

**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 3****13 February 2014**

Precious human rebirth and the six perfections. Chapter One: Verses 1.5–1.14. Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta.

In the last lesson we looked at verse 1.4.

## Verse 1.4

The leasures and endowments are very hard to find.  
Since they accomplish the purposes of beings,  
If I do not accomplish benefit upon this,  
How will I acquire this in the future?

This is an exhortation to extract the essence from this human life of freedoms and endowments. When one reflects on the difficulty of obtaining this human life of freedoms and endowments:

- One can reflect in terms of the difficulty of actualising the causes for such a rebirth.
- One can reflect from the viewpoint of its nature.
- One can also reflect on the difficulty through the use of analogies.

The root text is saying that having found now this human life of freedoms and endowments that is very difficult to find, one has to use it. In the context of this text, you are asked to extract the essence from this human life of freedoms and endowments by practicing the meditation on bodhicitta. The text is saying that if one wishes to meditate on bodhicitta, one actually has the basis, i.e., the body, for doing so.

As I mentioned before, whether one wishes to practise the Dharma or one wishes to cultivate the mind of enlightenment, it is much easier to do so on the basis of this human life of freedoms and endowments as it is the ideal basis for such practices.

In the previous lesson, we saw how in order to attain this ideal basis for the practice of the Dharma, i.e., this human life of freedoms and endowments with its 18 qualities, one has to actualise its causes. The causes for such a perfect human rebirth is said to be:

- the practice of pure morality
- complemented with the practices of generosity and so forth and
- completed with the making of pure stainless prayers.

In order to actualise such an ideal basis for the practice of the Dharma in the future,

one must actualise its causes, without which one will not obtain such an opportunity again.

## **PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH & THE SIX PRACTICES**

### *Practice of generosity*

In order to practise the Dharma, first we must have the means of survival such as food and other necessities that will sustain our life. Without them, it will be very difficult to practise the Dharma. Having the enjoyments and necessities of life comes about through the practice of generosity.

### *Practice of ethics*

In order to achieve a specific result, first one must create the correct cause because there must be concordance between the cause and the result. Even if you have the necessities for survival such as food, shelter and so forth, you will still need good health. When you do not have good health, it is very difficult to practise the Dharma. Good health is the result of having practised ethical discipline in the past. If you wish to obtain a good body with good health in your future lives, then you have to actualise its cause, the practice of ethics.

### *Practice of patience*

In addition to having a good body, good health and all the necessities and enjoyments for sustaining life, in order to carry out one's practice, one will need good companions and helpers. In Tibetan, it literally means to have a good entourage. This is also very important. The cause for having good helpers and good Dharma friends and not non-virtuous friends is the practice of patience. If there is a need to have companions who are helpful to your practice in the future, then you have to actualise its cause, i.e., the practice of patience.

### *Practice of joyous effort*

Even when you have all these three conditions—the means of survival, a suitable body with good health and a circle of companions and helpers—this does not necessarily guarantee that you will practise the Dharma. In order to practise the Dharma, first you must take delight in it, i.e., you must want to do it. From your side, you must have enthusiasm and delight. The cause for this is joyous effort (or joyous perseverance).

Dharma practice becomes challenging and difficult when we lack any of these four favourable conditions. When you do not have the means of survival, when you do not have food to eat, when you do not have the necessities of life, when you do not have good health, when you do not have good helpers and companions and when you do not take delight in virtue, when you do not have any enthusiasm for practising the Dharma, Dharma practice will become very difficult.

But if you do see the purpose of and want to experience these four favourable conditions in your future lives, then you have to create the causes by practising generosity, guarding one's ethics (or engaging in ethical discipline), cultivate patience and strive in joyous effort.

*Practice of concentration (or meditative stabilisation)*

However even when you have these four conditions, if you are unable to keep your mind focussed on virtue and you lack determination and single-pointedness of mind, i.e., concentration, then some of these favourable conditions can actually become the conditions for you to generate afflictions. Is that not the case for many people? For example, you may have all these favourable conditions but they often become the causes for the generation of negative emotions. Here when we talk about single-pointedness, it is the single-pointedness that is focussed and very intent on virtue. Without that single-pointedness, even when the mind wants to practise virtue, often the other conditions actually become the causes for the generation of afflictions.

*Practice of wisdom*

Dharma practice can also be difficult without wisdom. We need the intelligence that is able to discriminate and differentiate between what we need to cultivate and pursue and what we need to discard and abandon. Without this kind of wisdom, for example, one will not think of the future and one will simply concentrate only on the here and now. One will only focus on the enjoyments and happiness of this life without thinking of the future and without thinking of creating the causes for one's future happiness. When we live our life in such a way, not only are we not creating the causes for our future happiness, we will actually be depleting whatever merit we have accumulated in the past. So discriminating wisdom is also indispensable. Without it, while one is depleting and using up all the enjoyments that were the result of the practices that one had done in the past, one will not do the practices for creating the causes for one's future happiness. When all of one's virtue is depleted, this will be followed by the start of suffering.

Thinking along these lines, it becomes clear that one needs to engage in a certain amount of practice of the six perfections—generosity, ethics, patience, joyous effort, some form of concentration and some level of wisdom—in order to be able to do some reasonable Dharma practice.

Even when one has all these conditions and one does all these practices, at the minimum the motivation has to be turning away from attachment to the happiness of this life. This is the minimum and must be the driving force behind all these practices. Otherwise again it becomes difficult.

Everything I have said was already covered when we look at the lam-rim, the stages of the path to enlightenment. The point is that while we have already obtained and still have this human life of freedoms and endowments, we need to extract its essence and make use of it.

We can recite and reflect on verse 1.4, using it to persuade ourselves to practise the Dharma, reminding ourselves over and over again to extract the meaning of this human life. If you do not do this, I guess it will not be easy to transform your mind and to change yourself.

~~~~~

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

*Instructions on the reasoning behind abandoning negativities and practising virtue*

Verse 1.5

Just as a flash of lightning brightly illuminates  
For an instant within the clouds on a dark night,  
Likewise in this world, through the might of the Buddha,  
Merit and intelligence occasionally occur for once.

Verse 1.6a

Hence virtue is perpetually feeble,

Although we have obtained a human life of freedoms and endowments that is a suitable basis for practising the Dharma, the desire to practise pure Dharma arises very infrequently. Even when it does arise, it only lasts for a very short time, just like “a flash of lightning” in the dark. Our non-virtuous states of mind are very strong and powerful and they last for a long time, like the night sky that is completely covered by thick clouds. So first we have to work at generating the desire to practise Dharma and then, using that as the basis, we should seek to extend the duration of those virtuous thoughts.

The text says that the virtuous thoughts that arise in our mind are due to the enlightened influence of the buddhas and due to the power of our merit. So we need to cultivate faith and belief in the Dharma and aspiration for the Dharma. In particular, in this context, we need to develop the belief in the Mahayana Dharma that is the basis for developing bodhicitta.

It is said that for those who have vast and extensive belief in the Mahayana Dharma, they will receive the blessing of all the buddhas. Those who receive the blessing of all the buddhas are the ones who receive the blessing to actualise bodhicitta. It is mentioned in one commentary that it is very important to strive in cultivating and developing this belief in the Mahayana for it is the basis for bodhicitta. It is advised that we should cultivate this belief in the Mahayana Dharma on the basis of having found this human life of freedoms and endowments.

We know from our own experience how difficult it is for virtuous thoughts to arise. Even when they do arise, they do not last for a long time. The commentary is saying that with regard to whatever virtuous thoughts that may arise, we should try not to lose them. We should try to sustain the continuity of those thoughts and try to increase those thoughts. Basically, there is this advice to cultivate this belief in the Mahayana Dharma. By doing this, we will be establishing the foundation for developing bodhicitta.

*Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta*

~ *The potential to destroy all negativities and accomplish all virtues*

- A *Destroying great negativities*
- B *The potential to accomplish supreme bliss*
- C *The potential to accomplish whatever one wishes*

*A Destroying great negativities*

Let us look at how bodhicitta has the power to destroy great negativities.

Verse 1.6 b,c,d

The great power of negativities, horrible.  
Except for a mind of complete enlightenment  
By what other virtue will it be overcome?

I briefly mentioned before that there are two types of bodhicitta. The two types of bodhicitta are:

1. conventional bodhicitta
2. ultimate bodhicitta

The bodhicitta that we are talking about now is primarily conventional bodhicitta, i.e., we are talking about the benefits of conventional bodhicitta. One of these benefits is that it has the great power to destroy all negativities.

In the commentary, it is said that even when one accumulates non-virtue that causes one to be reborn in hell but one manages to develop bodhicitta, this bodhicitta will outshine or overwhelm those heavy negativities. When we compare the power of those negativities to the power of bodhicitta, the power of those negativities become small.

Let us think about this. Why is it that when bodhicitta arises, it can overwhelm and outshine even very heavy negative karma? When bodhicitta is generated and arises, one accumulates a vast amount of merit and very powerful virtue. You could say that this merit is immeasurable and limitless. That is what makes even those very heavy negative karma almost powerless and small in comparison.

*B Potential to accomplish supreme bliss*

Verse 1.7

All the Lords of Subduers who have contemplated for many eons  
Have seen it to be beneficial;  
For by it the immeasurable masses of beings  
Will easily attain the supreme happiness.

The buddhas thought about this for a very very long time and saw that the most beneficial thing for sentient beings is bodhicitta, that it is like a seed with which the immeasurable number of sentient beings can achieve supreme happiness.

*C The potential to accomplish whatever one wishes*

Verse 1.8

Those who wish to destroy the multitudes of sufferings of existence,  
Those who wish to dispel the unhappiness of sentient beings,  
And those who wish to enjoy multitudes of happiness,  
Should never forsake the mind of enlightenment.

“Those who wish to destroy the multitudes of sufferings of existence”: We can relate this to the persons training in the path that is shared with the persons of small and

medium capacities, i.e., those people who want to destroy the sufferings of samsara should meditate on bodhicitta.

“Those who wish to dispel the unhappiness of sentient beings”: We can relate this to the persons training in the path of the persons of great capacity.

“And those who wish to enjoy multitudes of happiness”: The happiness here refers to the happiness of being human beings or gods, i.e., the happiness of a good rebirth. You can relate this to the persons of small capacity or those who are training their minds in the path that is shared with the person of small capacity. Even such people should also meditate on bodhicitta.

In simple terms, you can say that:

- Those who wish to destroy the multitudes of sufferings of samsara should meditate on bodhicitta.
- Those who wish to dispel the unhappiness and suffering of sentient beings should also meditate on bodhicitta.
- Those who are looking for a good rebirth either as a human being or worldly god should also meditate on bodhicitta and never forsake it.

In general, you do not need to develop bodhicitta to get out of samsara or to achieve a good rebirth as a human being or god. But the point here is that when one actualises bodhicitta, all those different goals will also be achieved easily. This is advice that is given from the perspective of the practice of the Mahayana.

~ *Attaining the special name and purpose*

The next benefit of bodhicitta is that one becomes special in name and in meaning.

*Khen Rinpoche: Does anybody want a special name? If yes, then you know what to do.*

Verse 1.9

When the mind of enlightenment is generated, in that moment,  
Those wretched ones fettered in the jail of cyclic existence  
Will be called “Child of the Sugatas,”  
And will become objects of reverence by the humans and gods of the  
world.

When bodhicitta is developed and it arises in one’s mind, one acquires a special name. The name is a “Child of the Sugatas.” In addition to becoming special in name, one becomes special in meaning in that one becomes the object of reverence of humans and gods.

We are still talking here about an ordinary person, the sentient being who generates bodhicitta initially. He is still an ordinary being in cyclic existence but whoever he or she may be—it can even be an animal—once bodhicitta arises in the mind, that being becomes a special object of reverence.

Here we are talking about an ordinary person in cyclic existence who develops bodhicitta for the first time. When bodhicitta arises, that person is still an ordinary

being without any special or exalted qualities of abandonments or realisations. Nevertheless this person becomes a child of the Sugatas, a special object of reverence because of having developed bodhicitta. So when one actualises bodhicitta, one becomes special in name and in meaning.

~ *Explaining the benefits by means of an analogy*

- A *An analogy of the inferior becoming the supreme*
- B *An analogy of the difficulty in obtaining it and its great value*
- C *An analogy of an inexhaustible effect and an effect that is magnified*
- D *An analogy of the potential for being protected from great fear*
- E *An analogy of destroying negativities without difficulty*
- F *The way benefits are taught in the sutras*

A *An analogy of the inferior becoming the supreme*

Verse 1.10

Like the supreme gold-making elixir,  
It takes the unclean body and transforms it  
Into the priceless jewel, a Victor's body.  
Therefore, firmly seize this so-called "mind of enlightenment."

Using the analogy of a small amount of gold-making elixir that is able to transform a lot of iron into gold, likewise bodhicitta can transform our unclean body, i.e., unclean in terms of its cause and in terms of its nature, into the exalted body of a buddha. We are not saying that once bodhicitta arises in the mind, the actual unclean physical body transforms into the exalted body of a buddha. Of course that is not possible. But what it means is that when bodhicitta arises, from then on, on the basis of having this unclean body, one can achieve enlightenment.

From the perspective of sutra:

- It is the factor of method that primarily refers to bodhicitta that is responsible for achieving the form body, the rupakaya.
- It is the factor of wisdom that primarily refers to the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness that is responsible for achieving the truth body, the dharmakaya.

When you look at the sutric explanation of the substantial cause for achieving the form body of a buddha, upon deeper analysis, you will find that explanation inadequate. A detailed explanation of the actual substantial cause of form body of the buddha can only be found in tantra.

B *An analogy of the difficulty in obtaining it and its great value*

Verse 1.11

Since the sole helmsmen of migrating beings, the limitless mind,  
Has upon thorough investigation seen its preciousness,  
All beings wishing to be free from the abodes of migration,  
Firmly seize this precious mind of enlightenment.

This is an analogy of its rarity and preciousness. The analogy is of a captain of a boat who leads a group of people to seek treasures in the middle of the ocean. You need a captain who can lead them to the correct spot and enable them to retrieve the

treasures from the ocean. Likewise the buddhas have seen that bodhicitta is the best thing for accomplishing the welfare of the sentient beings. Bodhicitta is priceless for it can lead sentient beings out of all suffering. Therefore one should always hold on to bodhicitta.

*C An analogy of an inexhaustible effect and an effect that is magnified*

Next is an analogy of the unending and increasing result.

Verse 1.12

All other virtues are like the plantain tree,  
For after bearing fruit they will be exhausted.  
But the tree of the mind of enlightenment will constantly bear fruit,  
Whereby it is inexhaustible and flourishes more and more.

The text is saying that if we want to have unceasing virtues, i.e., virtues that are constantly increasing, then we should meditate on bodhicitta. It is said that when we have bodhicitta, our virtues will always increase like some trees that constantly bear fruit, i.e., they continually produce fruit. This is an analogy of how bodhicitta causes our virtues to increase always.

Virtues that are not conjoined with bodhicitta are likened to plantain tree. Such trees are said to only produce fruit once. After they produce fruit, the tree dies and it does not produce any more fruit.

So this is said to be one of the benefits of bodhicitta, i.e., once bodhicitta arises in our mind, our virtues would be unceasing and will carry on increasing. Usually at the end of a particular activity, we dedicate the merit that is accumulated. When we dedicate that merit conjoined with bodhicitta, it will be a cause for the merit to increase more and more.

Here we are just talking about the benefits of bodhicitta in general. There is so much more to be said about the virtues that are conjoined with bodhicitta. Whether the virtues that are conjoined with bodhicitta are necessarily unceasing or not, there is so much more to be said about them. I think there was some discussion on this topic in the previous module. We have covered this already. You can read up on this if you like and if you have questions pertaining to this, you can always bring it up in class.

*D An analogy of the potential for being protected from great fear*

Next is the analogy for the ability of bodhicitta to rescue one from great danger.

Verse 1.13

Like depending on a hero when greatly afraid,  
Even if I may have committed very terrible negativities,  
I shall be swiftly liberated in dependence upon it.  
Why then do those who have the imprints not depend on it?

It is said that the best method for purifying heavy negativities such as the five actions of immediate retribution (or five uninterrupted karmas) and so forth is by generating bodhicitta. It is like travelling along a very dangerous road. When one has someone



who is confident and brave walking ahead of oneself, one will be less afraid. Likewise when one develops bodhicitta, there is no need to be fearful of these extremely heavy negativities such as the five actions of immediate retribution that one has accumulated for it is said that even they can be purified.

*E An analogy of destroying negativities without difficulty*

Next is an analogy for how bodhicitta destroys negativities effortlessly.

Verse 1.14 a,b

Just like the fire at the end of time,  
In an instant it certainly burns up the great negativities.

In the teachings of the Buddha, there is a presentation of how the world system comes into being and how it will go out of existence. When a particular world system undergoes disintegration and destruction, that destruction will be caused by fire. During that time, all the abodes from the level of the first concentration and below that will be destroyed by this fire at the end of the eon. The power of bodhicitta in destroying negativities is likened to this fire that destroys the world at the end of its existence.

What is the difference then between the earlier benefit where it was mentioned that bodhicitta can completely overwhelm and outshine negativities created (Verse 1.6 b,c,d) and this particular benefit (Verse 1.14 a,b) where it says that bodhicitta can destroy the negativities “in an instant”?

You can think about this. It was said that when bodhicitta arises in one’s mind, that bodhicitta will outshine or overwhelm all one’s negativities. This is an explanation of bodhicitta in general but does it apply to every instance of bodhicitta or all kinds of bodhicitta?

If you remember the discussion on the paths and grounds, when the bodhisattva achieves the forbearance level of the path of preparation, he achieves the confidence that he will never fall back into the lower realms again. Could we relate this benefit to this achievement as it was explained earlier that the negativities mentioned refer to those negativities that will throw us into the lower realms? Could we apply that benefit to specifically mean gaining that confidence of not falling into the lower realms when one achieves the forbearance level of the path of preparation?

*F The way benefits are taught in the sutras*

Verse 1.14 c,d

Its unfathomable benefits were explained  
To Sudhana by the wise Protector Maitreya.

In the *Arrays of Stalks Sutra*, Maitreya explained to Sudhana that bodhicitta is like:

- the seed of all the teachings of the Buddha
- fuel because bodhicitta increases the white dharmas of all migrating beings

- the noble vase because it perfectly accomplishes all thoughts and all wishes.<sup>1</sup>

These are the benefits of bodhicitta. As said in the teachings, when bodhicitta arises in the mind:

- One is able to finish the accumulation of merit easily.
- One is able to purify negativities easily.
- One is able to accomplish effortlessly the aims of oneself and the aims and welfare of others.
- One becomes impervious as one will not be easily affected by problems and obstacles.

In essence, Shantideva says that:

- If you want to be free from samsara, meditate on bodhicitta.
- If you want to free others from their suffering and unhappiness, meditate on bodhicitta
- If you want to get a good rebirth as a human being or god, meditate on bodhicitta.

Basically, when one has bodhicitta, one accomplishes all one's goals. It is with bodhicitta that one will be able to finish the accumulation of merit and purify one's negativities easily. When bodhicitta arises, one will not face obstacles, because when bodhicitta arises, there is no more self-cherishing. Since self-cherishing is the source of all one's problems and obstacles, in the absence of self-cherishing, there will not be any obstacles at all. It is because of self-cherishing that one does not accomplish one's own goals and one cannot accomplish the welfare of others. So when self-cherishing is destroyed, one will be able to accomplish one's own purposes and the welfare of others effortlessly.

I do not really know how to give a good explanation but you should read the text and think about it. The point is that you have to generate belief in bodhicitta. When you have belief in bodhicitta, then you will have the aspiration for and faith in bodhicitta. It is that aspiration for bodhicitta that will kickstart your practice to cultivate and meditate on bodhicitta.

~~~~~

*Question:* I want to clarify the way conventional bodhicitta overwhelms negativities. Does it mean that it reduces or does it actually remove the conditions for that negative karma to ripen? It is not that it causes the negative karma to become like a burnt seed.

---

<sup>1</sup> “O Noble Son, the awakening mind is like the seed of all the buddhas' qualities. Since it increases the wholesome qualities of all beings it is like a field; since it supports each and every creature, it is like the earth; since it perfectly severs all poverty, it is like the god of wealth; since it affords complete protection to all bodhisattvas, it is like a father; since it perfectly accomplishes all aims, it is like the king of wish-fulfilling gems; since it completely fulfils all intentions, it is like an auspicious vase...O Noble Son, the awakening mind is endowed with such excellent virtues as these as well as limitless other benefits.” (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, translated by Stephen Batchelor, Copyright: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1979, page 169).

*Answer:* It is mentioned that one of the benefits is that negativities are outshined or overwhelmed by bodhicitta (Verse 1.6 b,c,d). When bodhicitta arises, it outshines the negativities, i.e., it renders the negativities powerless.

But whether the seeds of those negativities are removed or not is a different question. Think of this example. On a bright day, although the moon is always up there in the sky, because the sun is shining so brightly, you cannot see the moon. The sun completely outshines the moon. It is similar here. Whether the *seed* of the negative karma is rendered ineffective or powerless is something that we need to think about.

The seed of the non-virtue that causes rebirth in the lower realms is probably only rendered powerless upon achieving the forbearance level of the Mahayana path of preparation. So when we think about this particular benefit of bodhicitta, i.e. outshining the negativities, does it mean outshining them in terms of rendering the seeds of the non-virtues powerless or does it mean simply preventing and not allowing the result to arise?

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng and Aki Yeo; edited by Cecilia Tsong.