachment is a junkie for 'good feelings' as well, the deepest one – and then we define ourselves in those terms, you know? So, it takes time; all this stuff is not overnight. It really is not overnight. But the thing that we should look into, and have confidence in is that *it is possible*. It's techniques, it's methodology; it's worked for thousands of years for lots of people. You get courage from that when you read about or you see other people; you get inspiration, you know? Like if you want to become a great cyclist, you have a poster of Lance Armstrong on your wall because it shows you what you can become. You've got to have that; we need inspiring, you know? We need encouragement; we need to see it's possible.

That's why for me, the example of the Dalai Lama, you know, gives me great hope. If he can do it, I can do it, too; very much, that for me is important. Yeah...so what else? Do we have a break? Or do you want to finish?

Director: I have no idea what time...

Ven.: Ten to five – it's been nearly two hours. Finish, okay. Enough food for thought...yes, sweetheart?

The View of Karma and Sickness

1:37:52

Q: I have a quick question. You spoke a little bit the other night about attachment and dying and spirits on earth...

Ven.: I missed the point...

Q: Well, the other evening, Marga brought up the point...

Ven.: About spirits...

Q: ...and illness; when a person dies with attachment and...could you speak a little more on the Buddhist thinking on that? On illness, and working out karma; like, when you die and you're attached, you...

Ven.: Okay – there's different things happening. So you really want to know more about how to interpret sickness. Is that what you're asking? Karmically.

Q: Yes. How you can work out those...in relation to karma.

Ven.: I understand, darling. I understand. Generally speaking...

Q: Is that today's topic, or...

Ven.: it can be anything, I'm sure we can fit it in, don't worry. Generally speaking, as you know, the Buddhist explanation is that any moment that we have that we would call 'happiness' is the fruit of a virtuous karmic seed we planted. And every moment of anything we call 'suffering' is the fruit of a negative seed we've planted. It's a simple kind of law, you know. Okay. So, if we think about – in a conventional sense – what a 'good life' would be – quote, unquote – it would be a life in which you...okay, there's four ways that karma ripens.

One way is the type of life you're born into in the first place, whether human or spirit or animal; okay, and the second one – and obviously in our case, we're all born as humans – so the second way our karma ripened, like I said before, is our tendencies, our personality, our characteristics, our wish to be good or bad or kill or be psychotic or full of lust, full of love – you know, all these things; whatever our personality is. Then the next one is 'experiences similar to the cause', which is all the stuff that happens *to* us: the people, the relationships; how they see us, how they treat us. And then the fourth is even the environment we live in.

So, okay, using one example of one negative action, quite a heavy one called 'killing', the ways that it ripens in our life as a human – so, morality in our life has ripened at the time of death, which has caused us to get a human life. First point. Now, within this life, the way killing can ripen is in three ways. The first one would be as a tendency to keep killing. You understand? You're born in this life, you like to fish, you like to kill the bears, you kill the rats, you kill the roaches, you kill people; whatever. It's a tendency to kill. The next one would be – the result of killing – would be the experience; which would be to be killed, to die young, or to be sick. So in other words – and then the environmental result would even be, say, even the very environment itself if you think about it – which is the water and the air and the soil and all the rest, and the vegetables and the food – which the ideal scenario would be to nourish you – they harm you. You know, like polluted water or really bad plants or peanuts poison you. That's

the environmental karmic result of killing; being sick, dying young or being killed is the 'experience similar to the cause' of killing.

Okay, so, logically – if we use the analogy of seeds and fruit – every time a fruit comes, that's the end of that seed, isn't it? Isn't that right? So, then, a Buddhist approach – if you're trying to work with your life using this as your interpretation – then you're struggling to deal with the stuff that you created in the past that's now ripening in the present as your suffering; so your attitude towards it – when you're really being strong – is, 'Well, I'm glad I'm getting rid of it. I'm using up these seeds.' Luckily – even I remember; I gave a talk in Miami years ago and there was a rabbi there; it was about 'why bad things happen to good people', and he was a Kabbalah rabbi, and they believe in karma and reincarnation. And he said that we have a saying, that every time something bad happens you think, 'Great! One less debt to repay.' So, it's an interpretation of it; so that is very much an attitude that you have to anything going wrong. Someone doesn't pay your debt, your husband leaves you, you've got a pain in the knee; you try to interpret it as the ripening of some negative action of your own; 'Fantastic! Just got rid of that one,' you know.

Q: And that's how the bodhisattva interpreted the worms...

Ven.: The worms?

Q: The worms in his nose...

The Story of Harry's Trip Up the Mountain

1:42:11

Ven.: Oh, that guy. No, no; that's more dramatic than that...not only happy he's repaying the kindness of that sentient being and wanting the benefit of that sentient being, so happy to offer his body – that's even a more dramatic level. The bodhisattvas – and there's a story, reminding me now, the one you said about giving your life; there's this friend of ours called Harry – everybody always said, 'Oh, Harry's a bodhisattva,' but I – you know, when you look at him, he's a nice guy; you ask 'how would you look', Harry looks like a nice guy: funny, cracks jokes, kind to everybody, he's always sweeping the floor and doing the dishes; he's just this nice guy, you know? But then I heard this story and I figured, I bet you Harry *is* a bodhisattva.

And the story is this: he was at Kopan Monastery, our monastery in Kathmandu – lama Zopa's, and he was – this was years ago – and he was getting ready to pack, to go up to the mountains, you know, the Mount Everest area where there are lots and lots of caves and where Lama Zopa's from in this life; and Harry's been up there for many years different times meditating in the caves, right? So, he's going up there to meditate again and the story goes that Lama Zopa heard that Harry was leaving and he said he had a dream that Harry would die and he wanted to get a message to Harry, but Harry had gone – this was obviously before cell phones. So, the story goes – and I checked this with Harry, actually; I

heard the story and then I asked Harry what happened, and so this is what happened: he's going up the mountain and he's got this big pack on his back – twenty kilos or whatever, you know, of stuff; fifty pounds on his back – and these paths, I haven't been up in that part of the world, but these paths are very narrow and it's very treacherous. People are falling off the mountains regularly, the porters are regularly falling off, tourists are doing it; it's really treacherous, hills and mountain paths and things.

So, he's walking up this mountain path, and it must have been particularly treacherous, and coming right there were four Sherpas with their big packs, you know. And that's *really* treacherous; a friend of mine who used to do this said all you do is see your feet for ten days, you know, because they're bent over double with these massive packs on their backs. So, he stopped; and he said the first thought he had was, 'Okay – four of them, one of me, alright, I'll step to the side.' So, there's all these practices you do in the bodhisattva path in relation to this type of thing where you're using all these techniques to get ego out of the way, you know? So, one logical thing you say to ego – it sounds a bit dumb for us – you're only one, but there's four there, so they're more important – four's more than one, okay, I'll step to the side. So, this is the first thought he had.

Now, first of all, my point to this is he couldn't have just done this spontaneously unless you've practiced this for years in all these meditations -- do you understand -- to train yourself to do these things; because there's no way you just spontaneously – I mean, the normal thing we'd say in our culture – you'd have instinct for survival and you'd stand up against the, you know, the mountain wall and hope they don't all fall off. You know? I mean, whatever. But he said, 'I'll step to the side.' I mean, it must have been really quick, the whole thing. So he stepped to the side, and then he said to himself, if they knock me, I won't hold on. It must have been within like a second, you know?

So, they knocked him, and he's falling. And he said, he just fell on the ground, but his pack is pulling him. And he said, 'I had a psychic vision of the entire fall.' And then he said, 'And I saw my body crash to the ground.' But then he said – oh, I forgot. Lama Zopa, when he was at Kopan, asked Geshe Lama Konchog, this amazing holy yogi who lived for years and years and years in the mountains, who at that time was in Kopan – Lama Zopa obviously did himself, but he asked Geshe Lama Konchog to do prayers for Harry. And then Harry said – he didn't know about this – Harry said – Harry was falling and he said, 'I felt the hands of Geshe Lama Konchog forcefully pushing me,' and he reversed direction and fell into the Sherpas.

So, the first part for me, was the point of giving his life, you know? That's an example that there's no ego there; because of all his practice he *truly* put others first; like just without a second, without a blink of the eye, no big drama queen, like, 'look at me, I'm giving my life for others', you know; not like that. But then, this is also showing the powers of the holy beings and the immensity of his own bodhicitta, that he would happily give his life for other people. So, there's an interesting story. That's how a bodhisattva would do.

Greeting Suffering

1:46:23

But, one step at a time; we can learn to be brave in the face of the miserable things happening, and welcome them; because that's what patience is, actually. Patience is an amazing state of mind. We think of it as like, actually, we think of it as like passive aggression. Patience is the key to success, actually; because the second attachment doesn't get what it wants – and I really mean it, that's happening a thousand times a day, and we don't notice most of the time; when the smallest irritation comes, or the slightest panic or the drama, that's because attachment just didn't get what it wanted, you know; and it can be ever so tiny. So, the second something comes that you don't like, what patience is, is *greeting it*. Welcoming it. Not resisting it. Anger just resists it. Frustration, annoyance, irritation, depression, guilt, anger are all the same; they're resisting it, and then criticizing. And then going dragging down or punching people in the nose, you know.

But patience is seeing it for what it is and welcoming it and seeing it as good practice because it will smash attachment. That's second; and that's the way to become content. *That is the method for becoming happy*. It sounds kind of hilarious, but it's true. Because our happiness is that anger arising; so you go against that, and welcome – in other words, you're training your mind like you're developing inner muscles to be strong and brave in the face of the things that attachment doesn't like, and then slowly you're going to start seeing them as good. You won't distinguish them any longer as 'bad'; you'll be really courageous; you'll *greet* the rubbish, the sickness, the unhappy bad things; you won't go up and down like yo-yos, you know, you'll become stable like a rock. Nothing can deter you. Do you understand? And that way, I always figure, even if you're drowning, why be miserable as well? You know? You might as well stay happy, stay perky. Stay positive. Honestly! It's the best method: whatever happens, stay perky. You've got to practice it, it doesn't come naturally. You've got to fight like crazy to go against anger and panic, you know. It takes time. This is the key to success.

Conclusion and Dedication

1:48:29

Okay; that's a good note to finish on. Okey-doke; be brave, people. The key piece of advice I would say to you is *never give up*. Okay? Just never give up; that is the key to success, I promise. Okay? Thank you.

Jang chub sem chhog rin po che
Ma kye pa nam kye gyur chig
Kye pa nam pa me pa yang
Gong ne gong du phel war shog

That says, 'May bodhicitta grow and grow and grow', okay?
Cheers! Tomorrow again? Who knows what we'll talk about tomorrow; probably the third verse...

Transcribed by Fran McDermott