

The Devil Debates an Angel

Homework Master, Course Four:
Getting Your Life to Work
In a World that Isn't What it Seems

Name _____

Date _____

City _____

Class Two: The Canyons of Understanding (verses 78-86)

1) Things may be an illusion, but things do work. And when something works, it's because something else causes it to—so things depend on their causes to happen. Explain though the difference between an apparent cause and a real cause, in the example of a car starting because the key was turned in the ignition.

[When we want our car to start, we stick a key into the ignition and turn it. We believe this is the cause that makes the car start.

Sometimes though our car *doesn't* start when we turn the key—which very simply proves that the key is not the cause that makes the car start. We *think* it's the cause because (hopefully) turning the key does often make it start.

We have to look for the real cause though: the deeper cause. This is the cause that makes the key work when it does—and it's missing whenever we turn the key and the car doesn't start.

That cause is the seed within our mind to see our car start. When we're looking for the mental seed of an event, we need to look for something similar, that we did to someone else. The *real* cause to see your car start then is helping other people to get somewhere—giving rides to people, things like that.

This could put the repair shops out of business!]

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2) His Holiness repeats that “things happen, but only from the mind; things fade, but only from the mind.” Explain, in terms of a partner showing up in our life.

[In this system, which we can call the Diamond Cutter System (after the famous sutra of the same name), the “sure-fire” way to find a partner is to plant a seed for one.

Since the reason that we want a partner is not to be lonely, we need to plant the seed by providing companionship to someone who is lonely. We could for example visit that elderly woman who is in a nursing home and needs company.

The actual visit is the third of the Four Steps to a Dream. The first step is to decide what dream that we want (a partner). The second step is very important, since it plants a lot of seeds: planning our visit to the elderly lady, thinking a lot about what we’ll take for them, what we’ll say to them (the more time spent, the more seeds).

The fourth step is relax before bed, on the bed, and ruminate about what a good thing we’re doing, remembering how she smiled and how grateful she was.

To prevent this all from being selfish though, we reflect throughout on how—if we succeed in this new system—we can set a good example that might spread to thousands of people.

So we planted these seeds, to try to find a boyfriend, and now we’re sitting in Starbucks. A good-looking man walks in the door, and glances towards the extra chair at our table. This is the moment in which the karmic seed cracks open within our mind.

A tiny image of this man sitting down next to us forms within the depths of the mind, as the seed cracks open. This image is projected out from the mind and comes between our eyes and the man at the door; and so we see him sitting down.

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And so we become partners, because the seeds that we planted with the elderly woman through all four of the steps are opening all this time, and cause us to see a partner.

He is happening, but “only from the mind.” By the way, a man who is coming “only from the mind” as we’ve explained it here *is just as real as any man you’ve ever thought wasn’t coming from the mind*. These mental images are darned good—he kisses just the same! And he was always coming from the mind.

Now we have to keep visiting the elderly woman throughout our partnership (and in fact it’s very powerful to visit her *with* our partner), or else gradually we’ll start to drift away from our partner. We need to keep replenishing those seeds that get used up every hour just having him with us.

If we don’t replenish these seeds, then he will “fade from the mind”: his image, and his reality, will slowly start to fade as the old seeds wear out. And so continued visits to our elderly friend are crucial!]

3) Explain what His Holiness means when he says that “the reflection of the moon of wisdom appears in the still water of emptiness.”

[Here, wisdom is being compared to the moon, which can only be reflected upon the water of a lake if that surface of the water is smooth and undisturbed.

The moon is always a metaphor in India and Tibet for cooling light: for a light of understanding which helps us “cool down” negative emotions like anger or jealousy. The way this happens, as we know, is that wisdom means understanding: an understanding of where things are really coming from. We can’t get too mad at our boss if we realize that whatever yelling we see him doing is coming from some yelling that we did ourselves last week.

This understanding can only come to us—the moon can only reflect—if the surface of our mind is quiet and still. This stillness we get by practicing our meditation every day, even if it’s only for a short time. Things like not staying on the computer for more than an hour or an hour and a half at a

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time; and having a home which is always clean and simple, neat and orderly, are a big help towards achieving this stillness of mind.

Now the last question here is why His Holiness would talk about the “still water of *emptiness*.” For the answer to that, go on to the next question!]

4) Why does His Holiness keep calling emptiness “the mind as it really is?”

[We’ve seen how outside things, like a pen or a yelling boss, are coming from the seeds we planted in our minds earlier—by sharing office supplies with a co-worker, or by yelling at our kids. Now we have to look into where the things inside of us are coming from.

Let’s say that we often feel sad, or depressed. We “hear” sad thoughts in our mind. It’s important to realize that we can be *saying* these sad thoughts in our mind and *listening* to them at the same time. What’s really happening is that seeds from the past are opening up in our mind, saying whole sentences, and we hear them a millisecond after that. This is the way that the mind “really is.” It’s “empty” of coming from its own side.

This means that we can’t really control our thoughts in the present moment; just as we can’t control our boss in the present moment. We need to plant new good seeds, and then as they open we will “hear” our mind being more happy.

Of course if we want a mango we need to plant a mango seed; and if we want to hear happier thoughts in our mind we need to do the Four Steps on someone else, to give them some support and suggestions on how to be happier. So we’re going to have to keep our ears out for a friend or family member who is going through a bit of depression themselves, and help them out.

This by the way is not just a suggestion or a good thing to do. It is the *only* way that we can pull ourselves out of a bout of depression. And it *always* works.]

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5) How do the words of His Holiness' own poetry actually *work* to bring us understanding? Why does he compare these words to an echo in a canyon?

[The words of His Holiness' text on the debate between the Angel and the Devil don't work from their own side any more than an aspirin does. There's nothing *in* a certain combination of words that can teach us something, any more than there's something *in* an aspirin—some so-called “active” ingredient—that can help us get rid of a headache.

What makes the active ingredient active is, of course, seeds within our own mind. What makes words make sense to us—what makes them speak to us, or educate us—is seeds that we planted before, by trying to help someone else understand something.

If we come to understand these Diamond Cutter principles, then we can achieve anything that we want to in our life: financial security, a good relationship, youthful health and vigor—even a world of peace, free of hunger or poverty. But understanding these principles, and having them work for us, is also something that is coming from seeds, and we need to plant them by sharing what we do understand with others.

That is, each one of us needs to become a teacher of these ideas, which can bring happiness to the entire world. Just the idea that—whatever we want in our own life—we can get it by providing it first to someone else.

The “echo in a canyon” mentioned by His Holiness is a reference to this great truth. Our entire life is an echo: we only receive back what we have sent out to others, just as words yelled into a canyon float back to us, repeated many times.

We need to teach, if we want to understand. And if we understand, we have a perfect world, and all our dreams come true.]

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:

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, think of something you want in your life; then make a list of the apparent causes for it, and a list of its real causes.

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