

*Questions for Reflection*  
*Series 12, Talk 1*

Here are some ideas for your reflection during the week.

- 1) The aspiration to care for and to awaken all beings (bodhicitta) is considered mysterious and auspicious. This heartfelt care for suffering beings and fundamental questioning into the meaning of our lives arises unaccountably amid the multitude of psychological conditionings in our experience, known and unknown. Please take a moment to look over your life. Since you are here listening to these talks, you too must have at some point experienced this mysterious and auspicious calling. When did this happen for you? What were the specific circumstances? How have they expressed themselves in your particular life?
- 2) Second: These options actually pose the fundamental dilemma and choice for all humans, regardless of innate talent or social endowment: whether to use our potential and capabilities to pursue worldly, material values and purposes, or spiritual ones. Please describe how this dilemma and choice has played out for you in your lifetime. Probably there are multiple junctures where you have taken either this road or that road. Think this through in as much detail as possible.
- 3) Third: In whatever life we are already leading, just as it is, we can choose to direct our energies toward accumulations of worldly power and material wealth, either with well-meaning or self-serving intentions, or else toward beneficial consideration of all concerned, aimed at the development of spiritual awakening and the liberation from suffering. This question is similar to the second one but on a smaller scale, more like choices we make everyday. It's useful to be aware of yourself in this more mundane way as well.
- 4) Fourth: Aside from its social implications, home-leaving also denotes a deeper psychological meaning, abandoning the "home" of conditioned psychic patterns inherited through family dynamic and also from society. These mental habits are the psychic karma we derive first from our parents and develop later to protect the self, as we imagine ourselves separate from all others. Such conditioning may be necessary to function in the conventional realm, but when we take these mechanisms as real and settle into them as a shelter, they become an obstacle to the open awareness of the buddha nature. What "psychic karma" have you inherited

either from your family or society that you would consider obstacles to spiritual development?

5) Fifth: Many emergent Western Buddhist communities are dominated by sincere and often rigorous practice by laypeople, congruent with nondualistic Mahayana teaching that this very world is the realm for realization. This is reflected in an emphasis on spiritual practice in the family setting, with recognition that parenting and care for personal, intimate relationships may be challenging and even enlightening, spiritual activities. Please comment on this statement.

6) Sixth: The different versions of Siddhartha's departure offer renewed attention to the inner meaning behind home-leaving, which may be understood in terms of shedding the antiquated home of familial conditioning for the ultimate homecoming to the awakened heart. Please comment on this idea of ultimate homecoming to the awakened heart as opposed to the home-leaving of our family of origin.