



BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

Gelong Thubten, University of Helsinki, April 9, 2013

[Audio](#)

Introduction by Professor René Gothóni:

Our guest today is a Tibetan Buddhist monk Gelong Thubten. I'm professor in comparative religion in the University since 15 years, and we are very honored to have you here, though I have to say you are not the first one, and probably not the last one, either. The first Buddhist monk we had here was in 1971, when this department of religion was very young. It started one year before, 1970. Dr Das visited from Sri Lanka, and another one was Nyanatiloka. And two years ago we had Dalai Lama, so you are in good company.

Gelong Thubten: The expectations will be quite high ☺

René Gothóni: Gelong Thubten became a monk in 1993 and he is living in Scotland where they founded [Kagyu Samye Ling](#), an establishment, a Tibetan Buddhist centre, which is the first centre I understand in the west. We can congratulate you, because it's not so easy to find support. He is famous for giving lectures around the world, as we discussed before, not only in universities but also – which is very important, of course – in hospitals, schools and companies, prisons, social services and did I understand correctly, you are expert in mindfulness, or that is one of the topics?

Gelong Thubten: I'm not an expert, but I do talk about mindfulness as a stress-management method.

René Gothóni: And that is of course one of the very basic things in Buddhism. I remember I was myself in Sri Lanka in 1974-75 as a scholar doing research among Theravada monks, and there is a Buddhist Publication Society near to Candy.

Gelong Thubten: I've been there. They have many books, I went to that place and there is a Publishing House.

René Gothóni: There is a very famous area, a stupa, the wheel etc. Without further do I am very pleased that you are here. Now we are going to listen to the topic. This is of course interesting for all of us, because the topic is Buddhist Principles for a Better Society. The whole of Europe is in economic crisis and we all want to know how we can do better... anyway, we are all interested to hear what you have to say.

Gelong Thubten:

Thank you for inviting me to speak this afternoon.

I'm going to speak about some of the main principles of Buddhism and how they can be applied in a very practical way in our society, which doesn't mean that one has to become a Buddhist. I have no interest in converting people into Buddhism.

Actually the subject I'm going to be teaching is a subject that can be applied by anybody. It has not really anything to do with religion. It has to do with understanding our minds better in order to be more happy, in order to create a happy environment around us.

So the two main things I want to talk about are meditation and compassion. What I'm explaining comes from the Buddhist teachings, but I'm not going to use much Buddhist terminology, because I want to present this in a way that everybody can feel there is something that you can take with you for your own life. Really, meditation is simply a technique for understanding our minds better and that's something everybody can benefit from. The foundation for meditation training is to really understand that it's our mind that is the most important thing.

When we look at our basic motivation in life, what we are all looking for is happiness and less suffering. This basic principle of wanting happiness and wanting freedom from suffering, that's the thing that's there for all of us, and then it expresses itself in more different ways. People have all kinds of varied lifestyles, people are doing all kinds of different things, but deep down inside, everybody wants to be happy, even people who like to be miserable. It is their kind of happiness.

And the main understanding in Buddhism is that the place where happiness resides is in our mind. So if we can turn within and look at our mind, we can find peace, we can find inner happiness. Sometimes we call it inner wealth, the true wealth. Of course it's very interesting to apply this principle in terms of what is happening now in Europe with the economic crisis. I like a lot to talk about what I call the wealth of happiness, that really happiness is our true wealth. And this is the opposite to the normal social conditioning which talks about the happiness of wealth. People think that there is the happiness of wealth – if we have wealth, then we will be happy. Whereas, I would say, it's the other way around. If we have a lot of happiness, then we will be wealthy, because wealth is a mental experience. It's not about what you have.

So, the whole training of meditation is based on looking within and working on our mind...because all of our suffering, our depression, anxiety, fear, anger, jealousy, all of our problems, ultimately stem from the mind. Even if they are related to situations, it's the mind that is experiencing the situation. And if everybody can understand a little bit of this, then the world would be a better place. Because it means that people will be taking responsibility for their own reactions. We tend to live in a culture of blame, a culture where we blame others, it's always somebody else's fault. We go to therapy, and the therapist might tell you it's your mother's fault, it's your father's fault. Our culture so much encourages finding that it's somebody else's fault. But the principle in Buddhism is that it's nobody's fault, it's more that we need to change our way of thinking, because our experience of life is our experience. And if we turn within and work with that, we can change it.

So, a lot of people think that meditation is about not thinking. People have a funny idea about meditation. I teach meditation in lots of different situations. And I found that in all those situations people have an idea that meditation is about emptying your mind and having no thoughts. Going into a kind of trance or empty space. That's not meditation. That's actually unconsciousness. That's like being in a coma. If you want to get rid of all of your thoughts, you don't need to do years of meditation. You just inject yourself with an anesthetic. Or you walk very fast into a wall until you fall unconscious. And then you will have no thoughts. But as a Buddhist practitioner, or whether one calls oneself Buddhist or not, just a meditator, that's not the aim. The aim is to learn to be less bothered by our thoughts. It doesn't mean to get rid of them. It means to learn to accept them, and let them go.

This inner process of self-acceptance – if everybody can learn that through meditation – then this will of course effect our relations with others. Meditation means that you sit quietly... I'm not going to teach meditation, I'm just talking of this principle as a general thing. But meditation means you sit quietly and you focus on the present moment. So, some people for example observe their own breathing, some people use visualizations, some people use prayer, some people count. There are all kinds of different methods, but they all boil down to the same thing, which is that you sit quietly and you observe the present moment, you focus your mind on the present moment, because so much of our stress is based around the past and the future. There are three things that cause us stress. There is remembering difficult things from the past, there's worrying about the future, and the third thing is wishing that the present was different to how it

actually is. So, we remember the past, we worry about the future and we try to manipulate the present. And that's where all our stress and suffering comes from.

Meditation is where you relax deeply into the present moment and just remain with it in a non-judgmental way. And this helps us to find happiness, because we discover that in the present moment is a huge source of happiness, huge nourishment. It's very interesting; when you start to meditate you start to notice how much we look for nourishment from outer things. When I say nourishment I mean emotional support, emotional nourishment. We look to outer things for support. And when you start to meditate, you start to find that within yourself there's a great peace, a great inner happiness. It's like a well inside you filled with very nourishing water, and you can dip a cup into that water and drink it whenever you want. Meditation training becomes like that. You find more and more inner peace, inner happiness. You find you are sort of centred and you can remain within, I mean within yourself there is a centre where you can remain and find peace. And one starts to work with one's difficult emotions and difficult reactions, one starts to process them, and learn to let them go, and to not be trapped by them. And this is how we find more and more freedom.

So, the basic principle in Buddhism is that we all need to take responsibility for our own minds. And what we can do as an individual is to do that for ourselves, and then allow it to influence our environment. We can't tell everyone: "You have to meditate". We can't run up to people and say: "you need to meditate". But we can do it. If we meditate, then our mind will become more peaceful, our personality will become more accepting, less judgmental, more compassionate etc. And then, surely, wherever we go that will affect our environment. Just like when you throw or drop a stone into a lake and the ripples spread, one thing causes the next. Everything is interconnected.

The Buddhist philosophy talks a lot of interdependence; that everything is related, everything is linked. So what we do and how we are effects our environment. Even in a really simple way, when you go shopping, you go to the supermarket and there you are at the check-out counter. And there's the person behind the counter. She or he sees person after person after person; they are scanning your shopping, and you are the money. If you are somebody who is more aware, and you are more compassionate and you have done some meditation, then when you are in the queue and you get to the check-out till, just the way you look at that person, the way you interact with that person, can really help them, it can really make them feel good. And surely they will then transmit that to the next person in the queue. So, even in that tiny simple way, the way we respond to other people, empowers them to respond in that way to those around them.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said: "Inner peace leads to world peace". Inner peace leads to world peace. I think that's a very beautiful statement. What he meant is, I think, what I'm talking about here. That is, if we all develop peaceful minds, compassionate minds, then that will spread. That will affect our environment. Because what is society? Society is the sum total of its individuals. We are all those individuals. So, we can affect our environment in a positive way through changing our own mind.

But then a very important thing is to think very clearly about what is meant by altruism, and what is selfishness, and what is the difference between these two things. So this is the next subject I want to mention. In Buddhism we talk a lot about compassion. Compassion is a very difficult word to use to sum up the entire teaching, because we tend to have quite a partial view of compassion. I like the word altruism. The word altruism suggests that one is interested in the welfare of others, almost you can say putting others first, less wrapped up in ourselves and more interested in the welfare of others. And this is the heart of Buddhist training. When they asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama to define Buddhism he said: "my religion is kindness". And he meant that Buddhism is the training in compassion. The definition of Buddhism is compassion training.

So, I think it's a very interesting thing to think about, to think what is meant by altruism; how does that feel and how does selfishness feel? So, I'd like to encourage all of you to sit some time quietly, not now but

later, and think about these things. Think about: how does it feel to be altruistic and how does it feel to be selfish, because I think this analysis or examination is the starting point for developing one's compassion. So the way I do it, is that I sit down quietly and I think: well, let me just taste the flavor of this experience. How does it feel when, well, let's start with selfishness, how does it feel when I'm being very selfish? What is the flavor of that state? What is the flavor of that emotion? And then compare that with how does it feel when I'm being compassionate? This is a very interesting exercise, because it leads you to understand a lot about yourself and about others and about the world at large. And it's such a simple thing.

Buddhism is an amazing path, because it involves simply looking at one's mind. It doesn't involve following a dogma. The Buddha himself said: "Don't believe anything I say". That's most famous statement of the Buddha, he said: "Don't believe it." He said: "Test it for yourselves." So, we are not asked to follow a dogma or a belief system, we are actually being asked to investigate our own minds. And of course the Buddha gave methods and techniques to help us do that. But isn't it wonderful to find a method that you can look at yourself and make your own mind up? That's what inspires me about Buddhism.

So, this exercise is very simple. I'll teach it to you now and then you can try it out at home later. You'll find it very interesting. What you do is sit down and think about: how is it when I am feeling selfish, by selfish I mean putting myself first and others second. It's *me*. I'm thinking about myself, I'm wrapped up in my own problems, it's all about me. How does that feel? What is the taste or flavor of that sensation mentally, physically, emotionally, whatever?

When we are looking into that what we discover is that our selfish side – because we all have different sides, we have a selfish side, a compassionate side, a generous side, a stingy side – looking at these different aspects of our personality, what we discover is that our selfish side isn't really that happy. Our selfish side is quite small-minded. It's almost like the mind shrinks. When we are selfish, our mind becomes quite small, because the selfish mind is full of conditions: "This condition has to be met for me to be happy, that condition needs to be met for me to be happy. I need this, I need that. I don't want this, I don't want that." We have a whole list of things that have to be just right in order for the world to suit us. So, it's quite a tense, anxious state of mind. And what happens is when we are very selfish we tend to become quite obsessive about our own problems. We tend to – it's like we shine a spotlight on our own problems and they become bigger. We are shining a light on our own problems, almost like putting our problems under a microscope, because we're obsessed about them; we're not interested in the welfare of others, we are only thinking about our own welfare and so our problems naturally become much bigger than they really are and we suffer more.

Then it's also very interesting to think, when I'm selfish, what kind of an effect does that have on society? What kind of an effect does it have on situations around me? What kind of feedback do I get from others? So, that's also interesting exercise. You sit and you think about that. So, when I'm really selfish, how does that affect my environment? Well, obviously, nobody else is going to be very happy, because here it's me just thinking about myself and not really interested in other people. So, when somebody is selfish, that selfish person doesn't really have many friends. Nobody really wants to be around us, because we are so caught up in ourselves, we are so selfish, we are not very giving, not very kind, we are not forgiving. We are irritable, hard to be around, we are judgmental, we are criticizing others, we are always criticizing everything: "Oh, the temperature is not right in here, the lighting is not right, this is not right, that is not right. You need to make me happy, you need to do this, you need to do that." We're always saying these things or sort of giving off the energy of these kinds of things, anyway.

So, the selfish person ends up quite lonely because nobody really wants to be around them. We get a lot of negative feedback when we're selfish. We are being selfish and people are picking up on that, they feed back negatively to us, and they don't want to be around us. And then we start to think: "Nobody likes me." We start to think: "Everybody hates me." And then we start to hate ourselves. And then we go into a downward spiral of misery. So, it's very interesting to look at this selfish mind from all angles: how does it

feel within ourselves? How is it perceived by the others around us? How does it work in terms of our interaction with the world? And then one thinks in terms of the whole of society, how is it when everybody is being selfish?

One of my teachers is Kenting Tai Situpa. He is a highly esteemed Tibetan lama. He is one of the heads of our particular school of Tibetan Buddhism. And he used to travel a lot in the west, but of course he is from Tibet, he was born in Tibet, and he currently lives in India. He was being driven in Scotland through one of these typical Scottish towns with lots of houses – we call them terraced houses, where there's one house next to the next, many doors down one street, all houses joined to each other. And he was being driven down this road and he said: "You people in the West live in a very funny way." He said: "You all live right next door to each other, with only a thin wall separating you from your neighbor, but you don't even know their name. You don't talk to each other. And you are so close!"

It's funny.....when we go to bed at night, we are breathing in our neighbor's face, because his bed is on the other side of the wall. There's only a thin wall separating us but we don't know them.

And he said: "In Tibet we have lots of space. And many are nomads, who live in tents or in various locations with lots of space, but they know each other and there's a feeling of community."

So, it's a very interesting idea to think how we are all these selfish people, piled up in boxes in our towns just thinking about ourselves in our own environment, and not connecting with each other. And it's actually quite strange. And does it lead to happiness? Has it led to a harmonious society? Has it led to a feeling of no stress, to a feeling of peace? No, it hasn't.

So, back to our exercise – we are looking at how selfishness feels. How does it function? What's it like? So, we feel how the mind becomes very small, the mind becomes very tight, the mind becomes very rigid. It's like life becomes our potential enemy all the time. When I am just thinking about me, I am constantly thinking: will this person or this situation be all right for me? I'm judging all the time. Can I go there, will it be ok? Everything is potentially dangerous for us. We are constantly trying to push everything away. And we are constantly caught up in wanting something, or trying to get away from something else.

The Buddha said: "In the selfish mind, there's a lot of desire," where 'desire' is general term for any kind of wanting something. I don't just mean physical, sexual, desire. I mean any kind of attaching to something or trying to get something. He said the selfish mind is full of this desire. Desire is like drinking salt water to get rid of your thirst. But the more you drink, the thirstier you become. And it's like that, isn't it? We never really get what we want in life, because even when we get it, we want something else. Isn't it interesting how we want certain things? We put a lot of effort into getting them, and when we get them, we suddenly realize: "Oh, it wasn't that that I wanted, I want something different." Then we just go after something else and we might get it or we might not. If we get it, we think: "Oh, no, I want something bigger or better. " So, we never actually stop and feel satisfied. It's like an endless void that we are trying to fill and it's never filled.

So it's interesting to examine this within ourselves. To look at oneself and think: "How does that feel?" I think this is very important. And this is the only way I want to explain this subject to you. I mean, here we are in a University situation, I've come here as a visiting speaker to give a lecture, but I'm not really interested in giving you a boring lecture about Buddhism, because you can read all that in books. What I really like to do, is to give you some exercises that you can take home with you; not to become Buddhist, but just to look at yourself. And I think that then I've given you something useful. You can read all the other stuff in books.

So, back to our exercise. We are thinking about this selfishness. How does it feel, what's it like? Let's really get into it mentally and examine it. Then, when we've spent some time, a few minutes, thinking about that, we then think of the other side of the coin. How does it feel when we are not being selfish and instead we are being more altruistic, when we are actually putting others first and not putting ourselves first? How does that feel? What's that like? What's the quality of that? What's the taste of it? What's the sensation of it like?

So, we sort of imagine that, we get into that feeling, and we taste it, feel it, and explore it. And we start to discover, that it's completely the opposite of the selfish mind. Where the selfish mind is very tight and constricted like shrunken, the compassionate mind, or the altruistic mind is very open and spacious, because one is accommodating the needs and wishes of others. So, one becomes more expanded and more relaxed. The more open our mind becomes, the more relaxed we feel.

The generous mind is like a kind of fertile field, where anything can grow. The selfish mind is like a desert: hard, dry, cracked, nothing can grow there. The positive experiences of life can't grow in a dry place, they can only grow in a fertile field, and generous mind is like a fertile field, where all kinds of positive experiences can grow. Also, how we saw the selfish mind – there was this feeling that we are putting all our problems under a microscope. You know, when we are selfish we are shining a light on our own problems and we are obsessing about them and they become so big, while on the other side, with the altruistic mind, or the compassionate mind, we're not so wrapped up in our own suffering. We are more looking out at others trying to see what we can do for them, how can I help you and you. We're focused on the sufferings of others and how to alleviate those sufferings. So, we're not so wrapped up in ourselves. You could say the microscope is taken off the ego. We're not focusing on the ego anymore. It's like taking the heat off, taking the pressure off. Then one's own problems are put into perspective. We're not busy digging around in our own rubbish bin looking what's there. So, naturally the problems will become less heavy.

Our problems are there because we focus on them. If we take the pressure off and become more compassionate, we can find that they start to dissolve. Because what is a problem? It's a mental experience ultimately. And are these mental experiences real, solid objects in our mind, or are they more like thoughts that we repeat again, again, and again? So, if we stop hammering away with those thoughts, they will naturally start to become less troublesome for us. Through compassion our problems become less heavy.

Then, do you remember how in the first exercise of selfishness we looked at how that affects our environment, and what kind of feedback we get? And we saw how when we are selfish nobody wants to be our friend, we end up very lonely. So, what is it like when we are compassionate, kind, generous, non-judgmental, forgiving, altruistic? What is that like in terms of our environment? How is it for others? Well, obviously it's good for others, because when we're compassionate, we are helping others. We give them help, we give them kindness, so others benefit, but it's also very interesting to see how we benefit. We all know that compassion is beneficial for others, but how does it help us? That's very interesting. Because at the end of the day, no matter how spiritual you feel, there's always a little voice inside, saying: "What's in it for me?" So, we need to look and ask: "What's in it for me?" How can compassion actually help me as well?

Well, quite simply, we look at when we are kind and compassionate, what kind of feedback we get from others. What we discover is that everybody wants to be our friend. When you are a generous, loving, kind person, people are drawn to you like a magnet. When somebody walks into a room and that person is an easy-going, relaxed, kind person, who is interested in the welfare of others, everybody can feel that, they are drawn to them and they want to be their friend. Actually, people will happily do anything for you, because they know that you would do anything for them. So, you are getting a lot of positive feedback from your environment. Everybody likes you. Everybody wants to help you, because they know that you would help them. So, you start to feel very happy, you start to feel like everybody loves you, that you have lots of friends. You are in a harmonious situation within yourself and also around yourself. So, the compassionate person feels very loved, very protected, and very safe. Totally the opposite of the selfish person.

So, isn't it interesting and very sad and very ironic to see how, when we are selfish, we are only doing it because we want to be happy... and yet we get the opposite. We get exactly the opposite of what we intended. We get into selfishness, because we just want to be happy. And all we end up with is misery and loneliness. And we get sort of frightened of altruism, because we think: "What about me, I will become like a doormat!" And actually the irony is that the less we think about ourselves, the more we think about

others, the happier we become. That's why I call this the psychology of compassion. And I think it's a very interesting exercise, because you start to look at how compassion not only helps everybody else, but it also helps us.

And we need to do it that way because you can read all these great texts, from the great religious traditions, like Christianity, Buddhism, when they say 'love thy neighbor', or in Buddhism, when they say 'be compassionate to all beings'. You can read these beautiful statements and you can think, well, that's wonderful, that's great. But always inside, there's a little voice, saying: "But, what about me?" So, what we need to do is, turn around and face that voice and say: "Listen. I'll tell exactly what's in it for you: if you give up thinking of yourself, you will actually be happy." So, we need to tell our ego, that the only way we will actually find happiness is through thinking of others. Because, of course compassion helps others, but let's look at how it helps us, and that's very interesting.

So, after doing this exercise one comes to a point where one thinks: "Well, compassion is something worth developing, worth training in. It's something I'd like to sort of encourage in my mind; it's something I would like to grow. It's like a precious seed that I want to water to let it grow." We start to feel inspired to develop more and more altruism, because we can see that it will help others, and it will help us. So, then we can train in it. We can train and develop in it.

In Buddhism we talk about unconditional compassion. It's very interesting to look at that. What is meant by unconditional compassion? In Buddhism we also talk about: "Compassion starts with yourself." It's very interesting. What does that mean? Let's look at these two ideas briefly. Unconditional compassion means to have kindness, love and compassion towards all others, no matter what.

So, this is a very strong kind of bravery, courage, because normally our compassion is threatened when others do harm to us. And we get into anger and resentment. But forgiveness is actually a very powerful thing. If somebody hurts us, and people do, people hurt each other all the time due to ignorance. Nobody really means it. When I feel hurt, when somebody hurts me, and then I sit there feeling hurt, there's a part of myself that thinks: "They really planned that, and they really meant it." And I've got this sort of an image in my head, where they're sitting in a laboratory drawing up blueprints and plans on how to damage Thubten. "How can I really get him?" We start to think people are out to get us. But it's very false really, because people hurt us just through their own ignorance.

When somebody is being negative and harmful, angry and judgmental and nasty, are they really planning it, or could you say that they are controlled by their own negativity? How we know that is when we look at ourselves. If I look at myself, I see how I lose my temper; if somebody really winds me up then I lose my temper, and I shout at them, and afterwards I think: "Oh, my goodness, where did that come from?" It's something I had no control of. I didn't sit down to plan it and think: "Hmm, now, I'm going to get angry and lose my temper." It's like vomiting, it just comes out. So, if we see that that's what's we're like, then surely, we can think that that's what everybody else is like too. So, when somebody is harming me, it's like they are vomiting uncontrollably and there's nothing they can do about it. So, it's kind of crazy that I sit there thinking "they planned that", "they really meant it" and "I hate them" and "how dare they". Instead, we can think: "They couldn't help it."

In Buddhism we say: "When somebody is behaving badly or hurting or harming others, they are like somebody with a fever and we should be like a mother with a feverish child." So, supposing you're a mother and you have a small child who has a delirious fever. And you are trying to put your child to bed, or trying to feed them, trying to calm them down and they are completely mad with fever, and they start biting you and pushing you away and kicking you. You as the mother don't think, "Oh my goodness, my child hates me and I hate them back!" Instead you feel totally moved by the fact that your child is sick and crazy from the sickness and you will do anything to help them, because you can see that they are completely out of control.

So, the Buddha said, we should try to apply that kind of mentality in all situations. When somebody is trying to harm us we should think that they are like my feverish child, my child with fever. They don't know what they're doing, so it's not logical to react with anger. It's more sensible to respond with compassion and understanding. Which definitely doesn't mean that we become a victim, we become a doormat and sort of lie in the road saying: "Please kick me and abuse me, because you're just feverish and I deserve it." It's not like that at all. It means that we can learn to forgive because ultimately, at the end of the day, if somebody hurts you, and you carry that pain and suffering for years to come, who is hurting you now? It's your own mind that is hurting itself with resentment. If you forgive, who frees you? You free you. You have freed yourself.

So, this image of the mother with a child who is sick comes in use when one thinks about life's situations and situations in society, where we feel hurt, we feel attacked, we feel abused. It helps us to understand that it wasn't intentional. I'll give you another example. Supposing you go to work or to college with the same people every day, you're with the same group of people and one day there's somebody in your group who comes to college or to work and is just totally horrible to everybody suddenly. They're irritable, they're grumpy, they're pushing into people, they're snapping at people. So, it's quite a shock, and you all hide behind your desks and gossip about that person, and say: "What's wrong with him today? He's horrible." And you form gangs and clubs and gossip about him. And then, supposing, somebody takes you aside and says: "Oh, didn't you know? He had a terrible tragedy at home yesterday. Something very bad happened in his family." Immediately, your whole view of the situation changes and you think: "Oh, now it's understandable. Of course he's in a bad mood." Well, that happens, doesn't it? We get those situations.

Surely we can transpose that idea into every situation in life. Whenever anybody is acting in a strange way, or a difficult manner, there's going to be a reason. It's not something they invent for their own enjoyment. It's something that's happening to them, because they are in a difficult state. Do we have to be told that they had a tragedy at home, this happened or that happened, do we need to be told that? Surely, we can just assume it, because it's bound to be true. And this is going to immediately bring about a feeling of forgiveness and understanding.

The other very interesting thing is if you've done the exercise I mentioned before, where you think about selfishness and you think about compassion, and you become kind of interested in training in altruism, the next step is that you start to feel that you want to develop more and more compassion. And then you start to feel that when people are being difficult towards you, that is actually an opportunity for you to develop forgiveness and compassion. So, that person has become an aid to your practice. They've become a helper to your practice of compassion. Because it's very easy to feel compassion to everyone when they're nice to us, or feel compassion for small fluffy animals, or small children, whatever. But what about compassion towards the difficult people? If we can develop that, then we are really developing strong, strong, unconditional – you can even say universal – compassion.

So, surely when these difficult people come into our lives, they're a tremendous opportunity for us. So, we can feel grateful. There's a Buddhist expression: "Be grateful for everything." Be grateful. What that means, is that any situation that is harmful or difficult or troublesome or irritating, these are like a box of treasures, that when we open it, we find a lot of treasure inside, because to the person who wants to develop forgiveness, they need somebody to forgive. So, actually the harmful person, the person who is harming us, is our greatest ally or friend, because they've given us the opportunity to forgive.

As soon as you develop that kind of mentality, you've kind of forgiven them before you've even forgiven them, because you're looking at the whole situation differently. This kind of training is only possible when it's combined with meditation, because at the moment it's just a thought, it's a concept. We can sit in this nice, comfortable room, and we can say: "Well, that sounds great! It's really good to be a forgiving person, a person who can understand better." But, then of course, we go out of this room and if somebody runs into

our car as we're driving home, we scream at them and we forget all these wonderful teachings. So, it's impossible to just switch this on like magic.

But if you meditate regularly, and when I say meditation, I mean any form of training the mind – mindfulness, meditation, relaxation, in any spiritual tradition. It doesn't have to be Buddhist. If you do that regularly, you'll find that you develop the ability to relax into difficult situations, and not to get tight or tense in those situations. You develop the ability to calm down and be sort of welcoming, have a welcoming mind to whatever is happening. And this becomes a skill we develop over time. And then, when we are faced with difficult people, you can actually relax, open your mind, and develop more forgiveness. And maybe have the presence of mind to think positively and think: "Oh, this person is actually giving me an opportunity." "This person isn't so bad. This person isn't my enemy. They're actually somebody who's helping me to develop forgiveness, develop compassion. So, this is what is meant by 'being grateful'. It means to see all of life's challenges as an opportunity.

As somebody who meditates, we become somebody who wants to be tested. We want to be tested, because meditation is a little bit like exercise. It's like exercise for the mind. If you do exercise for your body, supposing you're lifting weights at a gym, and as your body gets stronger, you want to put more weights on the weight lifting machine to get more of a stretch. You get bored with just twenty kilos, you want thirty kilos. You put more weights on the machine to get more exercise, to make your muscles stronger. Let's look at meditation like that. It's kind of mind exercise. So, you could say, the difficulties of life are like weights on the weight lifting machine; the more there are the more we have there to work with to gain more stability through. So, this is how the difficulties of life can actually become supports for our compassion training.

That is what is meant by unconditional compassion. Unconditional compassion means a compassion, which is not partial, or only for those who are nice to us, or only for those who seem to be deserving that compassion. So, this talk is called Buddhist Principles for Better Society. A basic Buddhist principle is to be compassionate to all beings. And if one develops that as a mentality or a facet to one's personality, then the more people who develop that, the more harmonious society becomes.

Then I said I would talk about how compassion starts with ourselves, because this is also a very important principle to do with society. They always say, compassion starts with yourself. You need to learn to be compassionate to yourself, so that it can spread to others. This is very important, because here we are looking at how we can have less aggression within ourselves. Internal aggression, aggression towards our own mind is the problem. All these wars and troubles in the world ultimately stem from an aggressive mind. Everything starts with mind. The person who presses the button on a nuclear missile, it starts with their thought, doesn't it? "I'm going to press this button." The origin of it all is the mind, ultimately. The person, who decides: "I'm going to go to war with this country," is coming from a wish or intention in the mind. So, the mind is the place to look if one wants to find freedom from suffering or freedom from war. That's why His Holiness the Dalai Lama said: "Inner peace leads to world peace."

So, this development of compassion within ourselves is done through meditation. Because in meditation we learn to accept what is happening in our own mind. We learn to stop fighting our own suffering. And when you're meditating and thoughts come – you're sitting there meditating and then thought comes – how you deal with that thought is a crucial training in compassion. And I think it's interesting to see, how that internal psychological process has a relationship to society as a whole. Because people often say: "Buddhism is a very funny religion, because you talk about compassion, and then you go and sit in a room and meditate. What's that got to do with helping others? You Buddhists sit around saying you want to help everyone and what you love to do is to lock yourself in a silent room and just stare into space for hours. What's that about?"

We need to understand what it is, which is that the meditation is training in compassion, so that one can then take that out into the world to others. As Buddhists, we are very socially involved. It stems from

meditation. If it starts with meditation, then one's social involvement can be done in a fruitful way, in a less egocentric way.

So, when I'm talking about this compassion in meditation, what I'm talking about is how we deal with our thoughts. When people sit down to meditate, they often have a hard time, because they try to battle with their own thoughts. Most people who are new to meditation have this struggle. They learn how to meditate, and then they sit there meditating and wish they could stop thinking. Have any of you ever tried to meditate? Half and half. Haven't you found that it can be quite difficult because you're sitting there and you start planning your shopping list? Or you plan what you are going to cook for dinner. And then you get cross with yourself and think: "Oh no, I'm supposed to be meditating!"

So, what I would like to suggest is that if you think like that, you're not meditating, but you're promoting violence. If you think like that, you're actually promoting violence. What I mean is this: if you sit there and meditate, you're maybe being aware of your own breathing, and then you start finding you're planning your shopping list, and you go into a long journey in your head... and then you feel angry, you feel: "No! I've failed!" You then push those thoughts away and try to come back to the meditation. That is the promotion of violence, because you're trying to kill your own thoughts. So, the meditator becomes more and more tense, more and more angry, and just ends up quite miserable, frankly. That's the wrong way to meditate.

The right way to meditate is to learn how to just accept the thoughts, and to not judge them. So, you're sitting doing your meditation, you are maybe observing your own breathing, and then your mind wanders off somewhere and then you catch yourself: "Oh, my mind has wandered." And then, instead of judging it saying: "Go away you nasty thoughts!" you don't do that, you just very gently bring your mind back to the breath and just leave the thought alone. Just let it be. Don't try to remove it, don't try to encourage it, just leave it there and come back. And it will dissolve, because if you're not focusing on a thought, it has nowhere to go, it has to dissolve. It's a bit like a bubble in water; it just dissolves back into water. So, we just leave it alone.

Believe it or not, this is the definition of unconditional love, because when a thought arises in your mind, you just let it be and don't try to get rid of it, and you don't try to make more of it, you're letting it be just as it is and leave it alone. That's total acceptance. Trying to get rid of it is a kind of violence, like trying to shoot the thought with a gun. Trying to develop the thought into more is also a kind of violence, as you're saying it is not ok just the way it is. Just leaving it alone and coming back to the breath is compassionate acceptance. Just let it be. It's fine the way it is. Just return to the meditation.

With this kind of attitude you find that your meditation becomes a process of compassion training, because you are being compassionate to your own mind. You're just letting it be and coming back to the breathing again, and again, and again. And this training builds up, builds up, builds up, so that you start accept yourself more. You stop fighting yourself, your mind become more accepting, more loving, more kind. And then, of course, this is going to filter out in your relations with others.

When society goes wrong, is because people can't accept each other. That's when society starts to struggle, when the individuals within the society don't accept each other. Now, if we can accept ourselves in this meditation training, that will lead us to know how to accept others. Just to let somebody be who they are, and not to try to judge them, or change them, or obliterate them, or whatever. Just let them be what they are, love them unconditionally.

It doesn't mean that we become doormats, or we just let criminals be criminals, whatever. It means that we understand people. And actually the whole criminal justice system is an interesting thing, because, I'm quite involved in it and I teach a lot – I haven't recently – but I used to teach a lot in prisons. Going into prisons and teach meditation to the staff and the inmates. And you go into these prisons, and sometimes I would work in the most heavy units, for example the block where they put all the child abusers and rapists, so you

are in a heavy environment. You are in there and of course you think: "Well, these people are dangerous and they need to be here, because if they are outside of prison, they are going to cause a lot of suffering." But, what you also notice is that the prison, in my case it was men's prisons, I was in these men's prisons, and you notice that these prisons are full of men who feel that nobody understands them. And that's why they commit their crimes.

So, it's all very well to lock them up to be safe, but what else, what else happens? Do they just sit in their cell for ten years being miserable? Or if you teach them to meditate, if you give them a lot of therapy, help them to understand themselves, if they can feel that others finally understand them, maybe that will dissolve the criminal mind?

So, when I say acceptance, I don't mean just letting people do whatever they like. I mean understanding what is beneath everything, understanding where people are coming from. Society becomes a better place when people understand where everybody is really coming from, what is really beneath all of their negativity, and connecting with each other's heart, connecting with the goodness in each other, connecting with the purity within everybody. Everybody has a good side, and if we can connect with that, and encourage the promotion of that, then society becomes a better place.

I'm aware that these things I'm saying sound very idealistic. Like some kind of utopia, unrealistic. But if you keep remembering that what I'm talking about is a practical meditation training and developing a deeper and deeper understanding of the mind, then you'll see how it's possible in a gradual way. I'm not saying we can change the world just like that. I'm saying that if, as individuals, we follow this path of understanding, compassion and acceptance, the more people do that, the better the society becomes. Because ultimately it's all about our own reactions, isn't it, our reactions to society? That's what society is – a whole bunch of reactions. Everybody is reacting all the time.

Now I'm going to stop talking and I'm going to ask you to ask me questions. So give me your questions or comments or discussion, let's see what you think. Any questions?

Q: When you were talking about criminals, and you said to understand where people are coming from, what do you mean?

A: What I mean is, if somebody is violent, if somebody is killing or doing negative things, what is beneath that? What is the pain or the wound underneath that, that is making them act in that way? The way to understand this is to look at ourselves and think: "How is it when I'm being like that?" I mean, ok, we're not killers and, I don't know, maybe there are killers in this room, maybe not, but if I look at myself, I don't kill people, but I certainly get into bad moods, and I hurt people with my words. I make mistakes, all those things. If I look into that and I start to see how it's coming from a kind of sadness inside, or not being understood, or a feeling of loneliness, helplessness or fear. When I'm criticizing somebody or gossiping about them, it's coming from my own fear. That's a kind of wound inside me. So, the action I'm doing seems very sharp and aggressive, but underneath is a soft wound. And that's what needs to be healed. That's what I meant.

Q: You spoke about unconditional compassion and gratefulness for everything. I was wondering whether – because there are different ways to use the word unconditional – if you are nice to someone else, because you think that they are training you, it's still unconditional when you feel you are being nice to them because they are doing a favor for you?

A: I know what you mean. The teaching tells us: if somebody is harmful to you be grateful, because they are giving you an opportunity to develop compassion. So you could say: "Well, it's not really unconditional, because I'm seeing them as somebody useful for me." That's what you're saying, isn't it? So, what I would say is that in Buddhism we call it skillful method or skillful means. Skillful method.....well it means many

things, but in this case it means using the ego in a clever way, using the ego to overcome ego. So, we're using our ego's want. Our ego wants to improve; it wants to become more compassionate, so we go in to that part and say: "Let's play with this. Let's use it." But through the forgiveness, through the compassion, the ego will get smaller. So, it's kind of artificial at first, but if we do something that's artificial, then with enough time, it becomes natural. So, at first, it's going to be like: "Ok, I forgive you, because I know it's good for me." But, then the more we do it, then that forgiveness personality or mentality becomes so strong, that it will just be natural. That's really the only way to change, through the artificial becoming eventually natural. Does that help?

Q: Very much, thank you.

A: Anything else? I love questions, please bring me questions, because then I know what you think and what I should talk about. Otherwise, it's just a one-way street.

Q: The western economic system is now in big difficulties, and in the western societies the economy goes through the society. It's almost the same as the society, because it's so important. And the main feature of the capitalistic system is selfishness, my profit is your loss, and the more I have profit, the less you have profit. And it goes through the society at this moment, and I think that is one reason behind the difficulties at the moment. And also people know more and more what happens to nature and about the living standards in the world. Because our economic system destroys the possibilities to live and the life to remain in the world.

A: Exactly. Yes, I value that you brought this up. Our society is so much based on selfishness, and also so much based on short-sightedness, especially in how we deal with the environment. Our society is raping the world environmentally just for its own profit and not thinking ahead. We're not thinking that it means that our grandchildren are going to suffer. We're just thinking for this life, us now. In Buddhism we talk about reincarnation and future lives, but even if you don't believe in that, you can think: actually, my great, great grandchildren are going to suffer because of what I'm doing now. Do I want that? How can I do that to my own children? But we don't think like that. We just think: "Yes, we need to use the planet in this way in order to get what we want", but we're not thinking ahead. So yes, I agree totally with you; our culture is selfish and short-sighted. So, what Buddhism can give to this situation is through training, training people to become less selfish.

I remember when I had only been a monk for few years, and my teacher Akong Tulku Rinpoche was giving a talk and he said: "If you want to change the world, teach business people compassion." I remember hearing that and thinking: "Yes." And a few years later, I started working quite heavily in the corporate world as a monk teaching meditation. And I thought: "This could make a difference in that you teach meditation and compassion to highly stressed business people, and they're approaching it because they want to remove their stress, but actually, if you teach them enough of meditation and compassion, their attitude changes, and they start to think about social responsibility." They start to, because as your stress reduces, your obsession with your own problems reduces, and you start to think of others more.

I remember teaching in a very high-powered company in London that is all about money and investments. I was teaching the staff about meditation and I was going back every week and teaching a text called Seven Points of Mind Training, which is all about compassion training. And in about week five, one of the clients said to me: "If I really listen to you, I'm going to leave my job, aren't I?" And I said: "No, please don't leave your job. What you are learning here, please put that into your job. And then you can be a force for change in the world". Any more questions?

Q: This is quite trivial. I just wanted to ask you about posture, because I find it quite difficult to sit cross-legged. Does it matter?

A: Oh no, it doesn't matter. If you're meditating, you can sit in lots of different ways, you can sit cross-legged on the floor or you can sit on a chair. If you're very, very into meditation and you're doing this a lot, it's kind of good to train your body through yoga, maybe, and stretching, so that you can sit cross-legged on the floor. But it's not a necessary thing in the beginning. And most people I teach meditation to, they sit on chairs, at least to start with. But if you are sitting on a chair, you should sit with a straight back, not leaning against the back of the chair. Sit upright.

Q: First of all, thank you for a really interesting speech and then I would have one question, namely, Buddhism certainly has, in my opinion, a strong tradition of Buddhist psychology, but would you say there is any kind of specific political theory, or political philosophy that we could refer to as Buddhist?

A: Political theory?

Q: Yes, or does it all comes down to individual psyche?

A: How do you define political theory?

Q: That regulates or defines, for example, political or social structures, how they should be arranged.

A: Okay, yes, so I can talk from a point of view of Tibetan Buddhism, because that's what I know about most. If one looks at Tibetan history, the first Buddhist king of Tibet was the king Songtsen Gampo, in the 6th century. He was the first real Buddhist king of Tibet and under his guidance Tibet became fully Buddhist. The first thing he did was he introduced a legal code in the country based on Buddha's teaching of the ten unvirtuous actions and the ten virtuous actions. And everybody had to follow this standard. The ten unvirtuous actions are the things that Buddha said one should give up, because they're harmful to oneself and others. These are things like killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, gossip, slander, all of those negative things. The Buddhist society was constructed according to these principles, ethical conduct. And so, all Buddhist cultures are based on what is called ethics or morality or right conduct and I think that's the political structure in Buddhism. Does that make sense?

A: Yes, thank you.

Q: Thank you for the talk. I'm just going to continue from the other person, if you look at these structures, what about people being on different level? In Buddhism you also have hierarchy, and everybody is not on similar level.

A: The hierarchy in Buddhism is more about people who have more experience and more wisdom teaching the ones who have less experience and less wisdom, because the first group has more to say. Let's talk about a monastery, for example. In the monastery there's a kind of hierarchy in that the senior monks and nuns guide the junior monks and nuns. And so in terms of when they sit at a meal or in the temple, the senior ones sit sort of further up than the junior ones, but only because this is in terms of their years of experience. They are not seen as better people. Ultimately, everybody is seen as the same.

In Buddhism we say, that every sentient being has Buddha nature. Have you heard this concept before, Buddha nature? It's the basic principle of Buddhism, which is that all beings have the potential to become Buddha. Buddha means enlightenment. And all beings have that potential, whether one is a human being, a mosquito, anything. And so, everybody is the same in that sense. There is no hierarchy, ultimately. Everybody is the same. And only the other day our teacher, Akong Rinpoche, was telling people: "You should bow to dogs and cats. You should see them as equal to you." Normally we see animals as lesser beings, or whatever, but we should see them as equal. Everybody is the same, everybody is buddha. But there are certain people we can learn more from, so we respect them because they can guide us, but only

because they can guide us, so we can even surpass their knowledge. So, the hierarchy in Buddhism is functional, not ultimate. It's relative, not ultimate.

Q: But then practices are different between men and women.

A: In Buddhism? Yes so, Buddhism has been around since the 5th century before Christ, 500 and something BC. It's been around 2500 years. And it's been mainly in the East, it has only come to the West in the last sixty years, maybe. So, it has been in the East, and bound up with eastern cultures. So, the eastern cultures have traditionally always been very imbalanced in terms of men and women, in a very bad way, as I'm sure you know. And so, Buddhism within those cultures, who are the Buddhists? They are the people from those cultures. And their way of living tends to sort of reflect that culture. So, traditionally in Buddhist history the nuns have had less authority than the monks and women have been less respected than men, because that's what those cultures have been like, unfortunately.

Now, fortunately, we're wising up and realizing that men and women are equal and it's ludicrous to say that there's a difference. So, modern Buddhism in the west does not reflect that kind of inequality. In fact, in our monastery in Scotland, in Samye Ling, the most senior people out of the western students are women. We have western lamas now, western teachers. We have four lamas and three of them are women and one of them is a man. So, I as a monk prostrate and bow to nuns who are senior to me. That would have been unheard of in Buddhist history. But we are starting from a fresh place here. Buddhism has come to the west and it's got a fresh start and I think that's really important. Does that answer your question a bit?

Q1: Also, when Dalai Lama was in Finland, somebody asked if his successor could be a woman and he said: "Why not?"

A: Yes

Q1: Maybe it was a joke.

Q2: No, if I remember correctly, he also added: if I would be a woman, I hope I would be a good-looking woman!

A: Yes, absolutely, why not. Traditionally, the Dalai Lama was born as a man, because in the traditional cultures men had more freedom, unfortunately. So, he was born as a man because then he could do what he needed to do, but now he could be a woman. Great. I hope he will be a woman next time. It will be great.

Q: I have a question. Where to draw the line of unconditional compassion, if it's basically based on egoism in the first place?

A: What do you mean, based on egoism?

Q: What we were talking about here before, for example, capitalism and everything are based on the facts that how we see the future and the present moment and the past, what we want to do.

A: Hm, can you ask your question again in a different way, I haven't understood it yet? I want to understand what you are saying, but I haven't yet. Should we go to another question and come back to you, if you could formulate it differently?

Q: Yes.

A: Anyone else?

Q: So, what you talked about the ripples that are going on, I'm thinking about a very recent example in Finland in schools. There was a teacher just laid off because he removed a student from dining room, because the student was causing disruption there. So, he physically removed the student and somebody filmed this and it was seen that the teacher was using too much force, the school laid him off. But on a grander level they are saying that the school has used too much force laying him off. I see this as a ripple effect of the incident in the dining room. And it brings to mind that perhaps there were ripples even before, perhaps the storm was even before that, and the dining room was still a ripple of something.

A: Everything is cause and effect; it's like a constant chain reaction.

Q: But, this also brings to mind that, it's really quite difficult in the concrete situations to kind of figure out what would be the right action. For example when there is disturbance in the dining room, what to do? If you don't react in any way, then the disturbance continues and maybe somebody becomes hurt and it promotes the kind of violent culture, so you need to do something. But what to do in order to stop that situation, so that it doesn't spread, but is contained in a safe way, so that you don't cause violence in the situation? This is very difficult...

A: It is. You can talk about compassionate acceptance, but then also one has to stop situations from being harmful. Compassionate acceptance doesn't mean that if somebody is coming towards me with a gun I just stand there. I run away. Or if somebody is trying to shoot somebody else, you should of course try to grab the gun away out of their hand. You don't just say: "Hey man, we should all be compassionate!" So, we do need to act, but then how do we act? And what kind of mentality do we have behind that action?

This is not something that we can just switch on like magic overnight and react in the right way, because what is the definition of reaction? Reaction is an automatic, impulsive thing. It's not something that has much thought behind it. Something happens and we react. It's very automatic. Just like if somebody shouts at us and we automatically shout back. It just comes like that, without us planning it. So, there isn't much we can do in the heat of the moment. We will just do what we naturally do, we just react automatically, and that's what we've done, and it's too late to change it then. But, if we meditate regularly and we analyze our mind regularly, and we think about compassion, we think about forgiveness and we work on ourselves in this way, then over time, gradually our reactions will become purer, more positive as a by-product of our meditation. So, there's no magic, overnight solution, but our training will naturally help us to react in less harmful ways and in more skillful ways. Ways which are more beneficial for all involved, as one becomes increasingly able to do the right thing for all in the situation. This is a slow process.

Q: Isn't this the same case in one's mind, when talking about the mind and the thoughts, accepting the thoughts? If you try to accept them with compassion, with love, they just increase in your mind, perhaps they just get bigger and bigger and soon you are using your whole meditation time planning your shopping list and you tell your friend that you were meditating for one hour.

A: So, if I understood you right what you're saying is that if you accept the thoughts, your whole meditation will be thinking, right? I don't mean that.

Q: But that happens, that will happen.

A: No, what I mean is this: when you're meditating, normally in meditation you have a focus, like your breath, for example. Many people who are meditating focus on their breathing, and that's the meditation, to stay in the present. And then a thought comes, maybe ten thoughts, we are planning a shopping list, and then we realize we are shopping. Then you bring your mind back to the breath, you return to the breath. You are meditating. You don't just go off with that shopping list, you notice it and come back. But you are accepting it, because you're not trying to get rid of it. You're not saying it's bad. You're noticing it as: "Ok,

there you are, my friend. There are the thoughts, hello thoughts! Now, come back to the breath." Do you see the difference?

Q: Yes, could you say it's a kind of passive-aggressive thing?

A: No. Because you're sitting there and meditating, then suddenly you've gone skiing, or holidaying in your head, you're running around in the mountains, you're shopping, you're doing whatever, you notice that, and that moment of noticing can go two ways. Either, it can be aggressive or accepting. Aggressive would be you notice that and you think: "Oh no, I'm supposed to stop thinking," and you try to push it away. That's aggression. What I'm talking about is that you notice it and as soon as you've noticed it, you know that you're supposed to be meditating, so you just come back to the breath, but without trying to get rid of it. Just leave it alone. There's nothing aggressive about that. It's like saying: "Hello thought, aren't you beautiful! You stay where you are and I'll come back to my breathing."

Q: There's a thin line.

A: Try it! You have to try it. It's very hard to conceptualize it, because we're talking about something without actually doing it. If you do it, you'll notice the difference. You'll notice that it is very accepting, because you are just letting it be. You are just leaving it alone.

Q: If I remember right, you were explaining when you were teaching meditation... you said that something about seven steps? What are they?

A: Oh, there's a text called 'Seven Points of Mind Training' and it takes many weeks to go through all seven. They are seven stages of practice for training and developing compassion from the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, brought to Tibet by Atisha in the tenth century and now practiced very widely in Tibetan Buddhism. And they involve training in right thinking and training in meditational compassion, training in bringing compassion into daily life, forgiveness, acceptance, all of those things. I mean I can't tell you what the seven are because they are not just seven labels. They are seven groups of many, many practices. For example, one point will have maybe twenty practices in it.

Q: The message you've been telling us today is, in a way, it's rather simple. But, when you are a monk in a monastery for years, does the complexity of Buddhist teachings get more complex, or does the main thing remain very simple and what you actually do is more and more different practices. How does it evolve?

A: You do learn a lot of different practices and also you learn a lot about philosophy. So, it gets quite elaborate. You try to study Buddhist philosophy, understanding – it's called voidness or emptiness, you learn about the philosophy of emptiness, the philosophy about the true nature of reality, what Buddha said about it, what all the different great masters have said about it. We have courses where we sit and analyse through debate and logic. So, it can become very elaborate.

Where's the lady with the question that nearly happened?

Q: Yes, I had it but I don't know if I can put it actually anyway better. But I was just thinking, because you were telling that unconditional compassion is a type of altruism, if altruism is based on egoism in a way that we want to be loved?

A: No, I don't mean that. Altruism is based on wanting all beings to be happy. A doorway into that process is to realize that it will be good for us, too, if we practice it, but that's not the ultimate aim of it. It's again back to this point I made earlier called skillful methods, where you lead the ego into its own destruction. You're leading the ego into destroying itself. Destroying is a wrong word. You are almost like tricking yourself into being more compassionate by saying yourself: "Look, if you do this you will be happy, so just try it." You

sort of tell yourself that. And then the actual result of it is that you might end up loving all beings more than yourself. So, I don't mean that altruism is based on egotism. I mean, altruism can be practiced; you can approach it by tricking your ego into understanding that it will be good for it. Does that make more sense now?

Q: Yes.

Q: When we were looking at being selfish, we found we are small and we're alone. If we look at the business world, there are types of leaders who are really selfish and people are afraid to tell their own opinion. They are actually making stronger the person's selfish idea. And then you have a situation where you try to look good in the way that this selfish person is, putting other people down. And the other people are too afraid to stand against that person. So, it's basically that they are making stronger his ideas. So, his selfish ideas are getting stronger and stronger and you are trying to get a situation where you are trying to get something good from that. Is it actually better not to give up, or is it better to give up instead, or create a bigger situation that will actually lead into something good?

A: Are you asking, if you have somebody who is very selfish and he's the boss, or she's the boss, and the staff are trying to practice Buddhism then they are just going to be allowing that person to become worse and worse? Is that what you mean?

Q: No, the person who is egoistic, he's getting like an echo, he's getting stronger feedback.

A: Because everybody is accepting it?

Q: Yes, or they are too afraid of saying that the way you are treating people is not correct.

A: So, what's the question?

Q: So, when do you need to think that, ok, there is always the possibility by acting differently to change that person's mind or the way of thinking and you shouldn't give up?

A: At the end of the day, it's impossible to change somebody else. But we can change ourselves. And through that, it might inspire somebody else to change. But we can't change somebody else. It's impossible.

Q: That is helpful. By doing good someone will be inspired and will get the strength.

A: Definitely. And what you notice is, that people who are very selfish and very bossy and very nasty, if somebody else actually is very compassionate, that person can't bully them anymore. Because if you're very compassionate you don't become a victim, you become invincible. Nobody can hurt you because you're not thinking of yourself. So, there's nothing there that can be hurt. I mean, that's a high level of compassion, which, I don't know, very few people in this world may have achieved that. But it's something we can aim for. Does that make sense?

Q: Yes, it's challenging.

Q: You said that problems are there, because I focus on them, but this problem must have been something else before I made it a problem. So, how to focus on things, so that they don't become problems?

A: Something happened, and then we are focusing on it again and again, so we're keeping it going, and now it becomes a problem. If we can just let go and move on, then it can dissolve. Are you talking about problems from the past? Things that happened? Is that what you mean?

Q: No. I mean problems of present time. I mean, I would like to know how I'm making things into problems for me.

A: By solidifying our thoughts, making them solid. We make our thoughts very solid and then they become problems. We suffer. But, if we can just learn just let thoughts come and go like clouds in the sky, then we won't have these problems. Our problems are all about making our thoughts solid. And a lot of western therapy makes it even worse, because it can make us solidify everything, analyse it and make a big deal out of it. The difference between Buddhism and psychotherapy is very clear. In psychotherapy one is analysing everything and trying to understand it. And that can work, but the danger of it is that you can end up making it more solid and you never get free of it. You can end up digging in a bin that is endless. The more you dig, the more rubbish there is. The Buddhist approach is to change the way you relate to your thoughts, so you stop making them solid. That's what I mean by focus.

Okay, one more question. Who's got the last, golden question? Bring me the really hot question. No? Ok, I've got a hot question. Did you understand what I said? And did you find even one per cent of it useful? And do you think you can apply it? Well then, that makes me very happy, a job well done. So, thank you for listening.

And I'd like to say a couple of words about the organization that I represent, called [ROKPA](#). ROKPA has branches all over the world. And I'm here working for the Finnish branch of ROKPA. And ROKPA is based on the Buddhist philosophy of compassion. Actually a particular teaching in Buddhism is called Limitless Generosity. And we say that generosity has three aspects: material generosity, supportive generosity, and spiritual generosity. Material generosity means giving things, giving food and money to the poor etc, or giving things that people need. Supportive generosity means to give friendship, help and kindness, to give one's energy and time to others, to give protection to others. That's supportive generosity. Spiritual generosity means to teach people how to meditate.

Our organization is based on these three principles and ROKPA has three areas of activity. One is ROKPA charity, the headquarters of that are in Switzerland, ROKPA INTERNATIONAL is a charity with headquarters in Switzerland and branches in many European countries. We do a lot of charity work, humanitarian aid: working for feeding people who are hungry, giving medicine to those who are sick, educating people, opening schools in rural areas and poor areas of the east, such as Tibetan areas of China, Nepal and India, also Zimbabwe and South Africa. And then in the west doing projects at home, such as soup kitchens for the hungry, such as in Glasgow, we used to have one in London, we have soup kitchens in various cities. And so, the charitable side of ROKPA has to do with humanitarian aid. And that is completely non-religious; it has nothing to do with Buddhism. It's pure charity without religion and without politics.

Then on the therapeutic side, which has to do with generosity of support, we have what's called Tara Rokpa Therapy, which is a therapy process based on analyzing one's own mind using visualization techniques, using writing, using painting, different therapeutic techniques, which are kind of like meditation, but non-spiritual. It's more like therapeutic meditation.

And then on the spiritual side we have Rokpa as a spiritual department, the Buddhist centres teaching Buddhism, teaching meditation and Buddhist philosophy. So, we have these three branches and in Finland we have these three activities in three very distinct categories. So, that's what I'm here as a representative of and I just wanted to tell you a bit about that. Thank you.