

The Devil Debates an Angel
Course Two—How to Meditate, How Not to Meditate
Class One: A Car Centered in Traffic (verses 87-97)

1) What is the one point that both the Angel of Wisdom and the Devil of Misunderstanding both agree upon in the verses covered for this class? And why are they right?

[In the opening salvos of the current section of our text, both the Angel and the Devil agree that they cannot coexist within one person's mind: one of them must go. This is because the way that they view things is completely contradictory.

If we take the example of someone who is giving us a hard time in our lives nowadays—our boss, or our partner or one of our parents—the Devil takes them to be acting from their own side, by their own will. The Angel takes them as coming from how we have behaved towards someone else, say the week before.

The Angel says we cannot blame a single other person for anything bad that ever happens to us; and that we can achieve anything we want in life if we just provide to others, first.]

2) The Devil accuses the Angel of being ineffective, whereas he is highly productive, in eight different ways. Name them, and explain how the Devil produces them.

[The Devil of Misunderstanding everything in our life takes credit for being highly productive, in that he helps our mind produce the Eight Worldly Thoughts on a constant basis. These eight are the following four pairs of attitudes:

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(1) To be happy when we get something we want; and (2) unhappy when we don't.

(3) To be happy when we feel well; and (4) unhappy when we don't.

(5) To be happy when we acquire any measure of fame; and (6) unhappy when we cannot.

(7) To be happy when people praise us; and (8) unhappy when they criticize us.

It is very important that we understand exactly the point here. It's not that we shouldn't care whether we are happy or unhappy, or whether we get what we want or don't get what we want. If we understand karmic seeds clearly, then we will certainly be able to get everything we want, and there won't be any need to ever be unhappy. We shouldn't put up with less.

In the meantime though, we still have negative seeds ripening, and we have to keep our mental balance as they do. Not too upset when things go wrong, not too high when they go right for a while. Then we'll be able to maintain the clarity of mind that allows us to understand and plant the seeds for everything we ever want.]

3) In his text, His Holiness the First Panchen Lama is critical of a practice called "cutting thoughts of the three times." Explain the three parts of this view, and explain why by itself it is insufficient.

[This is all about dealing with worries and expectations, the past and the present.

The first part of this practice is "never to revisit the past"—not to dwell on worries or problems we've had in the past. The second part is to "never anticipate the future"—not to get caught up in expectations of the future.

Inbetween these two is the present, which we should leave as it has been "forever more," no complications, no additions: stay focused in the present moment, surrendering into it.

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His Holiness criticizes a meditation where this is all we do, because in itself this cannot solve our larger problems of death, old age, and all the problems of life. In surrendering to our feelings of the present moment, our sensation of the mind in the present, we are not doing anything to prevent the mind from doing what it has always done: misinterpreting where everything around us is coming from, not grasping that everything is coming from how we treat others.]

4) Describe an extremely *useful* version of this practice of “cutting thoughts of the three times,” using the analogy of a car centered in traffic, on two different levels.

[We can picture ourselves passing through life as being similar to a car moving along a 3-lane highway. There is a car moving ahead of us, which represents getting caught up in our plans or worries about the future, even so far as the expectations we have for the next hour or two. In meditation, we consciously work on not letting the mind wander to the future.

There is also a car behind us, which represents getting stuck in pleasant past memories or worrying, dwelling especially on disappointments from the past, things that people have done to hurt us, plans that didn't work out. We let these go, and during meditation we refuse to let the mind go to the car behind us.

To either side of us we can even picture two more cars, one representing worries, and the other representing expectations, past present or future.

Staying centered in the present moment of our own car, even as we move through life, is a beautiful state of mind that we can develop—a kind of focus and attention and appreciation of where we are right now, without worries or expectations.

This kind of focus leads us naturally to a higher kind of centering, which is where we stay at what might be called “zero point,” staying in the awareness of an empty point, where there exist no people or situations in our life which are coming from their own side, and not from how we have treated others. Over time, this higher centering allows us to build a new

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and beautiful world, as we treat others the way we would like to be treated, since one is the true cause for the other.]

5) His Holiness also criticizes a type of meditation where we try not to think of anything, saying that it involves “inconsistencies in cause and effect.” Explain.

[His Holiness the First Panchen Lama criticizes a type of meditation where we try very hard to meditate (which means *to think hard on one thing only*) about thinking about nothing, which of course is a contradiction.

A commentary on this idea says, very concisely, that we can’t expect a corn seed to produce a banana. Our goal is to reach the state of enlightenment, where there is nothing that we don’t know, or can’t think. To engage in a practice of meditation where we purposely don’t think of anything is like a corn seed, and could never produce the banana of enlightenment!]

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:

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, trying to keep the “car” of your mind centered in traffic on four sides. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:



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Class Two: Work, then Surrender (verses 98-108)

1) In these verses of his work, His Holiness the First Panchen Lama speaks about a mistaken meditation which he calls “an exploration to see if the mind is a physical thing.” What would be the point of such an exploration?

[It is said that—in order to get to the real truth behind our life—we need to identify what we thought was there but which was never there; sort of like realizing that a mouse that we thought we saw scurrying across the road at dusk was not a mouse at all, but just a windblown leaf.

The leaf was not a mouse, but thinking it was a mouse could have caused us a serious accident trying to avoid hitting it. And so things that we thought were there but which weren’t there can really hurt us.

A real-life example would be thinking that a person who criticizes us regularly is coming from their own side; that they want to criticize us, and so they do. But this person is not really there: the only person who is there is a person who criticizes us because we planted a seed in our mind to see them—and so if we stop criticizing, we can stop seeing ourselves being criticized.

Now some people in ancient times in Tibet heard that we were supposed to see what things were not. But they made a mistake with an idea called *shentong*, which means that a thing is the opposite of everything it’s not.

Now this is true: an apple, for example, is the opposite or reverse of everything that is not an apple. And our mind is the opposite of all the physical parts of us.

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But this kind of finding out that we're not something else doesn't help us, it doesn't help us deal for example with a person who is criticizing us. What helps us to see that they are not is to see that they are not coming from anywhere but ourselves. Then when can change ourselves, and they will change.]

2) Wise Ones of ancient Tibet used to talk about a meditation called "seeing the naked mind, the raw mind." How could this kind of meditation be mistaken?

[Seeing the "naked" or "raw" condition of the mind doesn't refer to just watching the mind closely. Our mind right now is filled with misunderstanding of how the world really works, and the more we watch it in our current condition the more likely we are to continue misunderstanding. And so seeing the "raw" mind doesn't refer to the apparent nature of the mind as it has always been.

Rather, it refers again to reaching to an understanding that the mind isn't coming *at* us, it's coming *from* us. Starting a meditation by watching our mind, by watching the thoughts in our mind, is great. That's a perfect place to start. But then we have to try to understand where these thoughts are really coming from.

If you think about it, we are *listening* to these thoughts, rather than *having* them purposely. Those of us who are prone to anger or to depression realize that we can't always make the mind do what we want it to: that we don't really have control over our thoughts.

During a correct "naked mind" meditation, we try to see where our thoughts and feeling are really coming from, which is both the kindness we have shown to others, and the kind thoughts we try to think of others, forgiving them, praising them mentally, refusing to judge them.]

3) His Holiness criticizes a meditation called "the unstoppable mind." What are some different ways of understanding the Tibetan word for this meditation, and how does Je Tsongkapa, the teacher of His Holiness the First Dalai Lama, critique this meditation?

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[The Tibetan word for “unstoppable” here is *sangtel*. It can refer to a meditation which “cuts to the core” (one meaning of *sangtel*) of something, or it can also refer to a meditation where we imagine that everything is equal, like the dust (another meaning of *sangtel*) that is spread evenly across the ground.

In either case, the basic idea behind this meditation is mistaken. As Je Tsongkapa describes it, this is an approach is “talk that spreads dark ideas.” The people doing this meditation have heard someone say that everything in the world—good and bad, pain and pleasure—are all the same, like the little pieces of dust on the ground across the world. And so in their meditation, and in their lives, they make no attempt to help others, and not to hurt them.

They try to meditate on nothing at all, and not to feel happy or sad, good or bad.

But these people have misunderstood the meaning of everything being the same. What it really means can be understood from looking at someone who criticizes us, and at someone else who appreciates us, and who says so.

On one level, these two people are the same. They are each coming from seeds in our mind that were planted there by how we ourselves have acted towards others in the past. One person is criticizing us because we were critical of others in the past. Another is expressing their appreciation for us because we expressed our appreciation for others.

And so in this sense—in coming from how we’ve been acting ourselves—these two are exactly the same. But this doesn’t mean that they are the same otherwise!

One of them hurts us, and one is a pleasure—in this sense they are completely different. It’s completely right to want to change the one who is hurting us: to be happy, and to make others happy, is the whole point of the spiritual path, and of a human life.

And if you think about it, the fact that both people are the same is what we can use to change the one who is unpleasant. If they come from me, then I

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can change them, by changing the seeds I put in my mind—by changing how I act towards others.]

4) Why does the Devil say that people are confusing about him existing, and not existing? How can we apply here the instructions of Machik Labdrun, the famous woman yoga who lived in Tibet 1,000 years ago, who said: “Concentrate the mind with effort, and then surrender into it; this is where you will find the mind”?

[The Devil makes the point that some people meditate only on their thoughts—for example, in the “centering” meditation where we try to stay in the present moment, by watching our thoughts in the moment, and cutting off those of the (1) past or (2) future, of (3) expectations or (4) worries. We try to stay in the center of these four, like a car locked in by four other cars around it in traffic, not letting our mind go to them—blocking these thoughts off with four invisible walls.

If they just stop here, watching their thoughts in the present moment, then these people are only aware that the mind exists; and in untrained people the Devil of misunderstanding always exists within it.

Or else people misunderstand the statement that this misunderstanding doesn’t really exist, thinking that it means that in reality there is no such misunderstanding. The Devil *does* exist, we *do* misunderstand, but he doesn’t exist from anywhere else but the seeds we put in our mind, for example by refusing to share what we know with others, and helping them to understand.

So he both exists and doesn’t exist, but we have to understand why.

In a practical sense, we can work to develop the ability to stay in the present moment, free of hopes and fears. Then, as Machik Labdrun says, we need to put some intense concentration and effort into understanding *where the present moment of quiet* is coming from, so that we can bring it on whenever we want. We concentrate on the fact that this quiet contentment comes from helping others, all the time.

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After we make the effort to understand it, we can then surrender into the quiet: we can be there in the contentment, a higher contentment and happiness.]

5) How rare, according to the Devil, is a person who really meditates correctly? And what is the immense and unique power that can help any of us to become one of these rare jewels among meditators?

[The Devil gives two examples to describe how rare people are who know how to meditate correctly. In one case he says that they are “as common as a star which shines in the middle of the day.” And then he says that meditators who are able to invite the Angel into their mind are as common as an udumbara flower, which is a mythical bloom which opens only once in a thousand years.

But even the Devil realizes *how* a person becomes a great meditator, and how they invite the Angel into their mind. He says, “And that can only come by pleasing the one who is your Lama.” The most important point for meditation then is to find a qualified meditation teacher, and to follow their instructions with dedication and devotion.]

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, do the meditation with the four invisible walls to come into the present moment. Then follow Machik Labdrun’s advice for the thoughts of the present moment, working hard to see that happy thoughts come from serving others all the time, and then surrendering into the present moment of that contented service. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations: