

The Devil Debates an Angel

Homework Master, Course Five
*A Simple Path to Happiness:
Overcoming Illusions in Our Life*

Class One: Daily Practice to Stop Illusion (verses 86-96)

1) In verse 86, the Angel of Wisdom says that “We can learn and study, but only apparently.” Explain what this means in terms of studying this very teaching; and what this has to do with illusion, and a simple path.

[Perhaps we could start with the action of studying. We go to a teaching about a “simple path,” and hear someone describe it. What’s apparently going on is that someone is sitting up in front of us, and speaking about the idea of an illusion—something which they themselves studied earlier, from their own teacher.

But that’s not really what’s happening. We ourselves, at some point in the past, have willingly shared something which we understand with another person; perhaps, for example, we have helped train a new employee at the office where we work.

This planted a karmic seed within our mind, and when that seed opens it creates a tiny, luminous image in the mind. In this case, the image is of a teacher who explains to us the words of *The Devil Debates an Angel*, by His Holiness the First Panchen Lama.

The mind then projects that image out into the world in front of us, and the image speaks to us and teaches us. We mistakenly believe that the teacher has come from somewhere outside of us, but that is only an illusion. In truth they are coming from us.

The Devil Debates an Angel
Course Five, Class One
Homework Master

It's a relatively simple thing to see that this is the case; and it's a simple path then to study wisdom deeply. We merely need to be generous in sharing what we know, whether it's how to run a certain computer program at work, or how to bake a certain dessert at home.

This will plant the seeds that open as a teacher who teaches us wisdom, which is simply the knowledge of how to plant seeds for the goals we dream of reaching in our life.]

2) In the case of learning anything, then, we are trying to do so not in the way we used to, but in a new way. How can we combine these two ways of doing things?

[The answer is that we CAN'T combine the two, never ever! As our root text says at verse 87, these two ways of going about our life are "completely incompatible." If we are going to follow the new way of doing things, then we have to give up the old—completely.

As an example we can take trying to find a partner. The old way is to go to a yoga class; or look on the internet; or wander through nightclubs. The new way is to plant a seed, by visiting a lonely person (perhaps someone in a nursing home) once a week.

After that we can still take a yoga class or look on the internet, and we will find a partner. But now we understand that it happened because we planted the seed at the nursing home, and not because we went to the yoga studio or website. We stop seeing these things as causes, and start seeing them as the instrument through which the karmic seed delivers us our result.

It's important that we completely stop viewing things the old way. We don't have to change our activities per se (we can still go to yoga), but it is absolutely necessary that we run our life with seeds (visiting a sick person on the way to yoga). We no longer disappoint ourselves by putting our hopes in external means.]

The Devil Debates an Angel
Course Five, Class One
Homework Master

3) In verse 89, His Holiness mentions the “eight attitudes.” What are these eight, and how is it that they spring from illusion?

[The eight attitudes, sometimes called the “eight worldly attitudes,” come in four pairs. These are the following:

1-2) To feel happy when we gain some material thing, and unhappy when we cannot

3-4) To feel happy when we feel well, and unhappy when we don't feel well

5-6) To feel happy when we achieve some attention or fame, and unhappy when we don't

7-8) To feel happy when someone praises us, and unhappy when someone criticizes us

Let's take the example of an illusion which is common in many people's life. Our partner criticizes us, and we feel unhappy: we fall prey to the last of the eight worldly attitudes.

It's very important to say here that we are not trying to reach a state where we are completely anesthetized: where we don't feel anything at all. Of course it's unpleasant to be criticized by someone so close to us, and we should try to stop this criticism.

Talking to our partner, though—negotiating with them—simply doesn't work. We know this, because it has failed many times: any action which fails sometimes and succeeds sometimes is not something we want to continue trying. It's an illusion that the criticism is coming from them, and it can only make us unhappy to try to convince them not to speak words of criticism that aren't coming from them in the first place: words which they cannot, therefore, keep from us!

We can overcome this illusion though, and the way we do so also means that we won't feel unhappy when others criticize us. We try to work out mentally how—when our partner criticizes us—this is actually coming

The Devil Debates an Angel
Course Five, Class One
Homework Master

from a seed in our mind, planted perhaps the week before, when we criticized someone else at work, for example.

Once we see that the sight and sound of our partner criticizing us as actually coming from us—and it's only an illusion to think that it's coming from them—then we no longer feel unhappy when it happens, because the only person to be unhappy at would be ourselves.

Rather, we simply take the steps that we have to take to stop the criticism: we stop criticizing others in our life. We are freed from the eight attitudes, because we no longer believe the illusion that anyone else is hurting us.]

4) How often are we wrapped in illusion?

[As verses 90 to 92 express, we are wrapped in illusion ALL DAY LONG: almost no one, in their entire life, gets out of this illusion, even for an hour. We are trapped in the illusion by our Tendency to Think that Things are Themselves, and as this monster himself describes it, he remains inside our mind like “the great salt sea, ever-present, never-beginning, staying and never to dry.”

Let's take the example of a health problem—something like a bad back. Our back hurts, and so we try all sorts of things to fix it: we might go to a chiropractor, or do some gentle yoga poses, or even undergo a dangerous and expensive operation.

It is an illusion though to think that these things, by themselves, can help our bad back. This is obvious from the fact that the chiropractor might hurt us more; and the same with the yoga and the operation.

A person who is trained in the Diamond Cutter Principles though steps out of the illusion. They know that it *is* possible for a doctor or yoga to help a bad back, but only if they possess sufficient seeds for this to happen. Anyone who thinks otherwise is still trapped in the illusion, and will continue to suffer and be disappointed as they go through life.]

The Devil Debates an Angel
Course Five, Class One
Homework Master

5) In verse 94, the bad guy describes a meditation which we can call Meditation on the Present Moment. He correctly criticizes this meditation, though, as nothing but a meditation on him! Does this meditation then have no role to play in our daily practice? And how does daily practice affect the illusion?

[The Meditation on the Present Moment can be very useful as a preparation for real meditation, even though by itself it does not directly keep us from falling into the illusion. That is, we can quiet our mind down by focusing on the here & now—by “being here now”—and this is a very good place from which to start meditating on stopping the illusion. There here & now though is not in itself an object which has the power to help us escape illusion and live a successful (meaning happy) life.

To lead a happy life, we do need a VERY REGULAR, daily practice. We need to be able to calm and focus the mind during a daily meditation session, and carry this calm to the rest of our day. Having a physical practice, such as yoga, which helps the prana or inner wind flow more smoothly is also an important daily practice. Serving others who are less fortunate than us is another essential daily practice, as is the formal study of authentic spiritual wisdom.

When we do have a regular daily practice which includes these four elements, then we find a place of calm and insight where we can see the illusion around us for what it is. We now understand that providing others with their wants and needs is the true path to gaining everything we ever wanted, for both ourselves and others.]

6) What are the Four Meditations built around this section of the ancient poem we are studying, *The Devil Debates an Angel*? How do we perform these four on a daily basis?

[The Four Meditations are done one after the other in a single daily meditation session. Here is how they are described:

The Devil Debates an Angel
Course Five, Class One
Homework Master

(1) Start with the Meditation on Complete Stillness. Simply see if you can physically sit completely still, without moving at all, even the tiniest bit. Sit as still as a stone, not even making any sound with your breath. This is only a preparation for real meditation.

(2) When you have reached a good stillness, then begin the Meditation on the Breath. See if you can count ten breaths without having your mind wander to anything else; if it does, then start over at “one”. A single breath in this meditation is a luxurious, silent exhale, followed by an inhale. This is another preparation, and not real meditation by itself.

(3) The Meditation on the Present Moment. Start to observe your own thoughts—which is actually a big part of Mahamudra, or the Great Seal: the main subject of our text by His Holiness the First Panchen Lama. See how many thoughts wander off to something that happened in the past, and how many to something which is coming up in your life in the future. Now place transparent diamond walls on the front and back of your skull, to block thoughts of future and past, respectively. Stay happy and content only in the present moment, and only in the place where you are sitting, with the people who are here now. Again this is only a preparation for real meditation.

(4) After you are completely present (in both time and space), then move on to the real meditation. This is the Meditation on the Golden Room, where you are sitting in a small cabin on top of a mountain. Golden light pours in windows all around, and coats the floor and all the objects in the cabin like liquid gold butter. Look out at the simple blue empty sky, and then bring the mind down to the horizon and see a wide beautiful valley stretching to the horizon. Finally ask your own Heart Teacher to enter the cabin and sit before you, locking their eyes upon yours in a gaze of love. Stay here happy and contented.]

Coffee shop assignment: Please meet with at least one other person—or better, a group of people—whom you didn’t know well before this teaching; do your homework together and discuss together any questions you have. Please write here where, when, and with whom you did your homework:

The Devil Debates an Angel
Course Five, Class One
Homework Master

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, do the first two of the Four Meditations: the Meditation on Complete Stillness; and the Meditation on the Breath.

Please write here the two times that you started these meditations (homeworks without these times will not be accepted):