

**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 6**25 February 2014**

Establishing selflessness. Chapter One: Verses 1.26–1.36. The reasons for such benefits (contd). Praising the person who cultivates bodhicitta.

Because it is suffering, it is selfless.

I mentioned that there were two ways to reflect on this statement. You have to analyse the two points that I explained to you in the last lesson. You have to think about them over and over again to understand what I have explained.

You have to think and come to an understanding as to why:

Because it is impermanent, it is suffering.
Because it is suffering, it is selfless.

“Because it is impermanent, it is suffering.” Why is it in the nature of suffering? This is because it arises from karma and afflictions. Because it arises from karma and afflictions, it is in the nature of suffering.

ESTABLISHING SELFLESSNESS

You have to think about where that suffering comes from. Based on that, you then go on to see how, “Because it is suffering, it is selfless.” When you think deeply and analyse where the source of suffering is, you would understand and discover that the very root of suffering is ignorance, i.e., an **apprehension of a self**. This goes back to the **view of the transitory collection**.¹ This is the root of all suffering, the mind that apprehends a self. Although a self is apprehended by this mind, i.e., ignorance, in reality such a self does not exist at all. However, its non-existence has to be proved.

Reasoning of one and different

We had talked about this in the past. There are different lines of reasoning that one can employ to establish selflessness. There is the reasoning of dependant-arising and the reasoning of one and different.

¹ The ‘I’ is apprehended to be separate, different and independent of the body and mind. This mind that conceives the ‘I’ to be self-sufficient substantially existent, i.e., conceiving it to be something that is independent of the body and mind, is called the view of the transitory collection. (Second Basic Program, Module 2, Lesson 27, page 1).

Let us look at the reasoning of one and different. In this line of reasoning, there are four essential points that must be grasped.

1. The first essential point is finding the object of negation. This is extremely important.
2. Based on that, the second essential point is establishing the pervasion.
3. The third essential point is establishing that it is not inherently one with the aggregates.
4. The fourth essential point is establishing that it is not inherently different from the aggregates.

The first essential point of finding the **object of negation** is extremely important. However, it is also very challenging to identify correctly, from your own experience, the object of negation. What exactly is your target? Although it is difficult, you have to try.

~ *Analogy of mistaking a coil of rope to be a snake*

Let us use an analogy to help you find the object of negation. Do you remember the analogy of mistaking a coil of rope to be a snake? In the view of the mind that is mistaking the coil of rope to be a snake, there is a snake appearing from the side of rope, i.e., the snake is somewhere there on the rope.

Likewise how does the 'I' appear to oneself? The 'I' appears to exist from the side of our body and mind. It is somewhere there within that collection of body and mind.

How does that coil of rope appear from the perspective of the mind that mistakes the coil of rope to be a snake? In the view of that mind, there is a snake appearing from the side of the coil of rope. To this mind, the concept of the snake does not appear to be something that is imputed or projected by the mind.

Likewise, in terms of our grasping of a self, when we think of the 'I' or self, the 'I' appears to exist from the side of the body and mind, coming from the side of body and mind. The 'I' does not appear to us as something that is projected or merely imputed by thought. This is the way in which the inherently existent 'I', appears to us. In terms of the inherently existent 'I', there is this appearance of the 'I' existing from its own side, i.e., from the side of the body and mind without it being imputed by the mind. This appearance is the object of negation, i.e., the object that needs to be negated.

When we talk about the object of negation, we are *not* negating the mere appearance of a self. This is not what is to be negated. What is to be negated is the appearance of the 'I' existing from its own side, i.e., the appearance of the 'I' existing right there from the side of the body and mind without being merely imputed by the mind. This appearance is what that needs to be negated.

Our greatest difficulty is distinguishing between these two in our own experience, although their manner of appearance is completely different. When we talk about the inherently existent 'I' that does not exist, nevertheless it *appears* to exist from its own side, i.e., from the side of the body and mind, *without* being merely imputed by the mind. It is this appearance that we need to negate. Such an 'I' does not exist and

needs to be negated. We are *not* negating the *mere* appearance of the 'I'. But in our experience, these two appear to be mixed and our greatest challenge is to see the difference between them. We are not able to distinguish between the two. Our problem lies in this. Until we are able to distinguish between these two appearances in our own experience, there is no way to move forward in the process of realising selflessness.

~ *Explanation of fourfold emptiness from the Heart Sutra*

In the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, there was an explanation of the fourfold emptiness (or the four empties). **Form** is mentioned first, "Form is empty. Emptiness is form." By changing the subject to the self or 'I', we can analyse this statement, "'I' is empty. Emptiness is 'I'."

'I' is empty means that the 'I' that appears to exist from the side of the body and mind without being merely imputed by the mind does not exist whatsoever. Although there is the appearance of such an inherently existent 'I', in reality, it does not exist. The self, the actual 'I', does *not* exist in the way it appears; therefore such an 'I' is empty, i.e., it does not exist.

The object of negation, the inherently existent 'I' that appears to us as the real 'I' existing from the side of the body and mind without it being merely imputed by the mind, does not exist. For if it exists, it can be found. But when you look for such an 'I' among the body and mind, you will not be able to find it. Although it *appears*, it does *not exist* in the way it appears. Therefore such an 'I' is empty, i.e., empty of existing in such a way.

Its nature, whether it be form or the 'I', is emptiness. Here we are talking about the 'I'. The 'I' is in the nature of emptiness. However, although the 'I' is in the nature of emptiness, this is not to say that the 'I' does not exist. The 'I' exists. How does the 'I' exist? The 'I' exists as mere appearance. Therefore, "Emptiness is 'I'."

By thinking how, "'I' is empty. Emptiness is 'I'," one comes to understand how the 'I' does not exist in the way it appears to us:

- The 'I' is empty of existing inherently.
- The 'I' is empty of existing in the way it appears to us.
- The nature of the 'I' is emptiness.

We are not saying that the 'I' does not exist. The 'I' exists. How does the 'I' exist?

- The 'I' exists as something that is merely imputed by thought.
- The 'I' exists as mere appearance.

This is how the 'I' exists.

It is said that one should not have any partiality. When one is partial or biased, one is supporting only emptiness but neglecting appearance or one could be in favour of appearance but neglecting emptiness. When one goes down such a path, one will never realise emptiness. So one should not, in the name of appearance, deprecate emptiness and one should not, in the name of emptiness, deprecate appearance.

The correct understanding of mere appearance should help one to elicit an

understanding of emptiness and the correct understanding of emptiness should help one to elicit the correct understanding of appearance. They are mutually complementary.

Due to the reason, “Because it is suffering, it is selfless,” by understanding selflessness, i.e., by understanding how the ‘I’ does not exist in the way it appears, then one is able to uproot ignorance, the apprehension of a self that is the very root of all suffering. By uprooting the root of suffering, one will be able to achieve the nirvana that is peace.

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### **THE REASONS FOR SUCH BENEFITS (CONTD.)**

*The validity of obtaining benefits from engaging bodhicitta*

Verse 1.26

How can I fathom

The merits of this jewel mind,

The cause of joy of all migrating beings

And the panacea for the suffering of sentient beings?

If the aspirational mind generation had all the benefits that had been mentioned earlier, it goes without saying that the engaged mind generation would have even greater benefits.

There is a citation from the *Sutra Requested by Viradatta* that establishes the benefits of the engaged mind generation. It says, “If the merit of the mind of enlightenment was to take form, all the sphere of space would be filled; it is even more than that.”

Verse 1.27

If merely a benevolent intention

Excels venerating the buddhas,

Then what need to mention striving to make

All beings without exception happy?

The *King of Concentration Sutra* says, “The benefit of the mere thought wanting to achieve enlightenment for the welfare of sentient beings is more powerful than the merit one accumulates from making numberless offerings to billions of buddhas.”

If the merit of the aspirational mind generation is more powerful than the merit one accumulates from making offerings to billions of buddhas, obviously the benefits one accumulates from the engaged mind generation would be even more powerful.

Here when we talk about the engaged mind generation, we are talking about the mind of enlightenment that is directly conjoined with the practices of the bodhisattvas such as the practice of the perfection of generosity and so forth.

A qualm is raised here. Sentient beings wish for happiness and do not want suffering. By striving in this way, they are able to achieve happiness and abandon suffering. Therefore are they not proficient or skilled in achieving happiness and abandoning suffering? Why should others strive for their purpose?

*Khen Rinpoche: This was the question that Hup Cheng (name of student) asked before. He asked, "Why do I need to get enlightened?" This is a similar question. The answer is in the next verse.*

Verse 1.28

Although wishing to be rid of misery,  
They run towards misery itself.  
Although wishing to have happiness,  
Like an enemy they ignorantly destroy it.

Everyone is the same in not wanting to have a short life. No one wants to be poor and no one wants to be sick. Everyone does whatever she/he can to avoid these things. Although no one wants to have a short life, yet they are killing. Although no one wants to be poor, they are stealing. They are engaging in actions that are contrary to what they are looking for.

The teachings are telling us that, although no one wants problems and suffering, although that is everyone's goal, yet in actualising that goal, many are creating the causes for suffering.

We don't see this often in Singapore but, in many places, when you light a candle in the dark, you will see moths attracted to the candle flame. They fly towards the flame and are burnt. There is something about the candle flame that attracts them so they fly towards the candle flame. The moths are not thinking of committing suicide by flying towards the candle flame. They are looking for something else but they are burnt by the candle flame in the process. Likewise, sentient beings want happiness but they run towards the causes of suffering and, in so doing, they suffer.

The teachings say that all of us are the same in wanting to be rich, to have long lives and good health. But in practice, sentient beings do not guard the practice of ethical discipline by avoiding the ten non-virtues. Instead they create immeasurable negative karma. In so doing, they behave as if virtue was their enemy and end up destroying it.

Verse 1.29

For those who are deprived of happiness  
And burdened with many sorrows,  
It satisfies them with all joys,  
Dispels all suffering,

Verse 1.30

And clears away confusion.  
Where is there a comparable virtue?  
Where is there even such a friend?  
Where is there merit similar to this?

Verse 1.29 is saying that bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, is the very thing that can dispel all misery, sorrow and poverty of sentient beings. It is bodhicitta that can

bestow on them every kind of happiness and clear away all confusion with regard to what is to be abandoned and what is to be adopted. There is nothing else like bodhicitta in terms of performing these functions.

One will not be able to find a friend who is able to eliminate all suffering, bestow all joy and clear away confusion with regard to what is to be abandoned and what to be cultivated. With regard to accumulating merit, there is no other kind of merit that is comparable to generating bodhicitta.

This ends the section on the benefits of bodhicitta.

I guess the reply to the qualm would be that, when one develops actual bodhicitta, one would be in a position to clear away the confusion in the mind of others with regard to what they need to adopt and what they need to abandon. One can clear away the confusion in the minds of those sentient beings who are running after the causes of suffering although they want only happiness.

By thinking about the benefits of bodhicitta, one strives to generate the bodhicitta that has not yet been generated and one prevents that which has been generated from degenerating. The point of reflecting over and over again on the benefits of bodhicitta is to develop a deep aspiration to be able to generate bodhicitta. By continually reflecting on the benefits, there will come a time when one is truly convinced that bodhicitta does indeed have those benefits, “I stand to gain all these benefits. I must seek to develop this bodhicitta.” Only then will one have a strong and stable aspiration or desire to achieve bodhicitta. This desire is like the desire of a very thirsty person for water. Someone who is very thirsty is always thinking about finding water. When such an aspiration for bodhicitta arises, this fulfils the purpose of hearing about and reflecting on the benefits of bodhicitta.

As we do not yet have bodhicitta, we do not feel anything for the benefits of bodhicitta. Instead we wonder, “Can this really be true? How is it possible?” At the initial stage of development, apart from relying on speech of the Buddha, it is difficult to infer that there are such benefits. Bodhicitta is out of our reach.

I mentioned the other day about developing equanimity. Based on that, developing some love and compassion—thinking of how we need to rely on others and for that reason, how others are so kind—is possible and within reach. One can develop some kind of equanimity, overcoming strong aversion or anger for some and very strong attachment for others. It is possible to do that. On that basis, develop some sincere feeling of wanting everyone to be happy and to be free of suffering.

When we are able to bring about such thoughts of equanimity, love and compassion, the mind definitely becomes more relaxed and less uptight. In addition to that, when we can develop bodhicitta, we can infer that the benefits must be even greater.

I mentioned the practice of the four immeasurables in the previous lesson. You have to try that out for yourself to see whether it works or not. In terms of practice, that is the first step you have to take.

#### **PRAISING THE PERSON WHO CULTIVATES BODHICITTA**

Next is explaining how those individuals who have real bodhicitta in their minds are worthy of homage.

Verse 1.31

If whoever reciprocates benefit  
Is worthy of some praise,  
Then what need to mention the bodhisattva  
Who does good without its being asked of him?

In the worldly sense, when someone receives help from another person, the beneficiary would praise his benefactor, “That person was really very kind. He helped me and did this for me.” This being the case, it goes without saying that bodhisattvas are worthy of homage and worthy of being objects to whom we make offerings because they help sentient beings without being asked. Furthermore, the help that bodhisattvas render to sentient beings is not some small little thing. They work for the happiness of sentient beings, the happiness of this life and the happiness of all their future lives. Therefore bodhisattvas are worthy of homage and worthy of being objects of offering.

Verse 1.32

The world honors as virtuous  
A man who procures mediocre food and for an instant gives it  
Disrespectfully to a small number of beings,  
That satisfies them for only half a day.

Verse 1.33

What need be said then of one  
Who constantly bestows the unsurpassed bliss of the Sugatas for a long time  
Upon countless sentient beings,  
Fulfilling all their hopes?

Here is an example of a man who gives food to some people for a very short while. He is not giving food to many people, just a few sentient beings. It is not as if he was giving a lot of food either. He is giving just enough food for them not to be hungry for half a day. His manner of giving is disrespectful, i.e., without respect. Even so, in this world, such a person would be regarded as quite a good person. He would be considered very generous in helping the poor.

If such a person who gave this small amount of food to a small number of sentient beings for a short duration in a disrespectful manner is worthy of praise, then what need is there to mention those individuals who, with an attitude of love and compassion, work for all sentient beings until the end of samsara and who gives sentient beings the highest uncontaminated bliss of full enlightenment. Such an individual is definitely praiseworthy.

Verse 1.34

The Buddha has said that someone who generates an evil thought  
Against such a benefactor as a Child of the Victors

Will remain in hell for as many eons  
As there were evil thoughts.

It is said that the Buddha taught that anyone who generates anger and evil thoughts towards bodhisattvas will have to be reborn in the hells for as many eons as there were moments of anger.

If moments of anger towards the bodhisattvas can have such destructive consequences, what is the merit that can be accumulated when one has faith in them? Here it says:

Verse 1.35 a,b  
But if one acts out of an attitude of faith,  
Its fruits will multiply far more than that.

It is said that those who act out of faith in relation to the bodhisattvas will experience results, “far more than that.” “That” refers to how sentient beings have to be reborn in hells for as many eons as there were moments of anger.

A bodhisattva is a special and very powerful karmic object, so whatever evil thoughts or anger directed at them will have grave consequences and whatever virtuous thoughts directed at them will lead to very powerful and positive results.

Verse 1.35 c,d  
Even in adversity the Children of the Victors generate no negativity,  
Instead their virtues naturally increase.

It is said that whatever adverse conditions bodhisattvas may meet, e.g., danger to their lives, their health, possessions and so forth, they are not affected and those conditions do not cause them to generate negativities. Instead such conditions encourage them to further increase their qualities and virtue.

Verse 1.36  
I prostrate to the body of he  
In whom the sacred precious mind is born.  
I seek refuge in that source of happiness  
Who brings to happiness even those who harm him.

Verse 1.36 is saying, “I prostrate to the person who possesses in his continuum the mind of enlightenment that eliminates both the problems of samsara and nirvana.” One is prostrating to the bodhisattvas who only benefit sentient beings, even those who harm them.

In short, the person who develops bodhicitta, a bodhisattva, is an object of homage and offering for all humans and gods. It is a great negativity to harm bodhisattvas. On the other hand, one accumulates very powerful virtue by making offerings and paying homage to the bodhisattvas. One accumulates very powerful merit by simply showing a pleasant demeanour to a bodhisattva.



When one adopts through a ritual the aspirational bodhicitta that comes with a commitment, one needs to abandon the four black dharmas and cultivate the four white dharmas. One of the things to be cultivated is to generate the recognition that all sentient beings are like one's Teacher, like the Founder, the Buddha. The point is to train in pure appearance in relation to all sentient beings precisely because one does not know who is and who is not a bodhisattva. As we saw earlier, when we get upset or angry with a bodhisattva, we destroy so much merit and accumulate so much negativity.

In our context, I think many people here have taken the bodhisattva vows and tantric vows already through the various empowerments. In that sense, everyone can be said to be a kind of special object. Therefore we should regard one another without anger or without showing an unpleasant or disrespectful demeanour. It will be beneficial when we think along these lines.

Even when we notice some faults in others, we should not grasp at those faults and hold on to them so strongly. In this way, the chances of getting angry are lessened. We can reflect on the faults that we see as being impermanent. It is not as if those faults will always remain. Also those faults are not established from their own side. It is not as if the faults have always been there. In that sense, the faults are adventitious.

The buddhas in whom we have such faith now were not always buddhas. They were sentient beings once who were also full of faults. When we talk about training in regarding others as the Buddha, seeing others as the Teacher, there is a basis for doing so.

Although sentient beings are not buddhas now, are they not amenable to becoming a buddha in the future? They can be buddhas in the future because they all have buddha lineage. They have the seed of enlightenment within them so they can become buddhas and they can develop bodhicitta. When we recognise this fact, we can treat and look at sentient beings as our Teacher, as like the Buddha. It is paying respect to and holding in regard the cause, i.e., one day, they can become a buddha. Just as we hold the result in such high regard, likewise we should hold the cause with the same level of respect and regard.

The point is that we should try not to get upset or angry and, as much as possible, focus on the qualities of others instead of focussing on their faults and grasping at them. Furthermore, sentient beings are not something that exists far away from us. Sentient beings are the people around us. In our context here, they are the people in the same class as us.

As I mentioned earlier, many of you here have bodhisattva vows and tantric vows and, in that sense, are also special objects. When we get upset and angry with one another, we will accumulate negativities so, as much as possible, we should respect one another. This is very important.

This is the end of *Chapter One: Explanation of the Benefits of the Mind of Enlightenment*.

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Question: In the last lesson you talked about the difference between bodhicitta as well as the Mahayana mind generation in terms of their boundaries:

- Bodhicitta exists from the Mahayana path of accumulation up to the tenth ground in the continuum of a bodhisattva.
- The Mahayana mind generation exists from the Mahayana path of accumulation up to enlightenment

This seems to imply that the definitions for the bodhicitta and mind generation are different. I am wondering what is the difference?

Khen Rinpoche: Your question is about the definition of bodhicitta?

Answer: In general, bodhicitta is mind generation. You will not find a definition for bodhicitta that is separate from the definition for mind generation. Bodhicitta or the mind of enlightenment is so-called because it is a mind generation existing in the continuum of a bodhisattva. Because it is the mind generation existing in the continuum of a bodhisattva, it is called bodhicitta.

The Buddha is not a bodhisattva. For that reason the Buddha does not have bodhicitta.

Khen Rinpoche: This is for the sake of debate.

In general, most of the time we could say that bodhicitta is mind generation

Khen Rinpoche: Mind generation is bodhicitta. They are the same. Normally we can say that.

Initially it may sound weird when you hear that a buddha is not a bodhisattva.

Khen Rinpoche: No? It does not sound weird? It sounds correct? A buddha is not a bodhisattva?

(Students' responses are inaudible).

Khen Rinpoche: I thought the Buddha was a bodhisattva. Anyway, you can think about it.

Question: Last week you mentioned that love is the antidote for malice. If love is the antidote for malice, would that not apply to belligerence as well because belligerence is also the mind of malice. In that case, compassion should not be the antidote for belligerence.

I remember during the lam-rim module, someone asked you whether non-harmfulness and compassion is the same thing. Because the definition of non-harmfulness is a mind of compassion, I think that compassion should be the antidote for harmfulness.

Answer: In general, when you talk about love and compassion, sometimes people mix them up, thinking they are the same but:

- **Love** is the wish for others to be happy.
- **Compassion** is the wish for others to be free of suffering.

When one has love, the thought of wanting others to be happy, the thought of harming others would not be there.

When one is focussing on a sentient being tormented by suffering and one has the wish to free that sentient being from suffering, the thought of harming that sentient being will not exist. The mind of harmfulness will not exist.

Is there a difference then between harmfulness and malice or ill will?

Khen Rinpoche: You have completed the study of the 51 mental factors. I have also forgotten!

Question: Back to the four immeasurables. All of them seem to be antidotes to the afflictions. Joy is an antidote to dislike. I'm not too sure which affliction is dislike. Also, dislike can be dislike for many things. Is it resentment, dislike for samsara and so forth?

Answer: Immeasurable joy is the thought not wanting others to be separated from happiness. In that sense, it is stronger than merely wanting others to have happiness.

Dislike would be the opposite of that. Instead of wanting others not to be separated from happiness, dislike is the thought wanting others to be separated from happiness.

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