

Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the Six Perfections at Amitabha Buddhist Centre

Lesson 2

14 March 2019

Meditation on Shakyamuni Buddha. Perfection of morality (or ethical discipline). Checking the behaviour of our body, speech and mind. Disciplining the mind. Why practising generosity alone is not enough. Three types of ethical discipline. Consequences of not being mindful. Practising with the other perfections. (This class was conducted in English by Khen Rinpoche).

MEDITATION ON SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

As usual, we will do a short meditation before the talk.

Try to sit comfortably and keep your back straight. Breathe gently and focus your mind on your breath. There are different techniques for doing this:

- You can focus your mind at the tip of the nose where your breath is coming in and out. It is much easier to concentrate that way for some people. Just feel how the breath is going in and out.
- Another method is for you to focus on your abdomen moving in and out. You can also focus your mind there.

So, use whichever method is more comfortable for you. Let us do the breathing meditation for a few minutes. That will help us to bring our mind to the present.

(The rest of meditation is the same as the one used in Lesson 1).

PERFECTION OF MORALITY (OR ETHICAL DISCIPLINE)

Last Thursday I spoke about the practice of generosity. Today, we will talk a little bit about the practice of morality or ethical discipline.

Checking the behaviour of our body, speech and mind

There is a quotation from Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*¹

With behaviour such as this,
I shall not win a human body again,
And if this human form is not attained,
There will be solely wrongdoing and no virtue. (Verse 17, Chapter 4)

Look at how we behave with our body, speech and mind. Even though we are human beings, most of the time, our speech is negative, our bodily actions are harmful and our mind is full of negative thoughts. Looking at such behaviour, we should ask ourselves how it will be possible for us to achieve a human rebirth in the future.

¹ *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* by Shantideva, translated by Stephen Batchelor. ©1979: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala.

That is a very, very good meditation to do in our daily lives—mindfully looking at the behaviour of our own body, speech and mind. If you are mindful, you will be able to recognize how much harm you do to others through the actions of your body, speech and mind. Once you notice that, then how is it possible to have a human rebirth in the future? It is not possible!

Once you take rebirth in the lower realms such as the animal realm, there is no way to create virtuous karma there. You can only create negative karma. So, if you look even more deeply, what will happen then?

Even as a human being, you create so much negative karma in this life. Then you take rebirth in the lower realms such as the animal realm. Of course, with that kind of rebirth, there is no way to create virtuous karma. You can only engage in negative karma. Because of that, your situation can only get worse and worse as you take more and more miserable rebirths. If you look at it logically, how is it possible for you to get out of a miserable rebirth? How can you be freed from that? So, logically speaking, if you think deeply, it is extremely difficult to have a happy rebirth. So, this is very powerful advice from Shantideva's text.

Disciplining the mind

Shantideva also said in another quotation (from the same text):

Those who wish to guard their practice
Should very attentively guard their minds,
For those who do not guard their minds,
Will be unable to guard their practice. (Verse 1, Chapter 5)

What Shantideva is saying here is that if you really want to discipline yourself, you must look at your mind all the time. If you don't look at your mind, then it is very difficult to discipline yourself. You must always guard your mind. If you don't guard or protect your mind but just let your mind do whatever it wants like a crazy elephant, then it will bring you to the heaviest rebirth in the hell realms where you will experience the heaviest sufferings.

Your mind can bring you that kind of harm. Even a crazy elephant cannot bring you to that miserable state. That is the point here. Shantideva is saying that when we see the crazy elephant, we are scared as we think it will destroy everything. But the elephant can only destroy your life or home. That is the most harm it can bring. It cannot do more damage than that.

The difference is that if you don't protect, guard or discipline your mind but instead let it do whatever it wants, it will bring you far more harm. It will bring you to the heaviest suffering rebirth as a hell being. Therefore, it is important to guard, protect and discipline your mind. This is a very important quotation. How much discipline you have is entirely dependent on your mind. If you cannot guard your mind, then it is much more difficult to guard your body and speech. So, this is the advice.

What I am trying to say is that ethical discipline is a very important practice. Without

discipline in your body, speech and mind, that will only bring you misery and suffering in future lives. It can do that even in this life. There are so many difficulties and suffering because we are not disciplined. Because of that, even in this life, there are so many problems. The same goes for future lives.

If you don't purify even the small negative karma that you have created, then this negative karma multiplies day by day. It becomes extremely powerful and brings about the heaviest suffering such as taking an unfortunate rebirth. As I have mentioned before, once you take rebirth there, it is almost impossible to have a human rebirth again. Therefore, it is very important to have ethical discipline.

The Buddha mentioned this benefit in the *King of Concentration Sutra*:

... if with a calm mind one makes offerings of umbrellas, victory banners, light and jewel ornaments to a hundred billion buddhas for eons equal to the number of sand grains in the Ganges River, a great deal of merit is acquired. However, if, during these degenerate times when the holy Dharma, the teachings of the One Gone to Bliss, has almost ceased, one keeps just one precept for a day and a night, the merit acquired is far greater than that of giving all those offerings to an uncountable number of buddhas over such a long period.²

So, comparing making offerings and keeping ethical discipline during this difficult period of time, even if it is keeping just one precept, the Buddha said in this sutra that there is much greater benefit in doing the latter. You can collect much more merit.

Why practising generosity alone is not enough

As mentioned before, you can practise generosity to sentient beings with your wealth, possessions and so forth including giving your body to other sentient beings. But that alone cannot bring a happy rebirth such as a human rebirth. If you don't have ethical discipline or keep the precepts, then no matter how much generosity you practise, it is not possible to achieve the higher rebirths of gods and humans. It is not possible. Therefore, you must practise ethical discipline.

The point is that even if you practise a lot of generosity but you do not keep ethical discipline, once you die, you may take rebirth in the lower realms. If you don't keep or you break so many of your precepts and you only practise generosity, you may take rebirth in the lower realms. If you take rebirth in the lower realms, it can be the animal realm or hungry ghost realm. You can take rebirth there because you didn't practise ethical discipline.

As an animal, you can be wealthy and have great enjoyments or even live in a golden house. When you take that kind of rebirth due to your generosity, you have no difficulties in finding food or shelter. You can get any kind of resources that you want. Some dogs have three or four people looking after them. I see some dogs leading a much more luxurious life than we do. They go to the pet salon often for grooming. Even

² *The Direct and Unmistaken Method—The Practice and Benefits of the Eight Mahayana Precepts*. Commentaries by Trijang Dorje Chang, Geshe Lamrimpa and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Compiled and translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. (Page 33).

you don't enjoy that kind of luxury! This is what I normally see. Some pets have even more enjoyments than that. When the dog dies, it has a funeral service. Some people love their dogs so much and spend so much money on their dogs. When the dog dies, some cry even harder than for their own parents. They treat them exactly like their own son or daughter, maybe even better than that. Of course, a dog has the very amazing characteristic of being extremely loyal. Once you are its owner, it won't bite you even if you beat it. It is unlike a cat. When you beat the cat, it may fight back even if you have kept the cat for ten or twenty years. But a dog is different. Even if you shout at it, it is very meek. It is very amazing.

So, if you do not keep ethical discipline but you practise a lot of generosity, the result can be that kind of rebirth. Look at this from the point of view of the dog. It can enjoy living in a luxurious place but it does not have any concept of creating karma. It doesn't have the concept of practising generosity. The point is whatever good karma you have created in the past by practising so much generosity, if you were to take this kind of rebirth, then you are finished. That's it.

By having an animal rebirth, there is no way you can create karma such as practising generosity and so forth. Whatever karma you have created in the past, due to your generosity, you experience all that in the animal rebirth. But in that rebirth, there is no opportunity for you to practise generosity any more. Therefore, you don't create good karma that you can enjoy in the future. Whatever generosity you have created is not increasing. Then in your next life as a dog, there is no opportunity to create generosity again. It ends there.

Therefore, in order not to waste your practice of generosity, you must practise ethical discipline. Otherwise, there is no way to continue the enjoyment of your practice of generosity. Once you take an animal rebirth, there is no way you can create good karma. You can only create negative karma. That means you will get worse and worse. Whatever good karma created in the past will also be finished. There is no opportunity to create good karma.

The point here is that you should practise a lot of generosity. On top of that, you must practise ethical discipline and keep the precepts. That helps you to take good rebirths as a human or god. One of the key ways to achieve rebirth in the human or god realm is keeping ethical discipline.

If you have practised a lot of generosity and on top of that, you keep the precepts, that makes your practice of generosity meaningful. Because of that, you are able to take rebirth as a human or god. In that rebirth, you are able to enjoy all the necessities and whatever resources you need. They are all there for you. Not only that, you are also able to practise generosity in that rebirth, helping others and creating so much good karma. In that rebirth, you have good karma and have wealth and so forth. Not only that, you are able to help other sentient beings. Because of that, you create so much good karma.

In this way, you will have never-ending wealth in all your future lives. You will continually have wealth and all the necessities to always engage in the practice of

generosity. That could also be because you have the habit of practising generosity in your mind. So, with the good karma accumulated in the past due to the practise of generosity, you take rebirth as a human or god. You will continually be engaging in the practice of generosity and keeping the precepts. Because of that, slowly, you will be able to achieve liberation or enlightenment.

What I am saying is that if you only practise generosity but you don't practise ethical discipline, it is not worth it because after you enjoy (the benefits of having practised generosity) in the next life, that karma will finish. Then it only brings miserable rebirths at the end of the day.

But if you were to look at this in a different way, on top of your practice of generosity, your practice of ethical discipline will become a very meaningful and powerful practice for you from life to life. You will be able to create good karma and be able to achieve liberation and finally, enlightenment. So, it is extremely important. One definitely needs to practise ethical discipline.

Three types of ethical discipline

What is ethical discipline? Ethical discipline is when you turn your mind away from harming others and from the sources of such harm.

The three different types of ethical discipline are:

1. the ethical discipline of restraint
2. the ethical discipline of gathering virtue
3. the ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings

These are mentioned in the lam-rim. Here, I am talking mainly about the first one—the ethical discipline of restraint. When the thought of harming others arises, immediately, with mindfulness, you recognize, “Oh, this is not good.” Then you restrain yourself by not engaging in such harm. That is the ethical discipline of restraint.

Generally speaking, there are three different classes of vows. There are the individual liberation vows, the bodhisattva vows and the tantric vows. Normally, we have these three types of discipline. I am not going to talk about all these here.

There are ten negative actions—three of the body, four of the speech and three of the mind. We all know that.

TEN NEGATIVE ACTIONS	
Body	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Killing (or taking life) 2. Stealing (or taking what is not given) 3. Sexual misconduct
Speech	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Lying 5. Divisive speech (or sowing discord) 6. Harsh speech 7. Idle gossip
Mind	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Covetousness 9. Ill will (or malice) 10. Wrong views

Discipline should come from wisdom. It should not be like punishment. It should really

come from your own wisdom, understanding (the benefit) of keeping precepts, avoiding killing, stealing and so forth. If you were to engage in those actions, it will really harm others. You understand that when you harm others, you are harming yourself. So, these are the two things. When you talk about non-virtue in a bigger way, we mainly talk about killing a human being. If you really were to kill someone, then you have harmed another being and, at the same time, you have harmed yourself. Your bodily action has become negative.

Stealing is also like that, i.e., by harming others, you also harm yourself. So, you develop the understanding with wisdom that by harming others, it also harms yourself and that is not good. For example, if somebody harms me, somebody kills me or somebody were to steal my things, is that good or not? It is not good. The same thing applies if you were to steal someone else's things or you kill someone. Is that good or not? The answer is no. It is not good. With this understanding, you don't engage in such actions. Sometimes, when the thought arises, immediately, you recognize and stop it. This is the way to practise ethical discipline.

The whole idea of ethical discipline is looking at one's own behaviour—how you behave, how you talk, how you think. Do they really harm others? It is extremely important to always check up on that.

How we speak, the kind of words and language we use, our body language—all these are important because people can see that. Of course, it is much more difficult for others to see what we are thinking in our mind. But sometimes, you can understand what is going on in the person's mind through their body language and the way they talk, even though it is not 100 percent. The idea is that how you behave is extremely important. You need to check up on that.

If you practise and behave well in your body language and speech, you are very pleasant, good and disciplined, then you give so much freedom to yourself and other sentient beings. When you are very disciplined, it gives the people around you so much freedom. There is also so much freedom for yourself. So, it is extremely important to practise avoiding the ten non-virtues in your daily life.

It is possible to avoid killing. In a bigger way, that means avoiding killing human beings. In a smaller way, that means avoiding killing insects. This gives so much freedom to other sentient beings. It also frees you from taking rebirth in the lower realms, i.e., you won't take rebirth in the lower realms. You are free from unfortunate rebirths by keeping precepts such as avoiding killing. With that understanding of (the benefit of) keeping the precept of not killing—"I don't want to kill because this will harm me and harm others"—then you will see the result of just keeping that thought in the mind, "I will not kill."

Consequences of not being mindful

It is also important to be mindful, introspective or vigilant and always cautious whether your body language or speech will harm others or not. You need to be mindful about this. This is important because when you are mindful, you engage less in negative actions. The problem is that if you are not mindful, it becomes very easy for

you to create negative karma. If you are not mindful, harsh words slip out easily from your mouth. Then this becomes a habit. The point is that when you are not mindful, you do that once, two times and so on and after that, you become careless of how much your harsh words harm others. You don't really think about it. However, when someone else talks to you harshly, this becomes a big issue. Yet when you talk harshly to others, it is not an issue at all. This is not correct.

I noticed that once one is habituated with using harsh words such as, "shit"—in Nepali, they use "dog" or "donkey"—one may not mean it but somehow, it just slips out from the mouth. If one doesn't think much about it, then it becomes part of one's habit. I told the person many times to change his habit. The person told me, "OK." Still, it is difficult for him as it is so easy for him to blurt it out because it is a habit and because of not being mindful.

Also, you don't notice how much you harm others. You know harming others is not good as it will bring so much suffering for yourself in the future. If you harm others in this life, it brings so much suffering for you in future lives. Once you really understand that, you have to be mindful about how you speak to others. If you are mindful, then you will be able to restrain yourself from using harsh words so much.

Many people are unhappy because of how we speak. If we are not disciplined about how we speak, then that will become a problem in our daily life. What I see is this communication problem. How people use words, their body language and how they speak become problematic in the family, society, community and between friends.

Don't look at the problems in future lives. Just look at the problems of this present life. They mostly come from not disciplining your body and speech. Even in this life, so many problems arise because you do not discipline yourself. Once you discipline your body language and speech, then you are very mindful of disciplining your mind. You will always be guarding and looking after your mind. Whenever the negative mind arises, immediately, you recognize it and try to stop that mind, letting go (of those negative thoughts). That becomes a very powerful practice of ethical discipline. If the mind is not disciplined, then it is not easy to discipline the body and speech. It all boils down to disciplining your mind. It is very important to bringing happiness in this life followed by happiness in your next life and then from life to life.

As mentioned in the text, when you practise ethical discipline very well by disciplining your body, speech and mind, then even very negative thoughts can stop. When you practise like that, then when you achieve the second ground of the bodhisattva's path, you are able to perfect the perfection of morality. When you reach this level, it is mentioned that even in your dreams, you won't dream about breaking the precepts. Then of course, when you are awake, there is no question that you will not break your precepts either. That is the very powerful perfection of morality. So, when you practise and are able to achieve that level, you won't engage in negative actions at all. Even in your dreams, you won't dream of doing that.

Practising with the other perfections

- I also mentioned before that when you practise ethical discipline combined with

the other five perfections, that practice becomes extremely powerful. When you are practicing morality, say, not engaging in and restraining yourself from killing, at the same time, you guide others to do likewise, advising them to keep the precepts such as not killing. So, at the same time as you are practising, you guide and give advice to others. This can be the practice of generosity.

- While you are practising avoiding killing or keeping the precept of not killing, at that moment, somebody may shout, “You are so stupid.” At that time, you practise patience.
- At the same time, you have a very strong determination and intention to keep developing the precept of morality. With such a strong intention, joyfully, you want to do more and more. That is joyous effort.
- Then with whatever merit you have collected, you make a single-pointed dedication, thinking single-pointedly of the benefits of keeping morality. That becomes concentration.
- Then the wisdom part refers to emptiness. Using the example of restraining yourself from killing,
 - the object (of your aversion), i.e., the sentient being (who you refrain from killing), is not truly existent,
 - you, yourself, who is practising morality is also not truly existent
 - the practice of morality itself is also not truly existent
 These are all illusory and not truly existent.

It is mentioned that within one perfection, if one can combine together all the six perfections, then that can become an extremely powerful practice of ethical discipline.

In our daily life, the practice of observing morality pertains mainly to the ten non-virtues, i.e., how negative karma is created from the body and how negative karma is created from our speech. This is important. Then it is also important to recognize how many negative thoughts arise in our mind. Be mindful about that. Recognize especially how our body and speech can harm others and try to restrain yourself from that and change in a positive way. Try to stop the negative habits and change to a positive way. When you speak to others, speak nicely in a way that brings happiness to others. (Be mindful of) how you speak to others, how you look at others and how you can help others.

With regard to generosity, you should give to poor people in a respectful way. As mentioned in the text, you should really want to give and not look down on them. When the beggar comes, you throw (your money) on the plate. It is not like that. You should really give respectfully to that person with a good heart. Of course, this comes from a good heart but the action itself is also important. You may have a good heart but just throwing (your money)... It should not be like that. With a good heart, one should give respectfully and talk nicely. Then with your body, speech and mind, you have become so helpful to others. You bring so much happiness to other sentient beings.

When we discipline our body, speech and mind and are able to bring so much happiness to sentient beings, that means we bring happiness to ourselves as well. You must understand that.

Sometimes, we may think of discipline as a punishment but it is not like that. What discipline means is to help and not harm others. When you discipline yourself well, that means creating virtue and not creating negative karma. In this way, you bring happiness to others and yourself. It is very important to understand that.

Sometimes, when we don't understand that, then keeping precepts becomes a burden or a heavy load. But it is not like that. When you don't understand, it becomes a problem so you must understand this. The conclusion is that, as much as possible, your body, speech and mind must be used in a virtuous way, to help others and not to harm others.

So, that is my talk for today. That is all. The next topic is patience. If you want to know more, you can read the lam-rim.

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