

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the Six Perfections

Lesson 4

28 March 2019

Meditation on Shakyamuni Buddha. Review: Perfections of generosity, ethical discipline and patience. Perfection of joyous effort: Importance of joyous effort. Types of joyous effort. Three types of laziness. Gathering of favourable conditions for generating joyous effort. Conclusion. (This class was conducted in English by Khen Rinpoche).

MEDITATION ON SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

(Class began with the usual meditation on Shakyamuni Buddha. Details in Lesson 1).

REVIEW: PERFECTIONS OF GENEROSITY, ETHICAL DISCIPLINE AND PATIENCE

In the last three classes, we talked about the practice of generosity, the practice of morality (or ethical discipline) and the practice of patience. We have covered these three topics. Today, I am supposed to talk about joyous effort.

As mentioned before, practising generosity is the antidote to one of the negative emotions, miserliness. By practising generosity, the result brings wealth, for one to help oneself and to help other sentient beings.

But practising only generosity is not good enough. One must also practise morality. Without practising morality, by just practising generosity alone, the wealth that results from that practice cannot continue. Also, you are not able to have a good human rebirth with just the practice of generosity alone. Therefore, morality is important. The practice of morality helps yourself and helps other sentient beings as it brings happiness to yourself and brings happiness to others as well. The practice of morality is about that. By keeping morality, you can have a good rebirth such as a human rebirth or a god rebirth. Such a rebirth is the perfect condition for one to practise Dharma and to help other sentient beings compared to a lower rebirth.

After that is the practice of patience. In order to sustain the practice of generosity and the practice of morality, you need patience. Without patience, you are not able to continue your practice. So, you need patience. When you practise patience, there will always be difficulties. As I mentioned the other day, it is always good to remind yourself whether there is any benefit to getting angry. It is mentioned that once anger arises in the mind, immediately, it destroys your peace of mind. That is very clear. On the other hand, if you are patient, then of course, your mind is peaceful and you willingly accept the problems that may arise. When you accept problems willingly, you have peace in your mind. That means it brings happiness for you. Not only that, it is able to bring happiness to other sentient beings.

Being patient is the antidote to anger as anger is very powerful and it can destroy your merit. Even if you have collected so much merit by keeping morality or practising

generosity, if you do not practise patience, then whatever merit you collect will be destroyed within seconds.

We all know that anger is extremely powerful. Among the delusions, attachment, anger, and ignorance, anger is easily recognizable compared to the other two. The problem is that we don't remind ourselves of this. We don't think about the faults of anger and we don't remember the benefits of patience. We always forget them because we don't really think a great deal about anger. That is lacking. Because of that, we easily get angry. You can immediately recognize how harmful anger is for yourself and others. It is very easy to recognize that. So, what I am saying is that it is very important to be mindful. Patience is very important for us in developing and changing our mind.

PERFECTION OF JOYOUS EFFORT

Importance of joyous effort

Joyous effort is important. Even after we have the practice of generosity, the practice of morality and the practice of patience, in order to be able to continue with these practices, we need to have joyous effort. Without joyous effort, we will only do these practices sometimes and not be able to continue our practice of patience and so forth. The point is that when you do practise generosity, morality or patience, you should do so joyfully. That becomes extremely powerful for one to continue these practices. Otherwise, it is not possible to continue. Therefore, joyous effort is extremely important.

Practising virtue is difficult. Creating negative actions is easy. For us, it is like that. There is a Tibetan expression, "Chasing the donkey up the hill is difficult but rolling the rock down from the mountain is easy." For us, we are exactly like that. For us to create virtue is like chasing the donkey up the hill. On the other hand, creating negativities need no effort on our part. Sometimes, we even do so joyfully. Sometimes, we do so joyfully and most of the time, it is automatic. So, it is not easy (to practise virtue).

Here, joyous effort means engaging in virtue. Not only that, it also means the continuity of engaging in virtue, not being discouraged and to have great courage in the heart. Joyous effort gives that kind of energy. It should be like that when you have joyous effort. It should give great encouragement to your mind. You don't feel discouraged and you engage willingly in virtue. So, that is called joyous effort.

You have to know what virtue is and what non-virtue is. You have to know karma. If you create non-virtue, what will happen? If you create virtue, what is the result? You have to study and know the law of karma. Once you fully understand that, you will create virtuous karma. All happiness comes from virtuous karma. There is no other way. Only by creating virtuous karma will you experience happiness. When you feel so hot and miserable, even a slight breeze will give you some happiness. That comes from virtuous karma. So, every happiness comes from virtuous karma.

This is not easy to understand. One must study and learn. From there, you will have some faith and conviction that gives you some kind of encouragement to practise. By fully understanding that, you will have confidence. Then a very strong intention or strong belief will arise in your mind that will make you want to practise the Dharma. That is very, very important. This all comes from the wisdom within that understanding. Then you have a

very strong motivation from the depths of your heart to practise the Dharma.

Types of joyous effort

There are different types of joyous effort:-

1. armour-like joyous effort
2. joyous effort of gathering virtue
3. joyous effort of working for the welfare of living beings

1. Armour-like joyous effort

Here, we are talking about achieving full enlightenment or achieving liberation, i.e., freedom from suffering. These are long-term not short-term goals. You cannot achieve enlightenment in a short lifetime. You cannot achieve liberation in a short lifetime. It is not possible in one lifetime. According to sutra, enlightenment is not possible in one lifetime. It takes three countless great eons to achieve full enlightenment. The point is to look at the big picture and to have a big heart. "It doesn't matter how long it takes, I am going to practise." Setting up this kind of mind-set is important. Then you will have the strong intention to practise the Dharma.

It is also mentioned in the *Lama Chopa* (or *Guru Puja*) text, "Even if I must remain for an ocean of eons in the fiery hell of Avici/ For the sake of even just one sentient being,/ I seek your blessings to complete the perfection of joyous effort,/ That out of compassion untiringly strives for supreme enlightenment." (LC104). That is the kind of strong intention we are talking about. This is what armour-like joyous effort is about, generating this very strong mind. You don't think about the length of time it will take when you have this strong mind.

2. Joyous effort of gathering virtue

You have this mindset and then you engage in the practice. First, you have this big mind. After that, you start with your practice. The joyous effort of gathering virtue is engaging in and collecting virtue such as making prostrations, doing the seven-limbs practice, listening to, reflecting and meditating on the Dharma and so forth. That is the joyous effort of gathering virtue.

As I have mentioned before, (these activities should be done) joyfully. Even for prostrations, you should do them joyfully and not in a rush. For example, if you commit to do 100,000 prostrations, you must do them joyfully with the understanding of the benefits of prostrations, understanding how much merit you will collect and how much negative karma you can purify with each prostration. The point is not to rush for the numbers and worrying about, "When am I going to finish the 100,000 prostrations?" It should not be like that. This is an important point. Even if you were to do one prostration a day, that should be done joyfully.

Otherwise, if you are just rushing for the numbers, then it is like punishing yourself. "Oh, I must do it as I have committed to it already. I must do. I must do. I cannot break the commitment." You may have different reasons but there is no joy in the heart. Once you have finished the 100,000 prostrations, then that's it. There is no continuation of the practice because of that. There is no other reason. I'm just giving an example. Doing every practice and doing retreat are also like that. If we don't do them joyfully—"Oh, there is such good karma in doing this!"—then that's it. If you don't really understand that much,

then there is no joy. "Oh, somebody else is doing it. So, I must do it also." There is no joy and it is just pushing yourself. Pushing the donkey up the hill is so difficult. That is our problem.

This is a good example. Once, eight of us trekked to Lawudo. Our destination was to go to Lawudo. We took a half-day plane ride and then we had to walk four days in the hills. Most of the Singaporeans didn't know how to walk. Normally, they don't get to walk on bumpy roads with stones. I noticed they didn't know how to enjoy the walking. They were always asking, "When will we reach there?" Every day, they would ask, "How many days/hours will it take for us to reach there?" They didn't enjoy the journey at all. They were only thinking about the future. "When am I going to reach there?" Of course, the destination is there. One's goal is there but you have to walk slowly to reach it. At the same time, you have to enjoy yourself while walking by looking left and right and all around you.

I noticed Westerners are different. The foreigners, the Europeans and Americans, when they go to the mountains, they are not rushing. It doesn't matter when they will reach their destination. They look left. They look right. They would say, "Hi. Hello." They would look at everything. It is only the Singaporeans. I noticed that they don't know how to enjoy the journey.

Another time, I went to Lumbini and the group of Singaporeans (I was travelling with) were sleeping throughout the journey. It was about an eight to nine hour drive. Most of them slept. None of them looked out of the window. I told them, "Look at this mountain. Look at that mountain." They asked, "What is there to look at?" Then I have nothing much to say.

I think foreigners won't sleep. They are so excited to see the scenery. They have their cameras. They don't think about when they are going to reach (their destination). They enjoy the journey.

So, it is the same kind of example. Just as you must enjoy the journey, you must enjoy exerting joyous effort gathering virtue in order to reach buddhahood. You have to practise to engage in gathering virtue. When you start, then you must enjoy. The point is that you must enjoy. It is very important.

If you enjoy what you are doing be it listening to the Dharma, reflection, meditation or doing retreat, then it doesn't become boring. It becomes very, very enjoyable. When you have this thought, time is not an issue. Whether it would take ten days or 12 days to reach Lawudo, it won't matter. I am giving an example. Buddhahood is like that. Sometimes, when we say three countless great eons, it looks like a long time but if you enjoy your journey, then it is not long. It becomes very short. That is the point. I am giving you the example of climbing the mountain. So here, when you practice the joyous effort of gathering virtue, you should enjoy it.

3. Joyous effort of working for the welfare of living beings

It can be similar. Here, it relates to sentient beings. When you want to help and benefit sentient beings, then whatever you are going to do, do it with joy and with some kind of good feeling in the heart. When you help the sentient being who needs your help, do that with some kind of happy feeling in the heart. That is very, very important.

My point here is that whatever you do, do it joyfully. Then it becomes very, very effective.

Three types of laziness

There are three types of laziness that obstruct our practice of joyous effort.

1. the laziness of procrastination
2. the laziness of attraction to meaningless activities
3. the laziness of discouragement

1. Laziness of procrastination.

This is one of our problems. It is the laziness that keeps us postponing our Dharma practice. We always postpone our Dharma practice till tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next year, one year later, after my retirement, after I am old ...It goes on like that. That is one of the laziness.

This is our biggest problem. We could say that it is our biggest laziness. Because of that, we don't really have joyous effort. We are always lazy in gathering virtue. We are all like that. That is one of our problems.

The lam-rim gives advice on how to reduce this laziness. What is the antidote or the method to reduce this laziness of procrastination. The antidote or method to reduce this laziness is to meditate on death and impermanence.

In the lam-rim, it is said that death is certain, the time of death is uncertain and at the time of death, nothing can help except the Dharma. We are also advised to think of our precious human rebirth. We have found this human rebirth but it will not last forever. It can disappear at any time. In reality it is like that. You must meditate on this. If you don't meditate well on this topic, then you will always remain as you are, thinking that you have time to practise the Dharma.

Lama Tsongkhapa mentioned in the lam-rim that the way to reduce this laziness is to meditate on death and impermanence. When you meditate well on death and impermanence, then you will be able to reduce this laziness of procrastination.

There is a quotation that says, "Death can happen at any time. Relax." Here when I say, "Relax," it means that sometimes when you are meditating on death and impermanence, these thoughts may come, "Oh, I am going to die today, I am going to practise the Dharma. I am going to die at any time." Then you put in so much effort to practise the Dharma. That is also no good. You will not be able to continue and sustain this.

When you practise the Dharma, you must relax. For example, the doctor says that you are going to die within a few days or weeks. You will put all your effort into practising the Dharma then. But even that is not sustainable. After a few days, you will feel too tired to continue and you will think of giving up.

So of course, you have to understand death and impermanence and that death can happen at any time. But then you must practise the Dharma in a very relaxed way. With the mindfulness of death and impermanence, you practise Dharma joyfully and in a relaxed way because death can happen at any time. So, there is no need to worry or be scared. If you are too scared, the practice will not turn out well. Or if you become too anxious doing

this and that, again nothing will happen. So, when you practise the Dharma, you must relax.

On the other hand, sometimes, we worry too much about dying and then nothing happens. That is also not correct. We can say the time of the death is like that. Normally, we don't practise but when the time of death comes around, we become very anxious. Everybody is recommending reciting this mantra or that mantra, hundreds of (different) mantras. You do this and you do that. After that, you get tired.

The point is that you must relax. Of course, you have to meditate on death and impermanence. The reality is that it can happen at any time. It doesn't matter whether it happens today or tomorrow. Having this mindfulness, then you practise the Dharma. You don't postpone your practice. Death can happen at any time but relax. Practise the Dharma. I think the meaning is that.

2. Laziness of attraction to meaningless activities

This is also one of our difficult problems. We all have the first laziness and definitely, we have this second laziness. The laziness here is about being attached to some small benefit and engaging in that activity. That activity doesn't bring much benefit but just a small gain. Yet you are attached to it and engage in it.

You totally forget about the big picture. Here the big picture is achieving enlightenment or collecting the virtue to achieve enlightenment. You totally forget about that. Instead, you are totally attached to this small thing that brings little benefit. You are attached to it, engage in it and you forget to practise the Dharma that is able to bring you everlasting happiness. This is the attachment to meaningless activities.

For example, normally, when we talk to each other, there is no need for any effort. In any conversation, especially gossiping about other people, we don't need to make any effort. It comes automatically one after another. Sometimes, it may even bring some kind of joy just talking about this or that person. It is such nonsense. It is meaningless speech. It is the same thing with regard to spending so much time watching movies, television or whatever. All these activities don't bring lasting happiness. For example, gossip doesn't bring everlasting happiness. Watching TV for a long period of time at the end of the day doesn't bring everlasting happiness. It doesn't bring about a good rebirth or a good result in the future. You are attached to something that is not really meaningful.

You have to understand that no matter how much you may enjoy such activities, they don't bring everlasting happiness nor do they bring much benefit in the future. On the other hand, if you look at Dharma practice, it brings so much everlasting happiness in the future. When you understand that, then you are able to be less attached to those activities. When you are able to understand the benefits of Dharma practice, then you are able to engage in it joyfully.

What I am saying here is that we have to understand that when we are attached to the temporary small benefits (of meaningless activities), that stops us from engaging in Dharma practice. This becomes an obstacle to joyous effort. Because of that, we forgot about our practice of the Dharma. You are joyfully doing these activities that are of small benefit and doing them very happily and joyfully. That means you forget totally about the

practice of the Dharma. You are always engaging in those activities and forget your Dharma practice totally!

As mentioned before, you need to look at your enjoyment of 10 hours, 12 hours of gossiping, watching TV or whatever and the kind of results they will bring about in the long term. It is nothing much! It's just temporary satisfaction. It doesn't bring you anything more than that. Definitely, it doesn't bring the happiness of your future lives. Once you understand that, you will reduce those activities. And if you fully understand the benefits of Dharma practice that brings about everlasting happiness, then you will have some intention to practise the Dharma. With the understanding of the benefits of practising Dharma, you will then engage in it joyfully. So, that's important.

3. Laziness of Discouragement

This is another type of laziness. Often, we just discourage ourselves, "How can I practise Dharma?" We have so many reasons for feeling discouraged. We don't think in a positive way. We always think in a negative way, discouraging ourselves by thinking, "I don't have this ability to practise/study the Dharma."

This is a hallucinating mind, a wrong mind and a mistaken mind thinking, "I don't have the ability to practise the Dharma." This is the laziness of discouragement that comes from the wrong mind that sees oneself as being unable to do the practice. This is something that blocks us from practising the Dharma.

For example, in order to achieve buddhahood, the Buddha's enlightenment and becoming a buddha, when you hear that it takes three countless great eons and also entails doing many different practices, you become discouraged. You find that so discouraging.

It is the same thing for us. We have so much discouragement in our mind because we have so many wrong reasons. "I am busy. I am working. I have a family. I have children. There are many other reasons. Therefore, I can't practise the Dharma." The idea that one does not have the energy to practise the Dharma is deceiving and discouraging oneself. So that is a type of laziness mentioned in the text. When we have such discouragement in our mind, when we have this hallucinated and wrong mind that thinks with all the wrong reasons, "I can't do it!", then we end up not doing anything at all. We don't even start our practice. Because of this thought, it blocks our practice and we don't even start it. So, this is one type of laziness. When we have this mind, then we don't really start our practice.

If we don't practise, how do we know whether we can do it or not? At least, if we start but we find we cannot really manage it, then that is a different story. But in the first place, if we block our mind like that, we don't start our practice at all. So, it becomes one of the types of laziness.

The recommended advice given in Shantideva's text and in the lam-rim is to meditate on buddha nature. The Buddha said every sentient being has buddha nature. Every sentient being is capable of achieving enlightenment. Therefore, as a human being, you are fully educated, you have a physical body and a stable mind. You should think instead, "If I practise, why not? I am able to practise. I am able to change. I am able to practise the Dharma, so (buddhahood) is possible." Thinking in this way, you encourage yourself to practise more deeply. That advice was given in Shantideva's text.

Once you have these three types of laziness—procrastination, attachment to meaningless activities and feeling discouraged—it is difficult to engage in Dharma practice.

You must apply the different antidotes for the different types of laziness, such as the meditation on death and impermanence, thinking about the benefits of practising the Dharma, the disadvantages of engaging in meaningless activities and so forth. By thinking about them, you then reduce your laziness. You also encourage yourself about what you are able to do. But in the first place, our problem is that we don't even start. We just think, "I can't do it." That is called laziness.

Gathering of favourable conditions for generating joyous effort

Then there is the gathering of the favourable conditions for generating joyous effort that involves developing:

1. the power of aspiration
2. the power of steadfastness
3. the power of joy
4. the power of relinquishment

1. The power of aspiration

In the first place, you must have this very strong wish and develop a heartfelt motivation to practise the Dharma. With wisdom, you really begin to understand that all happiness comes from Dharma practice and all suffering comes from engaging in non-virtue. Once you have this very deep understanding with your wisdom, then you will have this strong motivation or aspiration to practise the Dharma. So, that is a favourable condition for joyous effort.

2. The power of steadfastness (or stability)

The point of steadfastness is being stable and having strong confidence in yourself. This is also needed. Without this, it is also difficult. Once you have a very strong intention and strong self-confidence, you won't give up easily. You are very stable in this regard. This is also important.

3. The power of joy

Whenever you engage in virtuous activity, helping sentient beings or whatever practice you do, it will bring you some kind of joy. When you feel joy in doing the practice, then you are very satisfied with the practice. You have this very joyful feeling from inside your heart. This is very much needed. With that, it makes you continue with your joyous effort.

An example is when you were young and playing. You had so much interest in playing. You voluntarily, willingly engage in your playing with a happy feeling in the heart. You don't feel any hardship at all. Even if it gets difficult, you don't feel the difficulty at that moment. This is the example given. When you engage in virtue very joyfully, a happy feeling in the heart should arise. This becomes very important.

4. The power of relinquishment

Even if you have so much joy in practising the Dharma, without achieving calm abiding, your body and mind will get tired. You are unable to continue with your Dharma even if you have the wish to do so. Even if you have joy and stability, it is difficult to continue

practising Dharma day and night. Your mind will be tired and so will your body.

At that time, the power of relinquishment is important and you must rest. Once you are rested, then once again, you continue with your Dharma practice. Just like children playing a game, when they are totally exhausted, they rest. After that, they don't stop but just continue. The idea is the same here. You rest well then you continue. This is very good advice but I don't know whether we need it. We are always rested. Even before the practice, we are already resting!

Conclusion

The conclusion here is to first understand the benefits and happiness that Dharma practice can bring for oneself. Then you look at samsaric pleasures. How helpful are they for oneself? How long do their benefits last? When you look carefully, of course, no matter how much you enjoy or engage in samsaric pleasures, they cannot bring happiness in your future lives. Dharma practice can bring happiness in your future lives, from life to life, up to enlightenment. So, with that understanding, one should not delay one's practice as death can happen at any moment. At the same time, you have to be relaxed. Then you start your practice. The point is that. So, this is important.

If we delay (our Dharma practice) until we die, then we end up not practising at all. So, the first laziness (of procrastination) is the most dangerous laziness among the three. We never start our practice. Death can happen any time. So, relax and start your practice. This is important.

Whatever practice you do, whenever you start your practice, do so joyfully, even when it comes to doing your daily commitments and prayers, listening to teachings, circumambulations, making offerings and so forth. Whatever we do, do it joyfully. It is very, very important that we recognize this because when we have joy, we are able to continue with our practice.

Of course, I'm not saying, "Don't watch TV! Don't gossip!" Of course you may gossip and watch TV sometimes but don't spend all your time on those activities. If possible, give more time to your Dharma practice. Then when you are tired, you can watch some TV or gossip a little. I don't know what else you do. I'm not so sure about gossiping though. I remembered one of my teachers didn't talk much. I heard this is because one of his teachers advised him not to gossip and to be mindful about that. So, normally, he doesn't talk much about the usual things, except for answering questions on the Dharma. So that is very, very wonderful.

We will continue with the next topic, concentration and calm abiding in the next class.

Transcribing team: Phuah Soon Ek, Patricia Lee, Lau Geok Chin, Alison Wong, Rachel Tan, Aki Yeo, Julia Koh and Vivien Ng. Edited by Cecilia Tsong.