

Elaboration of the 3rd Disadvantage of Not Thinking about Death
by Ven. Thubten Chodron ©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle, 1991/92.

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Questions & Answers on Last Teaching

Freeing ourselves of anxiety

I've made the comment that when there's anxiety, it's because there's attachment. So you're saying if we can notice what it is that we're attached to that is causing the anxiety, what we're trying to cling on to to make permanent, and free ourselves of that attachment, then we can be free of the anxiety.

Often, when we have a negative emotion arise, like you were saying, we have anxiety and our immediate response is, "I don't want to feel this. So let's suppress it. Let's repress it. Let's pretend it doesn't exist. Let's go out and get drunk. We have to recognize it's there and acknowledge the fact that we're anxious about something. Trying to avoid the anxiety by distracting ourselves doesn't get rid of it. It's like trying to clean your dirty dishes by adding more food to them. So we need to acknowledge the anxiety is there, accept it and experience it. And then, knowing that we don't have to keep on experiencing it and being under its influence, we can apply the antidote. Recognize what it is we're attached to, and work with the attachment that is causing anxiety.

Sometimes we don't want to acknowledge it because we're afraid that it's going to blow up. And I think this is where it's very helpful to sit with the breath, and recognize, "My breath is going in, and my breath is going out, all this fear is coming up, this is just a thought. This is just a mental experience. All this anxiety, and all my projection about how horrible the future is going to be, is just a thought. Because my reality right now is, I'm breathing in and I'm breathing out." And I think not to be so afraid of our thoughts and our feelings as they're only thoughts and feelings, that's all. Not so afraid of them in terms of experiencing them, because they're not like big, ferocious dogs, ready to bite us. They're not going to take our arms and legs off.

We concretize things very much. "I am my thoughts. I think this, therefore I'm a bad person. I think this, therefore it's true." We take our thoughts so seriously. We take our feelings so seriously. And not realizing how much they change. We feel so stuck with some big issue, some big crisis one day, and the next day, we think, "Hold on. What was I so upset about?" So here is where this whole meditation on remembering transience and impermanence is very important. We remember that all these things keep changing. The good stuff keeps changing, no sense to get attached. The anxiety keeps changing, no sense to get overwhelmed by it. All these things arise due to causes and conditions, they have limited duration, they're going to change into something else. But while they're happening, we're sure they're real! This is exactly why we have to think about this stuff over and over again, so that we can call it to mind when the garbage is coming up.

Handling Criticism

We're in a situation where we realize somebody is criticizing us. Instead of reacting in our usual habitual pattern, which is "What? They're criticizing me?!" And either in anger ("Because they're wrong!"), or just complete "Well, they're right and I'm just a catastrophe!" , we recognize, "Hold on. This is somebody's opinion. Their opinion is not me. It's their opinion. It might have some useful information in it that can help me grow. So I'm going to listen. Just because somebody thinks this and says this, it doesn't mean it's true." We don't believe everything President Bush says, why should we believe everything somebody who is criticizing us says? On the other hand, that doesn't mean you just completely disregard it as, "This is somebody else' opinion, they don't know what they're talking about!" We have to be willing to take the information in, and check up and see if any of it is useful to help us grow. And also recognize that if somebody is losing their temper at us, it's indicative that somebody else is upset and out of compassion and concern for the other person, we want to be able to communicate better with them so that they don't walk around all muddled in their own upsetness.

Remembering Death

So we were talking about the six disadvantages of not remembering death. It's really helpful during this whole death meditation, to remember that meditating on death helps us get our priorities very straight. And this is a big difficulty in America now. People have so many choices. They don't know what to choose. And people don't know how to set their priorities. So they get all distracted running around doing all sorts of things This causes a lot of anxiety and stress because we don't have the ability just to say what is the most important thing. When we look at our life in terms of the fact that we are going to die, then it helps us set our priorities very clear. What we become interested in, is what can we take with us when we die. What can we take with us that is going to be long lasting, and what are things that are only temporal, that aren't going to be of any long term benefit, that we can just leave aside?

So here, we come to see the benefit of the Dharma practice, because when we die, it's our Dharma practice that comes with us. It's our habitual training of the mind in good qualities that lets those good qualities continue on into a future life. It's the karma we create by practicing Dharma, that good karma that is going to influence what happens to us in our future lives. So it helps us really set our priorities to see the value of Dharma, and not to get so wrapped up in seemingly important things that seem important because we're actually just looking very narrow-mindedly through the lenses of our happiness now. If we look closely, so much of our upset in our daily life comes from looking at everything through "This is interrupting my present happiness!" And we get angry and we get jealous. Or because we're craving this happiness, we get proud, and we get arrogant, and we denigrate other people. So when we really think in terms of death and set priorities in life, what's important, then getting our way and being big guy and being this and that, these stuff just doesn't seem

so important anymore. If I don't get exactly the kind of food I want, it really doesn't matter. If my body isn't as gorgeous and athletic as I want, it really doesn't matter. If I don't have as much money as I would like, it really doesn't matter. And so we enable ourselves to live a lot more peacefully.

Why We're Not Making Progress on the Path

Sometimes we wonder why we don't make progress on the path. Why we don't make progress is because we're usually distracted from practicing Dharma. And so because we don't practice, then we don't make progress. If we created the cause, we would surely receive the result. It's because we get distracted from creating the cause that then we don't progress along the path. And so remembering death is a really good antidote to help us eliminate all of these distractions that comes to practicing. So when you feel, "Wow, I'm sitting here but I'm not getting anywhere," and then you start getting judgmental: "Oh, I've been practicing Dharma for a whole week and I'm not a Buddha," (moaning), then it's really good just to sit and remember death and impermanence and put our mind really back into the practice instead of back into seeking worldly pleasure.

So this also involves recognizing that the things in this life, the pleasures we have, they do bring some happiness, but they don't last a long time. And this is real important because usually when we're seeking some kind of happiness, the kind of happiness in this life that acts as a distraction, we usually have some idea in the back of our minds that once I get this, it's going to bring me long term happiness. We might say intellectually, "Oh of course, eating this extra bowl of ice-cream is not going to make me everlastingly happy." But, when we're really attached to ice-cream, there's that part of our mind that is completely convinced if we only have another bowl, we can really be happy forever! What we think up here, and what we're grasping onto in our heart, are very separate at that point. So really thinking about death and really remembering these things bring the understanding from up here down into our heart. So then we don't get overwhelmed by these cravings and desires. Because we're able, through our heart, to recognize "This stuff is perishable. This is transient. That brings some nice feelings, but it doesn't last forever. So why go bananas over it? Maybe there's something more important to put my energy into that will lead me to experience a longer lasting happiness."

Setting Our Priorities

So you see this all relates to setting our priorities, recognizing what's important in life and what's not. And when we really do a deep meditation on this, and especially go into the eight worldly concerns we discussed last time, we'll definitely begin to feel that everything that we have been doing up until now has by and large, been a huge waste of time. (laughter) Now, I know you don't like to hear that. And I don't want to present you with a foregone conclusion. But it's something to consider, having the courage to ask yourself: "Is what I've been doing up until now, how much of it brings some lasting value, and how much of it has really at the end of the day, been a waste of time, considering that all that happiness that I may or may not have gotten from chasing after what I think I want, that all that happiness is perishable, doesn't last long."

The Courage To Be Honest

And I think this is a really big challenge for us, especially as we grow older and approaching middle-age, because our ego gets more and more locked in, and we don't like to evaluate our lives, because we feel that if we find one crack in what we've been doing, we might actually have to tear the whole building down, and that becomes too frightening. And so that's why you see sometimes as people get older, the ideas get solidified and rigidified, and

even though the people know something isn't completely right in their life, even though they know they're not a 100 percent happy, it's just too threatening to look at one's life, because one has spent so many years building up this ego identity of who I am, that it's just too scary. But if we get just enclosed, encapsulated by this fear of looking at ourselves, then that actually becomes very painful. It's interesting. We're afraid of pain so we don't look at ourselves. But that very fear that prevents us from looking at ourselves makes our mind extremely painful, because we live our life in complete denial. We live in complete mental evasion of what's going on. And so I think that all through our life, especially if we're Dharma practitioners, we have to really develop that courage to constantly ask ourselves: "Is what I'm doing worthwhile in the long run, for myself and others?" And you see if we do that and we check up on that all the time, then when we die, we're not going to have any regrets. If we don't check up on that, we live in our fear, pretending everything is alright in our life, then not only are we anxious during our whole lifetime, but at the time of death, we can no longer keep the show up. At the time of death, all the masquerade falls away, and then there's a lot of terror. So it makes a lot of sense for our own well-being, to be very vigilant about this. Really ask ourselves, "Is what I'm doing worthwhile in the long run for myself and others?"

Detaching Ourselves From the Eight Worldly Concerns

We started going over the disadvantages of not remembering death and we especially stopped on the third one: detaching ourselves from the eight worldly concerns. Because we see that if we want to practice Dharma, what prevents us from practicing is these eight worldly concerns: the attachment to the happiness of this life. And so last week we talked about attachment to getting material things and aversion to not getting them or being separated from them; attachment to praise, hearing nice, sweet words, feeling encouraged, and aversion to getting blamed and ridiculed and criticized; attachment to having a good reputation so that everybody thinks well of us, we're famous, we're well-known, we're appreciated, and aversion to having a bad reputation where a lot of people think we're despicable; and then attachment to sense pleasure in general, attachment to things going well, so that we have nice things to see, and hear, and smell, and taste, and touch, ...

Actually, giving up attachment to food and to clothes is considered easy, believe it or not. Giving up attachment to reputation is the most difficult. Why? Because we might be contented with, "OK, I'll eat cereals every morning for the rest of my life." And "OK, I'll just wear blue jeans for the rest of my life. But really, people have to think well of me because I do this. I have to have some ego-gratification. I have to have some praise for being noteworthy because of how much I'm sacrificing." This attachment to our reputation is the most difficult one to weed out. So don't feel alarmed as we go through this, and you start noticing in your life a lot of attachment to reputation. Don't get alarmed, but just recognize this is something that's difficult, that takes a lot of time to go through because our mind can get attached to anything and everything. We can get attached to looking the best. We can get attached to being noteworthy because we look the worst! We can get attached to everybody noticing us because we're rich and high-positioned. We can get attached to everybody noticing us because we've chosen to throw society's values back at them. Any of this kind of attachment to building up the "I" as some kind of noticeable, glorious thing, becomes attachment to reputation. We have to be really careful about this.

The Chinese also add, in addition to spelling out not only food and clothes and reputation, sex and sleep and money as well. And if we look, these are also some of our major attachments, aren't they? Very attached to sexual gratification. Very attached to the pleasure of sleep, even though we aren't even awake long enough to enjoy it. It's not saying that we shouldn't sleep. Of course we should sleep. We need sleep to refurbish our body. But it's this kind of attachment and clinging to sleeping more than we need to, that then becomes

detrimental. And of course attachment to money leads us to do all sorts of crazy things to get it.

These are just some outlines through which to look at our own attachment to the happiness of this life, and to check up what is my attachment in terms of food and clothes and reputation and sexual pleasure and money and sleep. Do I have a lot of this kind of attachment? Does it bring me any benefit? Does it have disadvantages? If it has disadvantages, what can I do about it?

Pointless in Getting Judgmental

Now, I must say we westerners, when we take this teaching and start to notice all of our attachments, we tend to get very self-critical: "I'm so bad because I'm so attached!" And so we beat up on ourselves and criticize ourselves because we're so attached to so many things. Buddhism is not saying that we need to beat up on ourselves emotionally. That is completely a figment of our deluded mind. The Buddha wants us to be happy and peaceful and calm. So in terms of recognizing our faults, we just need to recognize them, and recognize that it isn't that we're bad because we have faults. It's not a question of being good or being bad. It's a question of if we're attached to these things, it makes our life miserable. So it has nothing to do with being a good person or a bad person. We don't need to criticize ourselves. But just recognize, "Is this really making me happy or not?"

We tend to get very judgmental about ourselves. And we hear this teaching and all of a sudden we start judging ourselves and we start judging everybody else. "That person's so bad. They're very attached to their garbage cans." "That person's so bad. They're very attached to dah, dah, dah, " "I'm so bad because I'm so attached to dah, dah, dah." It's not a question of being good or bad. That's really our Judeo-Christian upbringing that we're projecting on the Dharma at that point and we don't need to do it. This is a very subtle thing. Really look in your minds because we really do have a tendency to start telling ourselves all sorts of negative stories that are totally unnecessary.

The Meaning of Detaching or Freeing Ourselves from the 8 Worldly Concerns

Also in this third point of the six disadvantages of not remembering death: even if we practice, we won't do so purely. So it involves recognizing our eight worldly concerns and freeing ourselves from them. By the way, when I say "freeing ourselves from them", it means detaching ourselves from these things. It's very important to understand the Buddhist concept of detachment because the English word "detachment" is not a real good translation for what is meant in Buddhism. So that's why a lot of misconceptions about Buddhism come. Because we tend to think, "Oh, I'm so attached to food and money and reputation and these things. I've got to be detached." So either we think that means I have to give up all my money, never eat again, and give away all my clothes, in that way I'll be detached. Or if I'm going to give up attachment to reputation and friends and relatives, that means I'm never going to have any friends again, I'm going to be completely aloof, and uninvolved. Who cares about anybody else.

Both of those are wrong ideas. They are common misconceptions about what freeing ourselves from the eight worldly concerns mean. It doesn't mean we have to give up all our worldly possessions and things like that. Because the problem isn't the reputation. The problem isn't the money. The problem isn't sleeping. The problem is our attachment to these things. We definitely need money to live in this society. We definitely need to sleep. We need food. We need clothes. We need friends. There's nothing wrong with this. And like I brought up last time, if we're going to benefit others, we need some kind of respectable reputation so that others trust us. But the problem is, to have these things and use them without attachment, but instead with the motivation to use them for the benefit of others. So instead

of attachment, feeling "I need these things in order to survive", we have a more balanced mind. That's what detachment means. It means balance. It means if we have them, fine. If we don't, we'll survive, it's OK. If I have the kind of food I really like, fine. If I don't have it, that's OK also. I can enjoy what I do have instead of getting so stuck "Oh god! I have to eat pizza when I wanted Chinese food!"

So in all these things, being detached actually means that we're able to enjoy what we have. Rather than getting stuck and longing for something that we don't have. This is real important. So it doesn't mean we just have to give everything up physically, but we have to transform our attitudes in how we relate towards things. Then that makes our mind very peaceful.

And especially in terms of human relationships. Often we think, and especially we hear the stories of these great meditators who went up to caves. They gave up society and they went up to a cave. And we feel, "Well, I just have to be independent of all these people and not involve in human relationships at all! Because otherwise I'll be attached." That's not possible. Why? Because we're always involved with human relationships. We can't survive without human relationships. We live in society — that's relating to human beings, isn't it? So it's not a question of freeing ourselves from society, because even if you're up in the mountain, you're relating to society, you're still a member of society. You just live in a far out place. But you're still part of the society of all sentient beings. And also just to survive, we definitely interrelate with everybody else just to get the necessities of our life. So detaching ourselves from friends and relatives isn't a question of moving far away and never speaking to people again and remaining aloof and cold and distant, because that could just wind up being a lot of delusion itself. But it again, means having a balanced mind. Having balance in our relationships with people.

So if we're with the people we get along with very well, fine. If we're not with them, life is also fine. The difficulty with the attachment is, when we're with the people we like, we feel so great (till we get into a fight with them, but we pretend that doesn't happen). And then of course when we separate from them, instead of being able to enjoy the people we are with, our mind is stuck somewhere else dreaming about somebody else that is no longer in our present reality at this moment. So we completely miss out on the beauty of the people we are with, because we're so busy fantasizing other things.

So again, this thing of detaching ourselves from friends and relatives isn't detachment in the sense of being uninvolved, it's just being balanced in the way that we relate to them. Appreciating them, but recognizing that we can't always be with the people we like the most. And that those people we like the most haven't always been the people we like the most either! So no sense to always be so attached to them. And that frees our mind much more to enjoy the people we're with.

10 Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa Tradition

The second part of this is called the "10 Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa tradition." These 10 jewels are things that help us gain some kind of equanimity in relationship to the eight worldly concerns. So these ten aren't listed on the outline, otherwise the outline would get too long. There're basically 3 general categories. There're 4 trusting acceptances, 3 vajra convictions and 3 mature attitudes towards being expelled, finding and attaining. If none of these makes sense, don't worry. Hopefully it will after it gets explained.

The Kadampa Tradition

I should explain the Kadampa tradition that practiced this. This was one tradition that came from Atisha, the great Indian sage who brought the second wave of Buddhism from India to Tibet. And this tradition is one of my favorites because these people were really genuine, sincere practitioners. They really abandoned all these worldly nonsense and goeey mind, and they practiced very purely without a lot of show and pomp and flamboyance. They just did their practice without looking for attention to it. I feel that that's for me, personally, a very, very good example. There's a great tendency in our mind when we start giving up our worldly attachments to want people to notice how holy we're being, or we want to make some progress up in the religious hierarchy. I love when my family asked me, "Where are you in the hierarchy of Buddhism?" I never know how to answer that. But there's the mind that likes to have a title. "I want to be famous. I want people to notice how much I've given up."

It reminds me of when I was in Taiwan at one point. Because the Chinese don't use the terms "Lama" and "Geshe" and "Rinpoche" and all these kinds of titles like the Tibetans do, they just have "Shi-fu" and "Fa-shi", I don't know, maybe they have some others in Chinese, but these are the two I always heard. They're kind of applied to everybody. But the Tibetans have all these different titles and things. So some of the people from the Tibetan tradition were there for a conference. And Lama Lhundrup all of a sudden became a Rinpoche. And one Australian monk became a Lama, because nobody from the other cultures knew how to use the terms. So everybody was becoming Lamas and Rinpoches. (laughter) So we used to tease each other about it. It's very easy in a tradition that has lots of titles and different-sized thrones, and different kinds of hats, and different kinds of brocade, and all of these, all the different hairdos, and the different robes, it's so easy for our mind to get really sticky in all of these.

A. The Four Trusting Acceptances

The First Trusting Acceptance: As our innermost outlook on life, being willing to accept the Dharma with total trust.

The Kadampa people didn't get involved in any of the above. They were really out to practice very purely without getting a lot of status and prestige. The first four of the ten innermost jewels are called the four trusting acceptances. The first one is: "As our innermost outlook on life, being willing to accept the Dharma with total trust." And accepting the Dharma as a very simple and effective way of thinking, speaking and acting. So this comes through recognizing we have a precious human life, thinking about the impermanence of our life, thinking about what's important, setting our priorities, and coming to the conclusion that practicing Dharma, i.e. transforming our minds, is the most important thing to entrust our life to.

This is something for us to think about. We may not feel this way right now. We may think our bank account is the most important thing to entrust our life to. But this is a way to start to train the mind to really look. Think about the preciousness of our life. Think about death. Think about our Buddha nature and what we can do. Set our priorities. And hopefully come to the conclusion that actualizing our potential, becoming a Buddha, practicing the Dharma, is the most important thing to do in our lives. So we entrust our life to that.

The Second Trusting Acceptance: As our innermost attitude towards following the Dharma, being willing to accept with total trust even becoming a beggar

Now, the second one is: As our innermost attitude towards following the Dharma, being willing to accept with total trust even becoming a beggar. Now ego is going to start to shake

a little bit. "OK, fine. I'll entrust my life to practicing the Dharma. That's great!" But then part of our mind gets really scared with "If I practice the Dharma, maybe I'm going to be poor. If I really sit and I go to teachings all the time, and I do my meditation practice and I don't work 50, 60, 85 hours a week anymore, maybe I'm going to be poor. I'm not going to get the next promotion." So some of our buttons are starting to get pushed. This is our attachment to the eight worldly concerns. So then, we have to understand what is important in our life and not compromise it. If we've decided in the first trusting acceptance that we're accepting the Dharma, then don't compromise that value because of our attachment to worldly things.

In other words, if something is really important to us -- not in terms of important because we're trying to get what our ego wants, but important in terms of ethics, in terms of the meaning of our life -- then we have to live by it without letting all of our worries about money and things like that interfere with it. Because there's going to be no end to worries about money. If you stop your Dharma practice because you're worried about money, and you go to work to get more money, you're never going to have enough money. The mind that is attached to money never has enough. So in this thing, what we're saying here is, if Dharma is really the center thing in our life, the chief support of our life, then to live by it and not be so afraid of what's going to happen materially to us.

And the Buddha dedicated eons of his merit and made a prayer that all the people who followed his teachings purely, will never starve, even in times of famine and gross inflation. And although this may not mean much, that's been my experience. I haven't worked since 1975, and I haven't starved yet. There have been times when I've been very broke, but haven't starved. And so I really think there is something to this. You never really hear of people starving because they practice the Dharma. But our mind gets all fearful about it anyway. So we have to entrust ourselves to the practice even if it means becoming a beggar. And this is breaking our attachment to security, financial security. And it's also helping us get in touch with the fact that preparing for future lives, practicing our spiritual path, is really at the end of the day more important than surrounding ourselves with a lot of money and possessions that never bring lasting happiness. We have to penetrate that in the mind. We say that here but we have to really feel that in our heart.

The Third Trusting Acceptance: As our innermost attitude towards becoming a beggar, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die.

Then the next trusting acceptance: As our innermost attitude towards becoming a beggar, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die. So what happens is, we're saying, "OK, I'll practice the Dharma. OK, I'll be a beggar." But then, the fear comes up: "I might die of starvation! I don't want to die of starvation!" And freak-out comes again. That'd make a nice movie title, wouldn't it - "Freak-out comes again". (laughter) So here, it's really important, again, to center in very much on what our priority is. That even if it means that we die of starvation in order to practice the Dharma, it's going to be worth it. Why? Because in previous lives, we've had infinite number of previous lives, we've had all sorts of wealth in previous lives. Where has it gotten us? In all of our previous lives, have we ever died of starvation for the Dharma? We usually die with lots of attachment, and trying to get as much stuff around us as possible. We have to try and develop the attitude that even if I were to die of starvation, it would be worth it in order to practice the Dharma. Why? Because Dharma practice is more important than living a life in which I don't practice but I spend all my time getting possessions and food. So it's confronting our grasping mind that is attached to all of these things, and really asking us to do a lot of deep soul searching, to overcome that fear of dying of starvation by having enough faith in the efficacy of the practice, to know that even if we did die of starvation, it would be worth it. But since the Buddha dedicated all these merits, we probably won't. But it's hard to have that kind of faith. It's really asking us to check up very deeply.

The Fourth Trusting Acceptance: As our innermost attitude towards death, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die friendless and alone in an empty cave.

Then the fourth innermost attitude or trusting acceptance is: As our innermost attitude towards death, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die friendless and alone in an empty cave. You can tell this was in Tibet. Here, it might be "die friendless and alone in the middle of a big city, or on the street". Here, we've gotten through, "OK, I'll practice the Dharma because that's worthwhile. I'm willing to risk becoming a beggar because I really believe in my practice. I'm even willing to risk dying in order to have the time and space to practice. But I don't want to die alone. And what's going to happen to my body after I die?"

So again, more fear comes up. More attachment and clinging comes up at this point. So here, it's really important to remember that if we practice well, we won't mind dying alone. If we don't practice well, then we're going to want lots of people around us because we're going to be terrified. But the thing is, none of the people are going to be able to give us any long lasting comfort because we're going to be experiencing the ripening of our own negative karma at that time, which other people can't stop. They can't stop our death. They can't stop the ripening of our karma. Whereas if we really devote our mind to practicing very purely, then even if we die out on the street, we can die very, very blissfully. So this kind of mind that gets very attached. We want to have lots of friends and relatives around when we die, is very indicative of a lot of fear and a lot of attachment going on in our mind, which means that we're likely to be very unsettled at the time we die.

Of course if you have Dharma friends near you when you die, that's great, because Dharma friends, they'll encourage us in the Dharma. They'll help us put our minds in a good attitude. So wanting to have our Dharma friends around us when we're dying, no problem with that. But it's this kind of clinging of "I want all my family around, holding my hand. I want to know I'm loved. I want everybody crying and carrying on because I'm dying." And so that might seem to make us happy but actually it causes a very disturbing mind at death time. Because they can't stop the death. They can't stop the negative karma. And if we've given up our whole practice in order to ensure that we die in a proper setting, we're not going to have the good karma to take with us at the time we die.

And then, this one is also asking us to look at our attachment to what happens to our body after we die. Because some people get really worried about, "I want a big funeral procession. I want a big grave. I want a nice monument on my grave. I want my picture. I want to be remembered. I want to be put in the obituary column in the newspapers so that everybody can mourn me." Some people get very, very concerned about that. "I want to have the services of good embalmers so I'd look good." Like I was saying last time. "I want a nice, expensive coffin." "I want to be buried in a nice, pleasant place, at a nice, high-class cemetery." So what this point is getting us to look at is that when we're dead, it really doesn't matter where we're buried. And it really doesn't matter whether we have a big funeral procession. And it really doesn't matter whether a lot of people mourn us. Because when we're dead, we're dead. We're not going to be hanging around this earth anymore, looking at what's going on. So why worry about it when we're alive? So this is really helping us again, to free ourselves from all this clinging attachment to big funerals, and being mourned, and having a nice grave, and things like that. Because it really doesn't matter. Our body isn't us.

B. The Three Vajra-like Convictions

The First Vajra-like Conviction: To go ahead with our practice without considerations for what other people think about us

Now the next section is the three vajra-like convictions. Vajra-like, or diamond-heart convictions. These are sometimes also called the three abandonments. So the first one here

is to go ahead with our practice without considerations for what other people think about us, because we practice. So this is going against that part of our mind that says, "Well, you know, if I practice Dharma, other people are going to think I'm weird. And if I tell people I'm a Buddhist, they might think I'm new age." This kind of stuff. We're kind of ashamed of our practice. We don't feel real confident about it. We're kind of ashamed of it in some way because we're really afraid of what other people are going to think about us because we practice.

And I've noticed this in people. Many people, when at work, when it just comes up in a casual conversation, they don't want to say they're Buddhist. People who've converted from other religions to Buddhism. And their usual thing is, "Well, other people are going to think it's weird." I think it isn't so much other people are going to think us weird, it means we're embarrassed. We don't feel comfortable with it. Because lots of times I've heard many people tell me stories about they've been so afraid of what other people are going to think about them practicing. But it's usually been all in their own mind. Their own fear. And the other people haven't thought that badly of them.

So this kind of fear -- what other people are going to think about us if we practice -- it becomes a big deterrent to practice. And this is what peer pressure is all about, isn't it? This is what conforming to the American dream is all about. Or conforming to whatever it is we think we're supposed to conform to. And we're very attached to our reputation and so we give up our practice because other people discourage it or we're afraid of what they're going to think of us because we practice.

So this is a big hindrance. This does not mean that we don't care at all about the effects of our actions on other people. In other words, in saying "to go ahead without considerations for what others think", it means in terms of the Dharma, to go ahead and practice without worrying about what other people think. It doesn't mean to go ahead and do anything we want to in our life without concern about the effect it has on others. Because if we go ahead and follow our attachments and cheat people and deceive them and go into our families with, "I want to do this and I want my needs met. And I want this. And I want that." And we go into our families and our workplace, "I don't care what it does to you. I don't care what you think. I want my way!" That's just more and more garbage. That's not what this point's saying. We need to be very sensitive to the effects our actions have on others. But in the sense of giving up the Dharma because we're afraid of what other people are going to think, that we have to give up. Why? Because it becomes a big obstacle in our mind, and it keeps us really attached to reputation.

And it's very interesting because if we don't live our life according to our own convictions, but according to what other people want us to be, we usually wind up to be very unhappy. And it's interesting. Psychologists usually say that somebody who does this, doesn't have a very strong sense of self. This kind of people usually go along with what everybody else wants them to be instead of living according to their own ethics and principles. From a Buddhist viewpoint, the kind of person that does everything the way other people want them to do it, and I'm talking about it here in a negative way -- giving up what's important to do worldly things -- that person actually has a lot of self-attachment. They may not have a strong sense of self in a psychological way -- here "sense of self" meaning the sense that "I am an efficacious person" -- they may not have that because they're letting peer pressure and society overwhelm them. But from the Buddhist way of using the word "self", they have a very strong sense of self. And it's actually a lot of attachment to reputation, "I want people to think well of me. Therefore I'm going to do what they want. It's not because I care about them that I'm doing what they want. I want to do this not because I think it's good. It's because I want a good reputation." So there's actually a strong sense of self involved in that.

This is very interesting to think about. Very often, psychological things, they usually say, "This person that doesn't have boundaries, and this person who goes along, doesn't have any sense of self." In the psychological way, they don't. In the Buddhist way, they do. Different ways to use the words "sense of self". You can see it.

The Second Vajra-like Conviction: Continuously remain deeply aware of our commitments regardless of circumstances.

The second one of the diamond heart convictions is to keep the constant company of awareness of our commitments, to abandon things that get in the way of our keeping our Dharma commitments. This could mean abandoning what others think about us because we practice. It could mean abandoning negative influences of others that make us break our vows and commitments. It could mean abandoning laziness. And you can see, we have to have a diamond-heart-strong awareness of our commitments and our vows in order to keep them going at any time and in every situation. If we don't have this, then some day if we find ourselves in the company of the people who drink, even though we may have a precept not to drink, we'll start drinking because that's what's expected of us, or because we're afraid what people are going to think. Or even if we've taken a vow not to lie, if our boss wants us to lie for the business, we'll do it. Or even if we've taken commitments to do certain mantras or meditation practices everyday, we won't do it because we're too tired. Or we forgot about our commitments. We don't value them. So this diamond heart conviction is to have a very strong resolution to keep whatever vows and commitments we have taken in our practice. And to see them as ornaments, as jewels, as very precious things. Not as things that get in the way. Our vows aren't things that limit us from doing things and put ourselves in prison. Our vows are things that liberate us from our negative habits.

The Third Vajra-like Conviction: Carry on continuously in our practice without getting caught up in useless concerns

And then the next one is the vajra or diamond heart conviction to carry on continuously without getting caught up in useless concerns, like running after pleasure for this life or getting discouraged because we don't have what we think we should have. Discouragement and depression are big, useless concerns. Sometimes we're starting to practice the Dharma and then we think, "Oh wow, I've devoted my life to this Dharma practice. Now I'm not the most popular person in Seattle." Or "Now all my brothers and sisters make more money than me." Or "I'm fifty years old and I should have a retirement fund and I don't have it. What are other people going to think? And what am I going to think and what's going to happen to me?" So all this kind of discouragement, this kind of fear or a judgmental attitude towards ourselves. "I don't have all these worldly things. Therefore I'm a failure. I don't have a big business card with lots of titles. I don't have this, that and the other things like everybody I graduated from high school with has. Therefore I'm a failure."

This kind of discouraged, depressed mind that is involved with attachment to the happiness of this life, is something to be given up. And instead, we should have a very strong conviction not to get caught up in useless things. Now it's important here to emphasize that there's nothing wrong with having friends or wealth. Dharma is not asking us to give up friends and give up wealth. But the thing is if our attachment to these things get in the way of our practice, or if the influence of these things get in the way of our practice, then we have to be willing to give them up. So there's nothing wrong with having friends, but as soon as our friends start saying, "Why are you going to teachings twice a week? What a drag! Better stay home and watch television, there's a really good movie on." Or "Better do this, that and the other thing." Or "Why are you going to do Nyung Nay? You're not going to eat for a whole day? That's not healthy! You should eat and keep your blood sugar up."

So all these things that people may say, they mean very well. But if this becomes a big hindrance to our practice, then maybe we have to give up those friends and seek other friends that are more in line with what we have as our firm conviction to be the meaning of our life. Doesn't mean we hate these other people but it just means we don't remain stuck in our gooey attachment towards them.

Similar with wealth. Having money can be beneficial if we use it to help other people. No problem with having the money. But if having wealth takes us away from the Dharma, then maybe consider getting rid of it. If you have to spend all your time worrying about your stocks and your bonds and your investment and this and that, and you have no time to practice, then what's the use?

As for our friends, we can have very meaningful relationships with our friends. And in fact Dharma friends are extremely important to us and we should definitely try and cultivate them and make as the core part of our friendship, our mutual Dharma practice where we really help each other in the practice. And then our friendship becomes very, very beneficial.

C. The Three Mature Attitudes

The First Mature Attitude: Being willing to be expelled from the ranks of normal people

There're 3 mature attitudes. The first one is a mature attitude that is willing to be expelled from the ranks of so-called normal people because we don't share their limited values. Now, I have to really emphasize here, this does not mean that in order to be a Dharma practitioner, you have to be expelled from the ranks of normal people and be considered a weirdo. It is saying that we have to give up that attachment that wants to belong and be appreciated and be accepted in the in-crowd. Because if we're attached to that kind of thing, then it becomes an interference in our practice.

This is also a thing of building up the courage to accept criticism because we practice. Because maybe some people will criticize us because we practice. And to not get discouraged and overwhelmed if people criticize us because we practice Dharma. But just recognize these people have a limited world outlook. These people don't understand about rebirth. They don't understand about Buddha nature. We probably one time thought just like them. It's not that they're bad people, but not to let ourselves get influenced by that. And so to be willing to be expelled from the ranks of so called normal people. That means giving up the attachment to what other people think about us and giving up the aversion to being criticized because we don't share the same values as others. Sometimes we do get criticized. Like maybe in the time of the Gulf war, if you went into the office and you said "I don't believe in killing," your colleagues might criticize you. And so just having the courage to endure being criticized because we don't share the same values as other people.

The Second Mature Attitude: Being willing to be relegated to the rank of dogs.

The Third Mature Attitude: Being completely involved in attaining the divine rank of an Enlightened One.

[Note: Teachings for the last 2 mature attitudes were not recorded.]