

3 Kinds of Joyous Effort & 3 Kinds of Laziness which Interrupt Joyous Effort by Ven. Thubten Chodron ©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle, 12 Jan 94.

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We have been talking about the fourth of the far-reaching attitudes: that of enthusiastic perseverance, or joyous effort. This is the attitude that takes joy, or takes delight in doing what is constructive or wholesome or positive.

Three Kinds of Joyous Effort

There are 3 kinds of joyous effort.

(1) The first one is armor-like, and this is when we take joy in the challenge of working for sentient beings, the challenge of practicing the path, the challenge of remaining in samsara in order to have contact with and benefit sentient beings. When we take all of that with a sense of joy and happiness, that is the armor-like joyous effort.

(2) The second kind is the joyous effort of acting constructively, so again taking joy in putting in effort and really discriminating well what to practice, what to abandon, and then actively practicing it.

(3) The third kind of joyous effort is the joyous effort of helping sentient beings. And so here again, we have that whole list of sentient beings, when we talked about ethics, remember that? No? (Laughter) That whole list of kinds of sentient beings to help – the poor, the sick and needy, those who were bereaved, those who were distressed, those who can't discriminate between what to practice and what to abandon, those who have been kind to us, remember that list? The third kind of joyous effort is the joyous effort in doing that. So really taking joy when there's an opportunity to help somebody instead of: "*Oh God, you mean I have to do something?*" So instead of that attitude, when hearing that somebody needs help, or somebody wants

something, then we have a sense of joy and buoyancy and want to go out and do it. So you can really see the difference here.

Three Kinds of Laziness

Joyous effort is the antidote to laziness, and laziness is the obstacle to joyous effort. So we talked about 3 kinds of laziness.

(1) Laziness of procrastination

One was our ordinary western conception of laziness, hanging out, sleeping, snoozing, lying on the bench, that kind of laziness in which we have, what I call it, the *mañana* mentality. Dharma practice is *mañana*: “Daily practice? I’ll do that tomorrow.” We say that everyday. Read a Dharma book? “I’ll do it tomorrow!” We say that everyday. Go on retreat? “I’ll do that next year!” We say it every year. So that kind of laziness of procrastination, where we’re just very attached to sleeping and dreaming and being very laid back.

(2) Laziness of being super-busy

The second kind of laziness is the laziness of being super-busy. We usually think of super-busy being the antidote to the laziness of procrastination. But here, being super-busy in a worldly way is another kind of laziness because we are still lazy in practicing the Dharma. We are extremely busy, and our calendars are filled with stuff to do. We go here, we go there, we are in this class and we are in that club, and we are into this, dah dah dah...and we travel to all these places and we do all these stuff, but we don’t practice Dharma! Because we are too busy. And then of course, the moment the evenings come free, we could totally freak out because we don’t know what to do with the free time. So we immediately call somebody up and fill it up. And then continue to complain about how we have no more time! So this is the second kind of laziness. It’s the story of modern America. (Laughter) Like I said, it is called laziness because we don’t practice. We keep ourselves extremely busy with everything but the Dharma.

Antidotes to 1st and 2nd kind of laziness

And so, the antidotes for these two kinds of laziness. For the first one, the laziness of procrastination, we want to think about death, and impermanence, and recognize that death is certain, the time of death is uncertain. And so better not to procrastinate because death could very well come before we practice the Dharma. For the second one, the laziness of being super-busy -- actually both of these antidotes work for both of these two types of laziness, but especially for the second one -- here we contemplate the disadvantages of cyclic existence. This second laziness of being very busy in a worldly way is seeing all the advantages of cyclic existence: “I can get a new house, I can get some more clothes, I can get some new sports equipment, I can go here, I can meet this fantastic person, I can get this promotion, I can be famous here and do this and that...” – that kind of attitude sees cyclic existence as something like a pleasure ground, it’s really fun, it’s a playground, we can play and do all these things in it.

And so the antidote to that, is seeing the disadvantages of cyclic existence: that no matter what we get, we are still not satisfied. That we work so hard to get stuff, and half the time we don’t get it. And if you look, so often that’s really true. Sometimes we get them, then they don’t meet our expectations, and sometimes they even bring more headaches. So really seeing, as it says in the “Foundation of All Good Qualities”, that samsaric perfections are not to be trusted: because

they don't bring us lasting happiness, they aren't stable. They are not always there for us when we need them. Recognizing this, and then seeing that the only real stability comes through the third noble truth: the truth of cessation, removing the ignorance, anger and attachment from our mind. Because we want happiness, then we work for liberation in that way, because that's a stable kind of happiness.

So we really think of the disadvantages of cyclic existence. That's extremely important, because without seeing the disadvantages of cyclic existence, it becomes very difficult to practice Dharma, in fact virtually impossible. Because if we are not dissatisfied with cyclic existence, why try and get out of it? If we think it's great, the way we are living our lives, being busy and doing all these stuff, then why practice the Dharma? There's no sense to it, there's no purpose. Dharma is meant to be more than a hobby. Although sometimes in America, Dharma is very much a hobby: You do pottery on Monday night, creative writing on Tuesday night, and swimming lessons on Wednesday night, Thursday night, you do Dharma and Friday night, you do something else. So it becomes like a hobby. Something more to talk about at cocktail parties. You know, it is very fashionable in America to know Tibetans, have a Tibetan stay at your house, very fashionable (Laughter). Fifth Avenue cocktail parties, you can really brag about it. So Dharma becomes just like a hobby, no real practice, it's just something that's trendy for the 'in' people: "*I met Richard Gere at a Dharma party!*" (Laughter).

[In response to audience question] Mindfulness is something that we should have all the time, and doing practices are not some intellectual gymnastics that we do over here while we ignore our life. If our mind is, let's say being super, super busy and we meditate on the disadvantages of cyclic existence, then the mindfulness is what carries that understanding of the disadvantages of cyclic existence into the present situation that we are living in right now. So that when chocolate cake appears to distract you, you are mindful enough to recognize that it is not going to bring you any happiness.

We have to settle it into our mindstream, then how we look at the thing really changes. Because when you are still doing the gymnastic, it's like: "the chocolate cake is really good, *no it doesn't bring me any lasting happiness*, but it's really good, *no it doesn't bring me any lasting happiness, I'm going to die one day, death is definite, time of death is indefinite*, but the chocolate cake I really want it, *no it won't bring you any happiness, and you're going to die*, oh but I want it!!" (Laughter) And you wind up with it! But when you really sit with it, and you really think about death and it really goes into your mind, then you lose interest in the chocolate cake. Then you're not having to remind yourself of something, and there's not this push and pull but you're just there with the understanding of impermanence and the chocolate cake by itself just is not so interesting.

(3) Laziness of discouragement (Low self-esteem)

And then the third kind of laziness, is the laziness of discouragement, or putting ourselves down. Or in modern language, low self-esteem. And this is where we stopped last time, so I thought I would go into this one more in-depth because we tend to suffer from this so chronically (Laughter), in our culture. You've heard me tell the story of how shocked His Holiness was to find out how prevalent this was. It's really true. And this low self-esteem, this discouragement, this putting ourselves down, is a tremendous obstacle on the path because when we put ourselves down, and when we are depressed, then of course we don't try and do anything, and if we don't do anything, we don't get any results. I had a discussion at one retreat that I led about this, and this one woman, her name was Martha, and she said that one afternoon she was sitting and saying Manjushri mantra, and she fell asleep in the middle of saying Manjushri

mantra. When she woke up, she was so mad at herself for doing that that she started saying Martha's mantra: *"I'm so terrible, I'm so lousy, I can't do anything right..."* (Laughter) And that mantra, we don't even bother to count those because we say them so constantly!

Competitive society and prevalence of low self-esteem

This inner talk that we do to ourselves -- of constant self-criticism, constantly belittling ourselves -- I think it comes a lot from our competitive society. Last week, I was just down at Cloud Mountain, and we had this retreat with the Chapman students, and I co-led it with Inge Bell, who's a sociologist, and we talked a lot about competition. She really brought that out in her discussion groups as a sociologist, on the effect that competition has on us, and how it really makes us feel very, very lousy about ourselves. Because, instead of doing things for the joy of doing them, we are always doing them with the motivation to be the best, and to be recognized as the best. And of course, as soon as one person's recognized as best, everybody else feels lousy. But she brought out a really interesting thing in the discussions: it is that with a competitive system, it's not just the people who are on the lower end who lose out by not being the best who feel lousy; the people who get the laurels, they actually in some ways have more tension and more stress because they have to preserve it. So we had this whole discussion about grades -- that was college students, we could translate into this group as work evaluations. And the students who got 4.0s had incredible anxiety about maintaining it. It's amazing.

So you can see in this society where we're taught from the time we're this big, to compete with other people. That whether we are high on the scale or low on the scale, it's very anxiety producing, and very much leads to low self-esteem, because we never feel we are quite good enough, or we never feel we'd be able to maintain that status. But I think it's too easy just to blame the society. We do that all the time, that's old hat: *"Let's blame the society."* We should also recognize how much we buy into society's values, and how much we are conditioned and let ourselves be conditioned by society. And this is what was so remarkable co-teaching a course with a sociologist, because both disciplines talk about conditioning, and societal influence. I mean, Dharma conditioning is dependent arising, isn't it? And I think where Dharma really has the insight, is saying that we have a choice, since we have the intelligence to consider things in a deep way. We have a choice: whether we're going to let ourselves continue to be conditioned like that, or if we're going to re-condition ourselves with wisdom, to see things in a different way.

And I think it's something to really think about: our whole relationship to competition. Really to look in our hearts: how much do we really buy into it, how much do we compete? What is our feeling when we lose, what is our feeling when we win? Are we happy either way? And Inge asked the students: "What was your first memory of when you realized that you were being compared to other people?" This is an incredible discussion to have. When we ask ourselves that question, we begin to see, it starts out quite young, doesn't it? Quite young. And what came out a lot in this discussion, was how we feel compared to siblings, or classmates. I was always being compared to Jeanie Gordon across the street: *"Why don't you clean up your clothes like Jeanie Gordon? Why don't you comb your hair like Jeanie Gordon?"* (Laughter) I'd really like to meet her again, one of these days. (Laughter)

This whole mentality of out-competing others -- it doesn't bring happiness, no matter which end of scale you are on. Because whether you come out winning or losing, you still feel you aren't good enough. And that's what really came out when His Holiness was asking this whole room full of PhD's: *"Who have low self-esteem?"*, and they all said: "I do." (Laughter) It's totally

remarkable seeing this. All these scientist who came to make presentations to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I mean, these people are special, and they have low self-esteem!

Low self-esteem and the two extremes of pride

And so we can see, and I think that's why we also have so much problem with pride in our culture, because when we don't have self-confidence, when we have low self-esteem, we react by over-inflating ourselves, in some attempt to make ourselves feel good. Not knowing what the valid basis of self-esteem is, we bolster ourselves up based on quite meaningless qualities, and become very proud and arrogant. But then on the other hand, and this is what's so confusing: sometimes, we feel that if we actually acknowledge our good qualities, that's being proud and arrogant. And I wonder, I don't know if there is a gender difference in this or not: you know, the way men and women are socialized? But I wonder if, sometimes, maybe especially women feel that if you recognize your qualities or let your qualities be shown, that it makes you look like you are proud. And so what we do is, we put ourselves down in an attempt not to be proud. And so we vacillate between these two, mutually unproductive extremes, and never finding what the valid basis of self-confidence is.

Valid basis of self-confidence: our Buddha nature

From a Buddhist perspective, the valid basis is recognizing our Buddha nature, because that Buddha nature, that absence of inherent existence of our mindstream has been with us since the existence of the mindstream. It's not something that is separate from our mindstream, it's not something that can be separated out from the mindstream. And so the fact that our mind is empty of inherent existence means that it can be transformed into a Buddha's mind. And that emptiness can never be taken away, that Buddha nature can never be taken away. And so on the basis of that, we have some valid reason for having self-esteem, because we have the ability to become buddhas.

So it's not I have the ability to become a Buddha because "I got an 'A' in Math", or because "I'm pretty" or because "I'm a good athlete" or because "I'm rich" or "I'm in a high social class", or any of these things. It's "I'm worthwhile because I have a mindstream that has Buddha potential." And to recognize that no matter how cloudy our mindstream gets, the Buddha potential is still there. And in one text, they have analogies about the Buddha potential, and how the Buddha potential is hidden. They say it's like a Buddha statue under a bunch of rags, or it's like honey surrounded by bumble bees, or it's like gold buried deep in the ground. So something that's there, that's quite wonderful, but because of the outside casing, there's some obscuration to seeing it. And so, we have this Buddha potential, but we are obscured from seeing it, and the obscuration is the ignorance, anger and attachment. The Buddha potential is the lack of those things being an inherent part of our minds. It takes a while to really contemplate this, but if we can tune into it, then no matter what is going on in our lives, we know that there is some hope for us, because if even the flies or the cats have Buddha potential, then we also do as well, simply by having a mindstream, that on one hand is empty of inherent existence, on the other hand is clear and knowing and has the seeds of these good qualities that can develop infinitely.

I wouldn't say that talking about Buddha nature is the best way for all people to develop self-confidence. Because you definitely need some faith in Buddhism to kind of have that idea, or some kind of deeper understanding. But if you are feeling – and there're also different kinds of lack of self-confidence -- if you feel like you are just rotten from the core, that there's nothing good in you, then knowing about Buddha nature can help remove that. But if you lack self-confidence because you can't ride a bicycle, then as Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey used to tell us,

if you can become a Buddha, you can learn anything. So while in one way knowing about Buddha nature would help you to have confidence that you can learn to ride a bicycle, in another way, maybe taking bicycle riding lessons might help you more, because it is working on just being efficacious in a particular skill. So it depends, I would say, on whether your lack of self-confidence is because you don't have a certain skill or because you think you are a rotten person.

Your ultimate self-confidence is when you've realized emptiness, but you can understand something about emptiness and you can understand something about Buddha nature without having realized it directly. If you have some kind of faith, or some kind of correct assumption about the existence of Buddha nature, that gives you the confidence so that then you can go out and understand it in a deeper way.

I think just having even some kind of vague understanding that anger is not an inherent part of my mind, jealousy is not an inherent part of my mind, just even that understanding can give you a whole lot of self-confidence. You haven't realized emptiness but you're beginning to recognize that we don't have to cling onto these things as if they were the essence of my being. You don't have to have a perfect understanding of emptiness to get this. But the more you understand Buddha nature, the more you have self-confidence. The more you have self-confidence, the more you practice, the more you understand Buddha nature. The more you understand Buddha nature, the more ...you know? The two things go together, and you keep going back and forth.

Answers to Audience Questions

1. Two kinds of Buddha nature

Buddha nature and Buddha potential are synonymous, as I am using them here. And there are two kinds:

- i) The principal kind that people refer to is the absence of inherent existence of the mind. That's called the natural Buddha potential, or Buddha nature.
- ii) And then the other kind is the evolving Buddha potential or Buddha nature, which is the clear and knowing nature of the mind, and the good qualities, like the compassion, love, the wisdom that we have now even though they are very undeveloped. So anything in our mindstream that has the capacity to be transformed into the Buddha's dharmakaya, that's called the evolving Buddha nature.

2. Two different senses of self: positive and negative

His Holiness emphasizes that there're two different senses of self. He says one sense of self is where we make ourselves super solid. There's this real solid inherently existent me in here -- that's the one that we have to free ourselves from. But there is a realistic sense of self, where he says we have to have a feeling of self confidence in the fact that we can practice the path and become buddhas. And that sense of self, or self confidence, some feeling that you are efficacious, that you can do it: that is a positive sense of self. So we need to get rid of the wrong sense of self, and we need to develop the positive one.

3. Developing correct understanding

It's really important to have teachings repeatedly, and to really discuss our understandings, so that we make sure we have a correct understanding. Because it's

easy to listen to something, think we understand and actually we misunderstand. That happens to many people. I can look back on things that I thought I understood five years ago that I realize now I didn't understand and I wasn't practicing correctly. But I think that this is part of the path. Understanding the proper way to practice is a whole other step because it's not that we just hear teachings and immediately we understand them intellectually and how to put them into practice. It's very much trial and error and really going over things again and again.

4. Need for equanimity to resolve conflict

Developing equanimity is important because it's so hard to resolve conflicts when our minds are super-sensitive. In fact, it is virtually impossible because when our mind is super-sensitive, then any thing the other person says or does, we go off the deep end. And so that's why we talk about the cultivation of equanimity which means detaching ourselves from the eight worldly dharmas. Because what is it that makes us so super-sensitive: attachment to praise and reputation – image and approval. Wanting to be liked, wanting to be approved of. And this is why the death meditation so helpful, because when we do the death meditation then we have less of this kind of attachment, so then we aren't sitting there, being so prickly, waiting for everybody to offend us.

5. Self-acceptance of our current level of dharma practice

Okay, so you are talking about if we really understood the Dharma deeply, we would probably be living very differently than we are now? So how come we aren't?

I think here, self acceptance is important -- being able to really see where we are at right now, and accept where we are at. Instead of competing with this idealized image we have of the great Dharma practitioner we would like to be and we should be -- and we would certainly be impressed with ourselves if we were! (Laughter) -- instead of competing with that image, just to be able to recognize this is who I am, this is where I am at right now. For example, I see that what Gen Lamrimpa is doing is wonderful, I aspire to do that one day but I know that I don't have enough pre-requisites to do it right now. So I have to practice according to where I am right now, and what I need to develop right now, without hating myself for not being a bodhisattva! Self acceptance doesn't mean complacency. It's accepting what is, is, but knowing that with skillful means you can change the situation.

One thing you did bring up that is quite interesting, is this perfectionist mind that keeps itself very busy, running around to all sorts of different Dharma stuff? Running here, running there, this teacher, that teacher, this retreat, that retreat, this practice, that practice, getting involved in this project, and that project and being this and that, and planning this and that Basically, this is like everything else, you know, some people import the busy mind into the Dharma practice, some people import the jealous mind, some people import the attached mind, some people import the anger mind. Whatever our thing is in regular old life, we import it into our practice. And that's why we are stuck with the same old things to work out. Because it's just this patterned behavior we that get ourselves into.

6. Big and small goals

So you are saying becoming a Buddha is too advanced but if you see some immediate benefit you get from the practice, then that encourages you to keep practicing? I think we do both things at the same time. I don't think it has to be a either or. I think on the one hand we've a long

term goal, on the other hand our little goals. It's like when you are in kindergarten, your long term goal is you are going to graduate from College, but you still like the stars on your paper, and you want the teacher to give you a candy on Friday because you were good. So it's like you work on both things.

You'll hear sometimes, like when Lama Zopa cultivates the motivation, he will have you cultivate this thing about "All mother sentient beings throughout the incredible six realms of existence who have been suffering since beginningless time, therefore I must become a Buddha to liberate them all from samsara." But to become a Buddha, what do I have to do? I have to listen to this teaching right now that is going on and pay attention! So it's like, you have the super big motivation, at the same time recognizing that if you have any chance at all, you need to be right here doing what you are doing right now making it beneficial. So you have both of them at the same time. Because the thing is, if you just have the one of "I am going to pay attention right now", then it's like where am I going with it? So what if I pay attention to every bit, so what? But if you have an idea of this path and where that whole thing is taking you, even though where it is taking you is beyond what you can conceptualize, you do have some feeling that these drops are falling into the bucket.

Okay, let's dedicate.