

**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 9****6 March 2014**

Meaning of *Calling the Guru from Afar*. Chapter Two: Verses 2.23–2.34. Homage. Refuge. Confessing negativities with the four powers.

MEANING OF CALLING THE GURU FROM AFAR

You may have heard of this particular prayer called *Calling the Guru from Afar*. It is important to know what exactly *Calling the Guru from Afar* means.

Khen Rinpoche: Do you know what this prayer is about?

Calling the Guru from Afar has nothing to do with geographical distance or time. *Afar* is a metaphor for the distance between your own mind and the mind of the guru. *Calling the Guru from Afar* is an attempt to lessen the gap between one's own mind and the guru's mind.

One can look at this from an ultimate perspective or a conventional perspective:

- From an ultimate perspective, there is no real difference between one's mind and the guru's mind in that both minds are in the nature of emptiness.
- From a conventional perspective however, in terms of appearance, there is a wide gap between one's mind and the guru's mind in terms of their qualities, i.e., the mind of the guru is far superior to our own mind in terms of its qualities.

When one calls the guru from afar, one is making a heartfelt supplication to the guru, based on a thorough understanding that one does not have the same mental qualities and that one is tormented in samsara. One makes this supplication with single-pointed faith and trust in the guru who has the power to protect one from those fears and suffering. When one has such single-pointed devotion to one's guru, one is not far from the guru. One becomes nearer to the guru. When one does not have such single-pointed devotion, then one is very far away from the guru.

The inner guru

When you have single-pointed devotion, this single-pointed devotion and faith is the real teacher, the actual guru. This is the inner guru. This inner guru arises in dependence on the external condition, i.e., the outer guru, who is appearing to us. The outer guru is the empowering condition that you depend on to generate this single-pointed faith. When such faith arises, this single-pointed faith is the real teacher, the actual guru. This is the essential point.

The inner guru arises when the single-pointed faith and devotion arises. It is due to this that we get closer to enlightenment. It is due to this that we please all the conquerors. It is due to this that we will not come under the sway or influence of negative friends.

When this single-pointed devotion and faith arises, this is the inner guru. When we do not have this inner guru, then having an external guru does not necessarily mean that we will be liberated or that we will get closer to enlightenment. It is impossible to be saved or protected simply by having an external guru when one does not have this single-pointed devotion. But when one does have such single-pointed devotion, then one becomes closer to the guru and one becomes closer to enlightenment.

I think this is the point behind the prayer *Calling the Guru from Afar*.

Why do we need to call the guru from afar? This is because at present there is a big gap between one's mind and the mind of the guru. *Calling the Guru from Afar* is an intense and heartfelt supplication to the guru made out of single-pointed devotion. The purpose of *Calling the Guru from Afar* is to make our mind closer to the guru and closer to enlightenment. It is this intense heartfelt devotion that reduces the gap between our minds and the minds of the guru, which makes us closer to the guru and closer to enlightenment.

When this single-pointed devotion, i.e., the inner guru, arises, then it is possible to actualise all the realisations and qualities of the path, starting from the topics of the human life of freedoms and endowments, death and impermanence and so forth. All these qualities and realisations of the path arise from the inner guru that is faith and single-pointed devotion.

Khen Rinpoche: Some may wonder why we need to call the guru from afar. He's just in front of us!

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We have finished the section on making offerings. Understanding the benefits of making offerings, you bring the merit field or the buddhas to mind. It is said that even when you offer a single flower, there are innumerable benefits and you accumulate a lot of merit. The merit accumulated from offering that single flower will be a cause for your own enlightenment. By having a decisive ascertainment or understanding of the benefits of making offerings, both actual and mentally transformed, strive to engage in this practice of making offerings.

## **HOMAGE**

*Paying homage with one's speech*

In general, paying homage can be done with one's body, speech and mind. In the text, first, one pays homage with one's speech by expressing verses of praise.

Verse 2.23

I eulogize the oceans of excellent qualities

With oceans of branches of melodious praise;  
May these clouds of pleasant eulogy  
Certainly arise always to them everywhere.

One eulogises the qualities of the buddhas. Here there are many verses that praise the qualities of the buddhas and so forth. When one recites these verses, one is paying homage with one's speech. One can imagine the sound and melody of the praises one is reciting filling the whole of space and one offers that. One should think that one is constantly eulogising or verbalising these verses praising the buddhas. Sometimes the verses are recited with pleasant tunes, melodies and so forth. For those with a reasonably good voice, praising the buddhas with these melodious tunes and so forth can become an offering.

*Khen Rinpoche: So it is good to have a good voice!*

*Paying homage with one's body*

Verse 2.24

With bodies as numerous  
As all the atoms within the field,  
I bow with my body to all buddhas of the three times,  
The Dharma, and the supreme community.

- One pays homage and prostrates to all the buddhas of the past, the present and the future.
- One prostrates to the scriptural and realisational Dharma in their mental continua.
- One prostrates to the children of the conquerors, the bodhisattvas.
- One prostrates with bodies equal to the number of atoms in all the buddhas fields.

When one is paying homage, as you recite the verses in praise of the buddhas through remembering their qualities, physically you adopt a respectful demeanour and mentally you generate faith and devotion. When all these three are present, this becomes the complete practice of paying homage with one's body, speech and mind.

*Paying homage with the mind is most important*

Paying homage with one's mind is the most important, i.e., having faith and devotion. With the faith and devotion that comes from recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels, then when you engage in praising them with your speech and prostrating physically to them, your faith and devotion will make paying homage with your body and speech perfect.

This is something that you must bear in mind. You need to remember this. Among the three, paying homage with your body, speech and mind, paying homage with your mind is the most important, i.e., generating the faith and devotion that comes from remembering the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. On that basis, you then engage in praising them with your speech and prostrating to them with your body.

This faith and devotion in the Three Jewels, i.e., the mental homage, is the most important. When one does not have this, it is difficult for there to be any great benefit

by simply performing physical prostrations or mere recitation of verses of praises. It is difficult for these practices alone to have any significant impact on your mind, i.e., without such faith and devotion, without some feeling in the heart, there can be no transformation in the mind.

When one has faith in and devotion to the Three Jewels, then paying homage to them physically and verbally becomes easy. Otherwise, without such heartfelt faith, sometimes just prostrating physically or just merely reciting some verses of praise becomes a chore.

*The objects of homage*

Verse 2.25 ab

I pay homage to the basis of the mind of enlightenment,  
To all supports of offering,

One pays homage to the bases of the mind of enlightenment such as representations of the buddhas, e.g., statues, the Mahayana scriptural collections, the object from whom you are going to adopt bodhicitta and so forth and “all supports of offering,” i.e., all representations of the body, speech and mind of the buddhas.

Verse 2.25 cd

To all abbots and masters  
And to all the [holders of] supreme conduct.

One prostrates to the abbot who grants one the pratimoksha ordination, the preceptor who grant the vows and also to those who are abiding and striving on the path to liberation. They are also objects of prostration. Those abiding in the “supreme conduct” help one to abandon negative actions and behaviour and cause one to enter and abide on the path to liberation. One prostrates to them as well.

There are two types of physical prostrations:

- the prostration that involves touching the five points of one’s body, i.e., two palms, two knees and the forehead, to the ground
  - the full-length prostration where one lays one’s body flat on the ground
- Whether you are doing the prostration where the five points of the body touch the ground or you are doing full-length prostrations, you touch both hands to the crown, throat and heart before one goes down. This is how it is done.

When one starts the prostration by joining the hands at the crown, one can pray that, “Through this, may I receive the blessings of all the qualities of the body of the Buddha and may I achieve all the qualities of the Buddha’s body.”

It is explained in the teachings that there are innumerable benefits to making prostrations. Even making one prostration has innumerable benefits. When you prostrate physically, your body covers a certain amount of space on the ground. There is a large number of atoms covered by that space that goes all the way down to the core of the earth. It is explained in the teachings that one creates the causes to be born as a wheel-turning king or universal monarch equal in number to those atoms that are covered by your body. Finally those roots of virtue will become a cause for

you to achieve full enlightenment. Bearing in mind these benefits, you should strive to make prostrations even if it is only three prostrations a day.

When we learn and study the Dharma and hear all these different advice, we should try to adopt and put into practice whatever advice that are within our capability. The advice you can do, do them. Then that will fulfil the whole purpose of learning the Dharma.

## **REFUGE**

What is refuge? It is a mind that (1) fears the suffering of cyclic existence and the lower realms and (2) a conviction in the power and abilities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to rescue or to protect us from those sufferings. This is what refuge is.

There is a difference in the way of going for refuge for a person of small capacity, a person of middling capacity and a person of great capacity. The difference comes due to their different perspectives.

### *The Three Jewels according to the Hinayana tenets*

You have to understand that the presentation of refuge according to the Hinayana would differ from that of the Mahayana. Of the four Buddhist tenets, two are Hinayana tenets, the Great Exposition School and the Sutra School. Their assertions of what the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are are different from the Mahayana.

Both the Great Exposition School and the Sutra School assert that the Buddha became a buddha in one sitting starting from the path of preparation, i.e., in one sitting, he progresses from the path of seeing to the path of meditation and then achieves the path of no-more-learning. The body in which he achieves enlightenment is the body of an ordinary being. Therefore it is a contaminated body. As such, for the proponents of the Hinayana tenets, the physical body of the Buddha is not the Buddha because it is true suffering.

- The proponents of the Great Exposition School and the Sutra School posit that the path of no-more-learning, the true path, i.e., the realisation in the continuum of Shakyamuni Buddha, is the Buddha Jewel.
- These proponents assert that the factor of abandonment of the objects of abandonment in the continua of a buddha and the superiors to be the Dharma Jewel.
- These proponents do not assert the Sangha Jewel to be a superior being but rather, they assert the qualities of realisations and the true paths in the continua of such superior beings to be the Sangha Jewel.

These are the Three Jewels according to the proponents of the Hinayana Tenets.

### *The Three Jewels according to the Mahayana tenets*

The proponents of the Mahayana tenets have a very different presentation as to what the Three Jewels are.

- First, in the Mahayana, there is the presentation or the assertion of the four bodies

of a buddha. The four bodies are Buddha. The form body of a buddha can be posited as the Buddha Jewel.

- The true paths and true cessations in the continuum of a buddha are posited as the Dharma Jewel.
- The superiors are posited as Sangha Jewel.

Is the body of a superior bodhisattva Sangha Jewel or not?

*Khen Rinpoche: What do you think? You still do not know what the Three Jewels are? You are still learning?*

|              | <b>Hinayana tenets</b>                                                                                    | <b>Mahayana tenets</b>                                                                   |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Buddha Jewel | Path of no-more-learning, the true path, i.e., the realisation in the continuum of Shakyamuni Buddha      | The form bodies (the complete enjoyment body and the supreme emanation body) of a buddha |
| Dharma Jewel | The factor of abandonment of the objects of the abandonment in the continua of a buddha and the superiors | True paths and true cessations in the continuum of the Buddha                            |
| Sangha Jewel | The realisations, the true paths, in the continua of superior beings                                      | Superior beings                                                                          |

~ *Causal refuge and resultant refuge*

There is also the presentation of causal refuge and resultant refuge:

- Causal refuge is the mind that believes in and has the conviction that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that exist in the continuum of someone other than oneself has the ability to protect one from fears. In the refuge prayer we usually recite, “I go for refuge until I am enlightened/ To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,” this indicates causal refuge.
- Resultant refuge is the faith and conviction that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that one will actualise in one’s own continuum in the future have the potential and power to protect oneself from fears. “By my practice of giving and other perfections,/ May I become a buddha to benefit all sentient beings,” indicates resultant refuge.

The unsurpassed teacher is the Buddha.

The unsurpassed refuge is the Dharma.

The unsurpassed guide is the Sangha.

The Buddha is the unsurpassable teacher who gives us refuge. What does it mean to go for refuge to the Buddha? It is a pledge on our part never to stray from or to adopt a path that is not shown by the Buddha. It is a promise to practise exactly in accordance with what the Buddha taught.

The Buddha is the one who shows the path. The path itself is the Dharma. When we take refuge in the Dharma, we are making a pledge, “I will practise this path.” The Dharma is the path that we enter and practise. The Dharma is shown by the Buddha. So taking refuge in the Dharma means making a pledge, “I will practise the Dharma exactly in accordance with how the Buddha has revealed it.”

By practising the Dharma, whatever Dharma qualities that arise in the mind is the

unsurpassed refuge or protection. For example, you are abiding in one-day vows. When you adopt such vows and abide in them, you have the qualities of those vows in your mind. This is what protects you. This can be an example of the unsurpassed refuge/protection.

Superior beings are our companions who help us to enter and actualise the path. The superior beings are the Sangha. Going for refuge to the Sangha means making a pledge, “I will practise exactly in the way that they have done and are doing now.” This is the pledge.

This is what refuge is. It is a heartfelt promise and a pledge.

- In relation to going for refuge to the Buddha, it is the pledge to hold the Buddha as the unsurpassed teacher and pledging to practise in the way that he has taught and revealed in his teachings.
- Going for refuge to the Dharma is to practise the Dharma that he has revealed.
- Going for refuge to the Sangha is making the pledge to practise in the same way as the Sangha, the superior beings, taking them as role models.

Refuge is very important in the beginning as it leads to all the other qualities and realisations. In fact all practices can be condensed into the practice of going for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The sutra, *The Stainless Space (or Sky)* states that if the merit of going for refuge were to take material form, even the whole of space would not be enough to accommodate it.

Verse 2.26

Until the essence of enlightenment,  
I go for refuge to the Buddhas.  
Likewise, I go for refuge to the Dharma,  
And to the assembly of bodhisattvas.

## **CONFESSING NEGATIVITIES WITH THE FOUR POWERS**

On the basis of going for refuge, there is then the branch of confession. The teachings tell us that, in the first place, we should strive not to be stained by faults or negativities. Despite striving to avoid faults and negativities, due to our familiarity with the afflictions, when negativities are accumulated, one should not just leave them as they are but rather one should strive to confess and purify them.

In the practice of confession, you have to apply the four opponent powers:

1. The power of regret (or eradication)
2. The power of the support (or refuge)
3. The power of applying the antidote (or the remedy)
4. The power of restraint (or turning away from wrongdoing)

### *1. The power of regret (or eradication)*

The power of eradication means generating regret for having committed non-virtues in the past. In order to develop regret, we have to reflect on the three effects of every single non-virtue we have committed.

Each non-virtue has three effects when it ripens:

1. the fruitional effect
2. the concordant effect that can be divided into causally concordant effects and behaviourally concordant effects
3. the environmental effect

2. *The power of the support (or refuge)*

The power of the support refers to going for refuge to the Three Jewels and developing bodhicitta.

3. *The power of applying the antidote (or the remedy)*

According to Shantideva's *Compendium of Trainings*, six antidotes are listed:

1. relying on the profound sutras
2. meditating on emptiness
3. relying on recitations (of mantras)
4. relying on the buddhas' holy form, i.e., making statues, tsa-tsas and so forth
5. relying on making offerings
6. relying on the names (of the buddhas)

4. *The power of restraint*

The power of restraint is making a pledge or promise not to engage in non-virtue again in the future.

When we accumulate negativities due to our overwhelming afflictions, we should not leave them as they are but we have to confess and engage in the practice of purification. It is said that there is no negative karma that is so heavy that it cannot be purified through the practice of confession.

Many people believe that you have to carry out the non-virtue either physically or verbally, i.e., the action has to manifest in a physical or verbal way, for it to be considered an accumulation of negativity or non-virtue. This is not true. Of course when you do that, i.e., carry out the negative action physically or verbally, you will accumulate non-virtue.

But having strong negative thoughts in themselves will also lead to the accumulation of negative karma, especially having strong ill-will or the thought wanting to harm. Remember when we were looking at the *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, it was mentioned then that if we feel like killing someone and we keep that thought strongly in our mind, that mental act in itself constitutes the accumulation of the karma of killing.

There are four permutations between karma that is accumulated and karma that is done.<sup>1</sup> Harboring the thought to kill for a long time constitutes the karma of killing that is accumulated but not done. Of course, there are also actions or karma that are

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<sup>1</sup> The four permutations of karma that is accumulated and karma that is done are:

1. karma that is both done and accumulated
2. karma that is both not done and not accumulated
3. karma that is done but not accumulated
4. karma that is accumulated but is not done



done but not accumulated and so forth.

When we talk about karma that is accumulated, essentially it involves a strong mental intention. There is a mental force behind it. With regard to entertaining the thought of killing, all you need to do is to hold on to the thought that you really want to do it. When you do that, you will accumulate the karma of killing. Although that mental action has not manifested in you carrying out the act physically, once you have the strong thought for some time, you would have accumulated the karma of killing.

When we say a karma is accumulated, essentially we are saying that a bad imprint is planted on the mind. When you have the thought of killing, you accumulate the negative karma of killing although it is not done. This places a very powerful negative imprint in the mind and it definitely ripens in due course unless it is purified through confession.

The teachings tell us that when we accumulate negativities and non-virtue we have to purify them through confession. We cannot just leave them as they are because they will not go away on their own. It will be a completely different matter if, when we die, somehow the imprints of non-virtue simply disappear on their own accord. But they will not disappear on their own accord. Rather they will follow the mind wherever the mind goes. Then there will come a time when they will ripen and one will experience the various effects of that ripening.

The next verse calls the attention of those to whom you are going to confess your negativities.

Verse 2.27

With folded hands I request  
The complete buddhas and bodhisattvas  
Who possess great compassion  
And reside in all directions.

Verse 2.28

Since beginningless cyclic existence,  
In this life and in others,  
Unknowingly, I committed negativities  
And cause them to be done.

Verse 2.29

Overwhelmed by the mistakes of ignorance  
I rejoiced in what was committed,  
But now seeing these mistakes,  
From my heart I confess them to the Protectors.

You bring to mind all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, thinking that they are abiding in front of you. In their presence you confess all the negativities that you have accumulated by first generating regret. You generate regret for all the non-virtue committed not only in this life but also all the non-virtue that you have accumulated

or created since beginningless time. You confess all the non-virtue performed by yourself or that you have caused others to accumulate. You also confess the non-virtue that you have accumulated through rejoicing in the non-virtue of others. You confess all such negativities and the non-virtue that have arisen from your afflictions.

In the presence of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, you take responsibility and acknowledge from the heart, “These are all the negativities that I have accumulated. They are really unacceptable and are not right.”

Verse 2.30

Whatever harmful acts of body, speech, and mind  
I have done by means of afflictions,  
Towards the Three Jewels,  
My parents, my spiritual masters, and others;

Here one is confessing all the negativities that one has accumulated due to the afflictions in relation to:

- those objects who are endowed with qualities like the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha
- those who have helped us such as our parents, father and mother
- our own gurus who have been very kind to us

You confess all the negativities accumulated due to the three poisons—ignorance, anger and attachment—in relation to these special objects such as being disrespectful to them, hurting or harming them, criticising and belittling them or through developing wrong views.

Verse 2.31

All the terrible negativities  
Done by me, a wrongdoer,  
Who have created faults of a multitude of misdeeds,  
I admit to the Guides.

Verse 2.32

I may die  
Before my negativities have been purified;  
Please protect me in such a way  
As will swiftly and surely free me from them.

In Verse 2.32, one goes for refuge and seeks protection so that one can purify oneself of all the negativities before death comes. This is thinking that one has to purify one's negativities through the understanding that **death is certain**.

The next verse relates to thinking about the need to purify one's negativities by understanding that the time of death is uncertain.

Verse 2.33

The untrustworthy Lord of Death  
Without waiting, whether or not something has been done;

Whether one is sick or otherwise,  
Suddenly comes; do not be complacent about life.

This verse is saying that you have to purify your negativities quickly because there is no telling as to when death will happen.

- There is no telling that death will occur before we have finished our work or will only happen after we have finished our work.
- There is no telling that death will only happen when you are sick and will not happen when you are not sick.
- There is no certainty that you will die at a particular place or a particular time.
- It is not certain that you will die with a specific medical condition.

Since the time of your death is uncertain, you have to purify your negativities. By reflecting on verses 2.32 and 2.33 and by bringing to mind how death is certain and the time of death is uncertain, you should persuade yourself to strive in purifying your negativities.

The point here is to generate regret by bringing to mind how if, for whatever reason you are suddenly going to die now, there are still so many negativities left behind due to you not having purified them. By thinking of the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the time of death, you develop a sense of urgency of having to start purification right now.

The next verse, Verse 2.34, I guess you can relate it to the point of how, at the time of death, nothing is of any benefit except the Dharma.

Verse 2.34  
Leaving all behind, I must depart alone.  
Through not having understood this  
I committed various kinds of negativities  
For the sake of my friends and foes.

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Question: How can we take refuge in arya superiors as the Sangha Jewel when their bodies are true suffering and, in the mental continua of such persons, there is still projecting karma that can propel them back to samsara?

Khen Rinpoche: The body is not the arya bodhisattva.

Student: Isn't the person constituted of the body and mind?

Khen Rinpoche: The body is not the arya bodhisattva.

Question:

Verse 2.32
I may die
Before my negativities have been purified;
Please protect me in such a way

As will swiftly and surely free me from them.

Is this line, “*As will swiftly and surely free me from them,*” just an expression of pleading for help or is it an expression of actually being able to be helped by the Three Jewels in such a manner?

Answer: When we do not purify our negativities, we will be reborn in the lower realms and experience all the suffering there. So out of fear, not wanting that to happen to ourselves, one is making a plea to and requesting the Three Jewels to protect us from this. So it is confessing and acknowledging regret for having done all these non-virtues and expressing that in the form of a request.

Question: Is “*As will swiftly and surely free me from them*” just an expression then?

Khen Rinpoche: Yes.

Question: In Lesson 7, you talked about the ultimate Dharma Jewel being true paths and true cessations and the ultimate Sangha Jewel also being true paths and true cessations.

I want to clarify this: the ultimate Dharma Jewel is true paths and true cessations in the mind of a superior being? Will it then be correct to say that the ultimate Sangha Jewel can be described as a superior being who has true paths and true cessations in his mental continuum? Basically, are we talking about the same thing but the focus is slightly different between a Dharma Jewel and a Sangha Jewel?

Answer: We posited them to be the same. What is ultimate Dharma Jewel and what is ultimate Sangha Jewel? They are true paths and true cessations.

Question: Would it be right to say then that we are focusing on the true paths and true cessations that are the mental attainments in the mind of the superior being.

Khen Rinpoche: This goes without saying. Definitely!

Student: The reason I am a bit confused with this is because when we were doing this topic in the first cycle of the Basic Program—I could have noted this incorrectly—it was explained that the entity of the Dharma Jewel was said to be an accomplishment of the mind whereas the entity of the Sangha Jewel was said to be a being, like a person.

Khen Rinpoche: This is fine when you are not looking at the Dharma Jewel and Sangha Jewel in terms of the ultimate and the conventional. In general, when you say what is a Dharma Jewel? It is true paths and true cessations. What is a Sangha Jewel? It is a superior being. This is fine.

But if you were to look at the Sangha Jewel in detail, looking at what is an ultimate Sangha Jewel and what is the conventional Sangha Jewel, then you have to be able to posit what they are.

But according to a commentary of the *Uttaratantra*:

- the ultimate Sangha Jewel is posited to be a superior being
- the conventional Sangha Jewel is posited to be a group of at least four fully ordained monks

This is another way of looking at this.

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