

**Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on
*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds, 2014***

Root text: *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* by Shantideva, translated by Toh Sze Gee. Copyright: Toh Sze Gee, 2006; Revised edition, 2014.

Lesson 1**6 February 2014**

Reflecting on impermanence. Summary of chapters of root text. Explanation of *jang chub sem chhog rin po chhe*. Chapter One: Meaning of the title & the translator's homage.

REFLECTING ON IMPERMANENCE

Because compounded phenomena are impermanent, based on that, one establishes that there is suffering. And based on the reason that there is suffering, one goes on to establish that phenomena are selfless.

When the Buddha first taught the Dharma, he said that all compounded phenomena are impermanent. There are different levels of subtlety behind the explanation of what impermanence is. There is coarse impermanence and subtle impermanence. The Buddha was alluding mainly to subtle impermanence.

Realising what subtle impermanence is is a challenging task. However without realising what subtle impermanence is, it is not possible to understand the suffering of conditionality (also translated as pervasive compounded suffering). Among the three types of suffering, the suffering of conditionality is the third type.¹

Whilst it is said that all compounded phenomena are impermanent, the specific example of impermanent phenomenon that we should primarily focus on is ourselves, i.e., we ourselves are in the nature of impermanence. Without realising that we are in the nature of impermanence, it is difficult for us to see how we are actually suffering. But it is very difficult to realise our own impermanence, especially the fact that we are in the nature of subtle impermanence.

From our own experience, when we think of ourselves, there is the 'I' or person who wakes up in the morning and there is the 'I' or person in the later part of the day, say, in the evening. When we look at the 'I' of this morning and the present 'I', we spontaneously and instinctively feel that it is the same 'I', i.e., the 'I' or person has not changed at all. In the same way, when we look at our body, we instinctively feel and believe that the body of this morning and the body of the current moment are the same, that is, our body has not changed. So realising subtle impermanence is very difficult.

But is that the reality of the 'I'? Is that the reality of our body? No. Because when we

¹ The other two types of suffering are (1) the suffering of suffering and (2) the suffering of change.

think about it, the reality is that the 'I' and our body have changed. In fact, from this morning up till now, they have been changing in each and every single moment. Up till now, they are changing but we do not realise it. We do not see it.

Imagine setting a stick on fire and then twirling it around very quickly. When you do that, there is an appearance of a wheel of fire. But in reality, there is no such wheel. Likewise although instinctively we believe that the 'I' and the body do not change from moment to moment, the reality is that that is a mistake. It is not true. It is false because the 'I' and the body are constantly changing in each and every moment.

In the Great Treatises in the study of logic, the statement is phrased in this way:

The subject, sound, is impermanent because it is a product.

By the valid proof of it being a product, one establishes that sound is impermanent. In this case when we talk about proving that sound is impermanent by the reason of it being a product, *impermanence* here means disintegration and *product* here means creation, i.e., something new is created. But when you think about the meaning of these two—impermanence and product—they are actually one entity with two different isolates.²

Khen Rinpoche : I hope you are not confused, not confused on the first day!

When we apply this line of reasoning by changing the subject to the 'I' or our body, then:

The subject, 'I', is impermanent because it is a product.

The subject, my body, is impermanent because it is a product.

One's body is a product because it is produced. With that as the reason, one establishes that one's body is impermanent. What we have to establish is that we are impermanent and that our body is impermanent because they are produced and are in the nature of impermanence. They are changing and disintegrating moment by moment. Why? Because they are products.

This is why the Buddha said, "Because it is produced, it is a phenomenon that undergoes disintegration." By that very reason, anything that is produced has the nature of disintegration. It is impermanent. Because it is produced, that phenomenon that is produced is in the nature of impermanence, undergoing disintegration in each and every single moment.

Production arises due to a cause. What is the cause then of that phenomenon having the nature of impermanence? Is there a cause for that other than the cause that led to its production?

² An impermanent phenomenon is so-called because it undergoes momentary change, i.e., it undergoes change in each and every single moment. An impermanent phenomenon can also be referred to as a product. It is called a product because it is a created or produced phenomenon. (Second Basic Program, Module 2, Lesson 1, page 6).

In the Buddha's teachings, it is asserted that the cause of the production of a phenomenon is itself the very cause of its disintegration. This is something that we need to think about and establish for ourselves.

Therefore impermanence and product are essentially one entity. It is just that they are different isolates but of course this is an extremely difficult point to realise.

In order to develop a definite understanding and realisation of the meaning of subtle impermanence, one has to realise that whatever is produced *necessarily* undergoes disintegration. This is the nature of impermanence. Without understanding this, there is no way to realise subtle impermanence.

When you light a candle, there is a flame. There is light or illumination. When the flame of the candle goes out, the light disappears as well. Does the cessation of that light happen simultaneously with the cessation of the flame of the candle? Or is there an intervening period (i.e., first the flame goes out, then the light/illumination ceases)?

Khen Rinpoche: Or do they go out at the same time?

One has to understand that an impermanent phenomenon undergoes momentary change in each and every single moment.

But while a particular impermanent phenomenon exists, it exists as a continuum. For example, there is a continuum of the body that existed in the morning and the body that exists now. While the body existed during that time, it is not that the body does not undergo change. Although there is a continuum of a particular impermanent phenomenon, in each and every single moment of that continuum, disintegration is taking place. Change is happening. This is what we have to understand.

Thinking about this, we have to utilise our time in such a way, especially when we have the time and opportunity, so as to not let it go to waste. Instead, we should educate ourselves, learn and reflect on the teachings of the Buddha. By continually reflecting on impermanence, this will impel us to take the opportunity whenever possible and with whatever time we have to move our mind in the direction of virtue, whether it be doing prayers, engaging in practice, learning or studying.

Whatever we learn and study, we should always apply it to our own mind and try our best as much as possible to weaken and to reduce our afflictions, the three mental poisons. We have to remind ourselves of our own impermanence and tell ourselves to engage in virtue. Whatever is good to do, we should seize the opportunity to do it. We should make a pledge to ourselves while there is such an opportunity. When all the different conditions are still there, we must try our best to make use of the opportunity.

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### **ENGAGING IN THE BODHISATTVA DEEDS**

With regard to studying this text, ideally there is great benefit if we can study the text

by following the outlines of the commentary. The purpose is to help us gain a good overview and understanding of the different sections and parts of the text. But in our case, I don't think we will be able to do that in such detail.

Rather if we can gain some understanding of some of the verses in the text, I think this will suffice for our purpose. For those of you who really have the interest and would like to read the root text together with the outline of the commentary by Gyalsab Je, the outline of Gyalsab Je's commentary is available in English.

I hope that I can explain the meaning of the verses as much as possible. I hope to go as quickly as I can.

The study of this text is different from the study of other philosophical subjects. This text is intellectually not that challenging and it is not difficult to understand.

### **SUMMARY OF THE TEN CHAPTERS**

This text, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, has ten chapters.

- The first chapter is an *Explanation of the Benefits of the Mind of Enlightenment* (or bodhicitta). This is a teaching of the Mahayana. In order to be a Mahayanist, one must first have the realisation of bodhicitta. Then one becomes a Mahayanist.

In order to develop bodhicitta, first one has to develop faith and belief in and enthusiasm for developing bodhicitta. For those reasons, the benefits of bodhicitta are explained in the first chapter. But just having faith and belief in and enthusiasm for bodhicitta does not mean that you will be able to generate bodhicitta.

In order to generate bodhicitta, one must overcome the obstacles, i.e., the negativities that have to be purified and one has to accumulate merit or virtue, i.e., the favourable conditions. On the basis of confessing and purifying one's negativities and accumulating merit, one adopts bodhicitta through a ritual. Therefore there are chapters two and three.

- Chapter two is called *Confessing Negativities*.
- Chapter three is called *Completely Upholding the Mind of Enlightenment*.
- When one adopts bodhicitta through a ritual, one develops and generates this mind of enlightenment. But it is insufficient to simply adopt bodhicitta through a ritual. After one has adopted and generated bodhicitta through a ritual, it is important to not let that mind of enlightenment degenerate. In order to not let one's commitment degenerate, one has to know exactly what to adopt and what to abandon. For that reason, there is chapter four, *Teachings on Conscientiousness*.

After adopting bodhicitta through a ritual, it is important to not let it degenerate. Therefore there is the training in the deeds or practices of a bodhisattva. With respect to that, there is the general training and the specific training.

- The general training is covered in chapter four where there are the teachings on conscientiousness, i.e., teachings on what one has to adopt and what one has to abandon with regard to one's training.
- The specific training refers to the training in the perfections.
- Chapter five is *Guarding Introspection*. Once one has adopted bodhicitta, it is important to maintain one's ethical discipline. In order to maintain one's ethical discipline, one needs mindfulness and introspection (or vigilance). For that reason, there is an explanation of introspection in chapter five.
- Chapter six deals with the perfection of patience, *Relying on Patience*.
- Chapter seven covers the *Teachings on Joyous Effort*.
- Chapter eight deals with the perfection of meditative stabilisation, *Teachings on Concentration*.
- Chapter nine is on *The Perfection of Wisdom*.
- Chapter ten is the chapter on *Dedication*.

If you were to ask where the practice of the perfection of generosity is indicated in the text, according to the commentary, the perfection of generosity is indicated in the chapter of dedication because in that chapter, there are verses that refer to dedicating one's body and roots of virtue and enjoyments to others.

This text, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, is essentially a teaching showing the whole practice of the Great Vehicle, the Mahayana.

### **JANG CHUB SEM CHHOG RIN PO CHHE**

The dedication prayer that most people are familiar with, *jang chub sem chhog rin po chhe*—"May the supreme jewel bodhicitta/ That has not arisen, arise and grow,/ And may that which has arisen not diminish/ But increase more and more"—is the condensed meaning of all the ten chapters of this text. When you expand on the meaning of this dedication prayer, then you have these ten chapters. But if you were to condense the subject matter or the meaning of these ten chapters, it can be condensed into this one dedication verse.

*"May the supreme jewel bodhicitta/ That has not arisen, arise and grow"*

When we talk about bodhicitta or the mind of enlightenment, you can look at it in terms of the conventional mind of enlightenment and the ultimate mind of enlightenment. When we say, "May the supreme jewel bodhicitta/ That has not arisen, arise and grow," we are talking about these two minds of enlightenment, the conventional mind of enlightenment and the ultimate mind of enlightenment.

In order for that which has not arisen to arise and grow, you have the first three chapters explaining how to make that happen. The first chapter explains the benefits

of bodhicitta, chapter two refers to confessing negativities and chapter three deals with completely upholding bodhicitta.

*“And may that which has arisen not diminish”*

It is not sufficient to adopt bodhicitta and then let it degenerate. As the dedication prayer goes, “May the supreme jewel bodhicitta/ That has not arisen, arise and grow;/ And may that which has arisen not diminish,” it is important not to let the bodhicitta that has arisen degenerate.

The methods for stopping the degeneration of the bodhicitta that has been generated are the practices of conscientiousness, introspection and patience that are taught in chapters four, five and six. So these chapters become very important.

*“But increase more and more”*

Then the dedication prayer ends with “But increase more and more.” So on top of not letting the bodhicitta that has been generated degenerate, you must also ensure that it increases. For that, you need joyous effort, you need to develop meditative stabilisation (or concentration) and you need wisdom. Therefore you have chapters seven, eight and nine.

So for the bodhicitta that has not arisen, one must develop it. Once it is developed, one must ensure that it does not degenerate. On the basis of that, one strives then to increase one’s bodhicitta. The result of following this process is that one achieves the final fruit of attainment.

The whole purpose of attaining this final fruit of attainment is solely to work for the benefit and welfare of others. In that sense, the whole purpose of cultivating bodhicitta, not letting it degenerate and then striving to increase it is to achieve that goal, that final fruit of attainment, which is for the benefit of others. This prayer then is like a wish or an aspiration to achieve that final fruit of attainment of benefiting others.

## **MOTIVATION**

It is said that the motivation for doing anything is very important especially at the beginning when we are doing something very important. Therefore the motivation for learning and studying this text becomes very important. Each of us has to find our own motivation for doing this. We have to look within ourselves and ask, “Why am I here? Why am I studying this? Why am I learning about this?” We need to find an answer for ourselves.

So when we set the motivation, we need an answer for ourselves. You have to find your own answer and until you find it, you have to ask yourself over and over again “Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this?”

*Khen Rinpoche: Did you find your answer? You haven’t found it?*

*I will share with you my own experience.*

*When I was young, around 12 to 15 years old, I had no idea why I was studying Buddhist philosophy. I didn't have any motivation at all. Why was I studying this? I was just following other people. There were classes in the morning and night that you had to attend. There was no choice.*

*Only at the age of 18, when I began to debate in Kopan, there were some geshe who came from Sera (Je Monastic University). These geshe would give their answers. Then we had to debate with them. It was extremely difficult debating with them. They were so scholarly. They knew everything, like enlightened beings! They could answer any questions you asked of them. When you ask them about the texts, they could answer that as well.*

*This is what I felt when I was around 17 or 18 debating with them. This feeling came from my heart. I couldn't imagine how their brains could remember everything! Those geshe had studied all the subjects about 10 to 15 years before, yet they could still remember everything.*

*We were young at that time. We didn't even know what we were studying at that time. I was quite surprised by and just admired those geshe. Then some kind of wish arose in my mind, "How wonderful it would be if I could answer like that." Only then did some kind of motivation arise within me. I think that is called motivation, "How wonderful it would be if I could know all the texts. Whatever text I was studying, how wonderful it would be if I could understand everything."*

*Also at that time, (the late Khensur Rinpoche) Lama Lhundup was teaching us. For example, a sentence such as *jang chub sem chhog rin po chhe*. Of course at that time, I had zero idea. But he could explain so very well those words. I thought, "How wonderful it would be if I was able to understand the topic."*

*That is what made me study and to complete my studies. Not really complete but mere labelling "complete my studies." This was what happened to me. For me, that motivated me to study so long, for about 15 to 20 years.*

*No matter how many years you study, how many books you read, the learning is almost never-ending. The questions are also never-ending and arise more and more. You may know more but for some subjects, you find that there is more that you do not know. So it was quite challenging. For me, it was like that. I was always wondering and thinking, "I want to know. I want to know. I want to know."*

*At that time, I didn't have the motivation to teach others or to do meditation and so forth. I didn't have those thoughts in my mind. For me, I just wanted to know. I wanted to know everything. A little bit *kiasu*,<sup>3</sup> yah? Somehow having that kind of mind all the time kept me going so that pushed me to study more.*

*At that time you think you have read so many commentaries. You have received so many teachings. You think you know everything but when the teacher asked some questions, you realise you don't know anything at all. Your understanding was totally*

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<sup>3</sup> Kiasu is local slang for being afraid to lose out.

wrong!

*So at that moment, I found that the teacher was extremely important. He could really clarify the subject for you, making very clear what was right, what was wrong. Sometimes when you read the text, it seems that you understand something but you cannot be right. You are just getting some rough idea and you are not really going deep down. I found it much more beneficial with a teacher. Then you can really have a good understanding of the text deep down. At that time, you really appreciate that the teacher was there. This was how I felt and how I motivated myself. I thought to just share that with all of you.*

Everyone has to ask oneself, “Why am I going to study this?” Motivation is the driving force. It is everything. Of course there are whole varieties of motivations. Everyone’s motivation is different. Some people want to know because they want to learn. Some people really want to put the teachings into practice. Some people may really want to know in order to be able to share, teach and help others.

Whatever it is, the point is that one has to find the driving force, i.e., the motivation that drives oneself. The reason why people get stuck or do not really achieve much is because they are neither here nor there. It boils down to them not being clear in their own mind of what they want. This is why one’s motivation is everything. It is what drives and determines the result.

So whenever one is studying or learning, it is important to check and adjust one’s motivation. Based on that, as much as possible, learn.

## **CHAPTER ONE: EXPLANATION OF THE BENEFITS OF THE MIND OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

In the root text, it says,

In the Indian language: *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*.

This is how the text starts.

*In the Indian language* means in Sanskrit. The name of the text is *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*.

*The meaning of the title*

~ *Meaning of “Bodhi” or jang chub*

*Bodhi* is Sanskrit. *Bodhi* in Tibetan is made up of two syllables, *jang* and *chub*. When we look at these words, they are very profound and it is important to understand them.

- *Jang* is to purify all the obscurations, specifically referring to purifying all the obscurations that prevent omniscience (or all-knowingness).
- *Chub* is to internalise or actualise, i.e., to gather and to complete all the good qualities.



There is so much that one can understand from and read into the meaning of *jang* and *chub*. All this depends on one's level of education. When one's scope of learning is limited, one's understanding of *jang* is that it simply means to purify or get rid of something. But there is so much more to say about *jang*. To purify what? To purify obscurations. Then when one goes into more details, what kind of obscurations? There are afflictive obscurations and knowledge obscurations. One can go deeper as to what they are.

*Chub* means to internalise or actualise all the qualities. For example, we can talk about all the qualities and realisations of the ten bodhisattva grounds which for us are quite inconceivable. It is difficult for them to fit into our limited mind.

The point is that when one's scope of learning is narrow, there is only so much that one can understand from these words. When one's scope of learning is more extensive, then when one comes across these words, *jang chub*, there is so much more one can read into them. The clearer one's understanding of their meaning, then when one thinks of enlightenment, when one thinks of the Buddha, one will really feel that the Buddha is someone who is really extraordinary and very special. That kind of understanding arises.

It is widely believed by most people that there is no need to engage in extensive studies. What is the benefit of learning so much? I always say this is not the case. This is wrong because your scope of learning determines how much you can understand, for example, understanding what *jang chub* means. Whether we are saying *jang chub*, enlightenment, the Buddha or the object of refuge, we are talking about the same thing. The more learning you have, this will translate into your increased understanding of what *jang chub* is, i.e., who you are entrusting yourself to. Are you not entrusting yourself to the Buddha?

With more education and more learning, when you come across these words or when you think of the Buddha, the feeling is very different. When you think of the Buddha, your faith, your experience and your feeling will be very different. When you have a good and complete understanding of what *jang chub* is, then when you think of your object of refuge, the Buddha, you will be able to feel that the Buddha is really extraordinary.

When you can understand what *jang chub* is—all the abandonments, qualities and realisations—and why *jang chub* is achieved, i.e., for the sake of sentient beings, then you understand that your object of refuge whom you are entrusting yourself to, is like this. It is really helpful for giving rise to very strong faith and devotion.

~ *Meaning of "sattvacharyavatara"*

- *Sattva in Sanskrit (as in bodhisattva)* here refers to the courageous one who works for the welfare of others. So then you have bodhisattva.
- *Charya* means conduct or deeds.
- *Avatara* means to engage in.

So that is the title of this text.

*The translator's homage*

Then you have the verse of homage made by the *lotsawas* (or translators) of the past:  
Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas

The Tibetan kings of the past instituted a system with regard to paying homage at the beginning of one's translated work. For example, here is the "Homage to all the buddhas and the bodhisattvas." Sometimes there is the "Homage to the youthful Manjugosha" and sometimes there is the "Homage to the Omniscient One (the All-knowing One)." These three different kinds of homage indicate the scriptural collection under which a particular text is categorised. By looking at the homage, you will be able to identify immediately and easily the relevant scriptural collection.

In this case, the homage is paid to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. This is an indication that this text falls under the Sutra Pitaka.

|                                            | <i>Text belongs to:</i>                   |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Homage to youthful Manjugosha              | Abhidharma Pitaka or knowledge collection |
| Homage to the Omniscient One               | Vinaya Pitaka                             |
| Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas | Sutra Pitaka or sutra collection          |

This text is called *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*. Why do we give this text a name? According to *Descent into the Lanka Sutra (Lankavatara)*, the Buddha said that one affixes a name to the treatise or text in order to eliminate the confusion of sentient beings, i.e., they will be confused when you do not name the text.

*Khen Rinpoche : The Buddha said that if there is no name then people will be confused. This is why Buddha has to give the name.*

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Question: Is great compassion a kind of fear of sentient beings taking rebirth in samsara?

Answer: This is the kind of compassion we have but I think the actual great compassion is not like that. A fully qualified great compassion is not like that. It is the mind that is unable to bear the fact that sentient beings are suffering. It is a mind of great courage, a very strong and courageous mind. Although one does not have any solution, one has very strong and powerful courage and strength of mind.

Because it is such a courageous mind, it can induce the next mind, i.e., the mind of wholehearted resolve with the attitude thinking, "I myself will do it alone." Such an attitude cannot arise when one does not have a very strong courageous mind.

The kind of compassion that we have is the very ordinary and limited kind of compassion because our compassion is mixed with attachment. Sometimes we have the feeling of compassion arising but it is mixed with attachment and it is not free from bias. When we generate such ordinary compassion, the mind also becomes quite tight and narrow. We feel uneasy, disturbed and worried. This is the kind of compassion that we have and it is called partial or partisan compassion.

The mind of great compassion is a mind that does not have preferences for some sentient beings and not others. As such there is no prejudice. I don't think such a pure mind of great compassion comes with worries and fears. In fact it is a very courageous mind.

Question: We should develop great compassion in order to become a buddha. I always have this mental block: even if you become a buddha, you are still unable to release all sentient beings from their suffering. So my question is: Why become a buddha? The buddhas are enlightened but still the suffering of sentient beings go on and on and on. We aspire to become a buddha but when we become a buddha, can we really stop the suffering of sentient beings?

Khen Rinpoche: *It looks like you do not want to be enlightened! You want to be enlightened or not? You think you can help somebody? You think that you cannot help anyone? I am talking about now. Can you help someone?*

(Student's answer is inaudible).

Khen Rinpoche: *If you are better, can you not help more people? When you have a good heart or plenty of money, it is possible, is it not? Depending on your qualities, your good heart, your money, you can help ten people, 20 people, 100 people. When you are enlightened, you can help many people. So quickly get enlightened!*

Question: Is it true that you have to develop single-pointed concentration in order to develop bodhicitta? If that is the case, why does the practice of concentration come amongst the deeds of the bodhisattva?

Answer: When you look at the Great Treatises, it is quite evident, for example, in the commentary to Maitreya's *Abhisamayalankara* that you need calm abiding in order to actualise bodhicitta.

In the context of the perfections—where the perfection of meditative stabilisation precedes the perfection of wisdom—in the discussion of the perfection of meditative stabilisation, when we talk about calm abiding, we are *not* talking about calm abiding in general. This is because the calm abiding in the continuum of a bodhisattva is not necessarily a calm abiding that is focussed on emptiness.

The discussion of the generation of calm abiding in the context of the perfections is referring primarily to the calm abiding focusing on emptiness. Based on that, one develops the union of calm abiding and special insight.

If you remember our discussion in the previous module on the paths and grounds, the bodhisattvas achieve calm abiding focusing on emptiness on the Mahayana great path of accumulation. It is only when that bodhisattva has achieved the special insight focusing on emptiness that he enters the path of preparation. Subsequently, when that bodhisattva realizes emptiness directly, he enters the path of seeing.

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