

**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 10****11 March 2014**

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What is refuge? Chapter Two: Verses 2.34–2.55. Confessing negativities with the four powers (cont'd).

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**WHAT IS REFUGE?**

I mentioned before that the practice of going for refuge is extremely important. Among the three objects of refuge, the Buddha is the one who shows refuge. When one goes for refuge to the Buddha, it means that one recognises the Buddha to be one's guide and one pledges to practise his instructions exactly as he had taught. The purpose of going for refuge to the Buddha is generating the pledge, "I will practise his teachings exactly as he intended."

In order to be able to make this kind of pledge or promise, first one must understand how the Buddha is an unparalleled teacher and that there is no other guide like him. In order to develop the conviction that the Buddha is an unparalleled teacher, one must listen to his teachings and reflect on them. When such faith and conviction in the Buddha arises, one will then naturally be able to pledge, "I am going to practise his teachings exactly as he taught them."

The unparalleled or unsurpassed refuge is the Dharma, which protects us from all undesirable things, samsara and the lower realms. When such conviction arises in one's heart, this is going for refuge to the Dharma. By going for refuge, one makes the pledge or commitment to practise the Dharma purely.

The unsurpassed guide, the Sangha, refers to those who guide us and help us in our practice. They are our role models and are the superior or arya Sangha. Going for refuge to the Sangha is making the commitment to practise like them.

Going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is essentially making these pledges after which one's practice begins. It is on the basis of knowing well what exactly the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are that one can make such a strong pledge.

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**CONFESSING NEGATIVITIES WITH THE FOUR POWERS (cont'd)**

We have started the section on the practice of confession. The teachings tell us that we should engage in this practice by applying the four powers.

*The power of regret (or eradication)*

The text talks about generating regret for all the negativities one has accumulated since beginningless lifetimes. These include:

- the negativities that are accumulated by oneself
- the negativities accumulated when one caused others to engage in negativities
- the negativities accumulated when one rejoiced in the negativities that were performed by others
- the negativities accumulated in relation to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, in relation to one's parents and so forth.

Contemplating the results that one will experience in the future, when these negativities that one has accumulated ripen, one generates regret.

If one was to die without having purified the negativities that one has accumulated, it will also be a cause for regret. The text talks about bringing to mind how we will regret dying without having purified these negativities, especially since death is certain but the time of death is uncertain.

~ *Regretting negativities we have done for the sake of close friends and so forth.*

In the following verse, the text says that we often accumulate negativities for the sake of our loved ones, our resources and possessions and ourselves, not knowing that at the end of the day, we have to leave all these behind. We generate regret by bringing to mind how all these will not last.

The text is also telling us that we often accumulate negativities out of attachment for loved ones and dislike for and anger towards our enemies in our quest to defeat or destroy them. It is also inappropriate to accumulate negativities for the sake of loved ones and our enemies.

## 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.

## Verse 2.35

Even my foes will become nothing.  
My friends will also become nothing.  
I too will become nothing.  
Likewise all will become nothing.

~ *Friends and enemies alike become only objects of memory at the time of death*

One tries very hard to destroy one's enemies but even if one did not do anything at all, sooner or later, they will die. Likewise for one's loved ones, one tries so hard to sustain them. But over time they will gradually decline and will also die. We ourselves will one day also cease to exist. We will die. There will come a day when this world will also cease to exist.

For that reason, it is meaningless to accumulate negativities for the sake of loved ones and enemies. By thinking in this way—how it is inappropriate to accumulate negativities for their sake—one generates regret.

Why is it meaningless? Because you can try ways and means to sustain these relationships. But, at the end of the day, they will all become just objects of memory, nothing more.

Verse 2.36

Just like an experience in a dream,  
Whatever things I enjoy  
Will become a memory.  
Whatever has passed will not be seen.

At the time of death, the last day of your life, no matter how much enjoyment you had in this life, no matter how many friends, loved ones or possessions you have, they are all just objects of memory. They cannot help you beyond that. This is evident when you think about it. Imagine the very last day of your life. All those past experiences are over, are finished and are just memories. So it is evident that all these things are unreliable. You can see this directly with your own eyes.

Verse 2.37

Even within this brief life  
Many friends and foes have passed away,  
But whatever terrible negativities I committed for them  
Remains before me.

At the end of the day, friends that have been nice to us, enemies who had harmed us and those we would like to harm, everyone will die. When they die, they are gone, but the negativities that we accumulated in relation to our friends and enemies remain. The teachings are telling us that such negativities that we have accumulated for the sake of loved ones and enemies remain with us even after they have died, accompanying us like our shadow. We will have to experience the suffering that these negativities will bring about.

It is evident that whatever benefit we may have received from our loved ones and whatever harm we have received from our enemies only last for as long as they exist, i.e., they only last for this life. But the negativities that we accumulated in order to defeat our enemies and to sustain our friends and loved ones remain with us from life to life.

*~ Regretting negativities we perform due to not realising that the time of our death is uncertain*

Although the time of death is uncertain, because of our predisposition believing that everything is unchanging and permanent, we create a lot of negativities. The teachings are telling us to generate regret for having lived in such a way by remembering the uncertainty of the time of death.

## Verse 2.38

Thereby, through not having realized  
That I will suddenly vanish,  
I committed many negativities  
Through ignorance, attachment, and hatred.

~ *Death is certain and to die while still possessing negativities is fearful*

## Verse 2.39

Remaining neither day nor night,  
This life is always slipping by  
And never lengthening.  
Why will death not come to one like me?

“Remaining neither day nor night” means time is slipping by. Time does not stop and nothing is being added to our lifespan. It is definite that we will die yet we still have with us all the negativities that we have accumulated. Bringing this to mind, we generate regret.

Because the time of death is uncertain, therefore we must strive to purify our negativities. The teachings give an analogy of a pond. Imagine there is a pond that does not have any of water from other sources. With certain conditions such as hot weather and so forth, the pond will start to dry up and there will come a time when that body of water will cease to exist. This is like our lifespan.

~ *Not purifying our negativities will bring suffering even in this life*

When we do not purify our negativities, then we would have to experience their suffering results even in this life. When we do not purify our negativities, even our friends, loved ones and relatives would not be able to do anything to help us.

## Verse 2.40

While I am lying in bed,  
Although surrounded by my friends and relatives,  
The feeling of life being severed  
Will be experienced by me alone.

## Verse 2.41ab

When seized by Yama’s messengers,  
What benefit will friends and relatives afford?

When we are lying on our deathbed, we may be surrounded by our loved ones, friends and relatives. They may do many things to keep us alive, but there is nothing they can do to prevent us from experiencing the suffering of death. We have to go through the experience of dying alone. The terrifying fear and suffering at the time of death can only be experienced by oneself, not by anyone else.

At the time of death, we undergo the death process where the subtle elements in the body undergo dissolution. When we have accumulated many negativities, we will experience all kinds of fearful, frightening and terrifying visions and we experience these on our own. No one can protect us from them, not the doctor nor our loved

ones. What can protect us is only our merit.

~ *The fear that comes from not performing meritorious acts*

Verse 2.41cd

My merit alone shall protect me then,  
But upon that I have never relied.

The unsurpassed protection is virtuous karma but since we have not accumulated such virtuous karma, thinking about this, we develop regret.

~ *The anguish of regret*

Verse 2.42

O Protectors! I, so unconscientious,  
Unaware of such terror as this,  
Performed many negativities  
For the sake of this impermanent life.

This verse is an expression of regret.

~ *The reason great fear arises*

Verse 2.43

One who is being led today to the spot where his limbs will be  
mutilated  
Will be petrified.  
With dry mouth, sunken eyes, and so forth  
His entire appearance is transfigured.

Verse 2.44

What need to mention the tremendous despair  
When stricken with the disease of terror,  
Being clasped by the frightful physical forms  
Of the messengers of Yama?

If a person is led to the execution ground or place where he would be killed, that person would be very frightened. Looking at the physical appearance of that person, you can see all these signs of great terror and fear. If that is the case, then it goes without saying that, at the time of death, when we have visions of the messengers of the Lord of Death coming to take us away, that would also be very frightening. This is what will happen at the time of death. Then what will happen in the next life?

~ *The way negativities cause one to be tormented by suffering in future lives*

Verse 2.45

“Who can afford me good protection  
From this terror?”  
With terrified, bulging eyes agape  
I shall search the four directions for refuge.

Verse 2.46

Then seeing no refuge in the four directions

I shall become enveloped in gloom.  
If there should be no refuge there,  
At that time what shall I do?

It is said that there are people who die experiencing this. They are terrified, looking around for help but not finding any protection anywhere. Their minds become completely enveloped by darkness and gloom.

In the next life, if you are reborn in the hells, when you look around, you would not find any help. It is terrifying. At this time, the Buddha will not be able to protect you because you were reborn there due to very powerful negative karma. When that karma ripens, there is nothing the Buddha can do.

Up to this point here, verses V2.27 to 2.46 come under the power of regret.

The very essence of generating regret for having accumulated negativities is through remembering that:

- death is certain
- the time of death is uncertain
- at the time of death, nothing help us except the Dharma

By thinking about these points, one develops regret for having accumulated negativities.

As we saw earlier, in order to defeat those we do not like, i.e., our enemies, we have to put in so much effort. Likewise, we also put in a lot of effort to support and sustain those who are in agreement with us. In the course of doing all this, we accumulate a lot of negativities. But at the time of death, none of them is of any benefit.

In the first place, we should remember and keep this in mind and, as much as possible, abstain or refrain from accumulating negativities. In case we do accumulate negativities, as much as possible, we should purify them without delay by remembering that the time of death is uncertain.

We have to remember this: that we can sustain and support our loved ones due to our attachment to them and we can defeat our enemies, but there will come a time when they will cease to exist. However the negativities we accumulated in relation to doing things for or to them will remain with us and we will have to experience the results. By remembering this, we should refrain from accumulating negativities.

#### *The power of support*

Next is the power of support, starting with going for refuge to the Three Jewels from this very moment.

#### *~ Relying on refuge of the Three Jewels*

Verse 2.47

Therefore from today onwards I go for refuge  
To the Victors, the protectors of migrating beings,  
Who strove for the purpose of protecting migrating beings

And with great power eradicate all fear.

Verse 2.48

Likewise, I perfectly go for refuge  
To the Dharma they have realized,  
That clears away the fears of cyclic existence,  
And also to the assembly of bodhisattvas.

These two verses talk about going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

~ *Relying on the children of the Conquerors*

Verse 2.49

I, terrified  
Offer myself to Samantabhadra;  
To Manjughosha also  
I offer my body.

Verse 2.50

To the Protector Avalokiteshvara  
Who unmistakably acts with compassion,  
I utter a mournful cry,  
“Please protect this wrong-doer!”

Verse 2.51

In my search for refuge  
I cry from my heart  
To Akashagarba, Ksitigarbha,  
And all the Compassionate Protectors.

Verse 2.52

And I go for refuge to Vajrapani,  
Upon the sight of whom all hateful beings,  
Such as the messengers of Yama,  
Flee in terror to the four directions.

There are eight close sons or the eight great bodhisattvas—Samantabhadra, Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, Ksitigarbha, Akashagarbha, Maitreya and Sarvanivaranaviskambini. Bring to mind these bodhisattvas and take refuge in them.

~ *Having gone for refuge, practise in accord with their instructions*

One brings to mind all the negativities. After having gone for refuge, one should practice according to the advice of the Three Jewels and the eight great bodhisattvas.

Verse 2.53

Previously I transgressed your words,  
But now upon seeing this great fear  
I go to you for refuge.  
By doing so, please swiftly clear away this fear.

“Previously I transgressed your word”: “I” here refers to the one who has accumulated all the non-virtuous negative karma. “I, this person who has accumulated so much negative karma because of not following your teachings, have gone against your advice and have engaged in activities that should be discarded and not cultivated the qualities that need to be cultivated.” As a result, one would have to experience all the suffering and problems. By remembering this, one is making a plea before going for refuge to them.

This is the power of the support, which in this case is going for refuge to the Three Jewels and relying on the eight close sons of the buddhas.

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

Verse 2.54

If I need to comply with a doctor’s advice  
When frightened by an ordinary illness,  
Then what need to mention that it is so when perpetually diseased  
By the hundreds of faults of attachment and so forth?

When people fall sick, out of fear for their health and their lives, they would consult a doctor to seek a diagnosis. They will usually follow exactly the advice of the doctor even though it may involve some hardship or inconvenience. If that is the case for an ordinary sickness, it goes without saying that someone who is afflicted by hundreds of faults of attachment, anger, ignorance, pride and so forth, needs to rely on and follow exactly the advice given by the Omniscient One, the Buddha. The mental sickness of the afflictions is far more severe than any physical sickness while the medicine to cure it is very rare.

Verse 2.55

If all the people dwelling in Jambudvipa  
Can be crushed by just one of these,  
And if no other medicine to cure them  
Is to be found in all the directions

In Gyaltshab Je’s commentary, it is said that if everyone were to generate just one moment of anger towards a bodhisattva, it can destroy all the human beings in this world and cause them to be reborn in the hells. The medicine for this sickness, which is the meditation on the path and so forth, is so rare that one cannot find it anywhere else apart from the teachings. Other than the teachings, one will not be able to find such medicine anywhere else. You will not find it even in the celestial realm of Brahma.

Even just one affliction can harm so many sentient beings. The medicine to cure the afflictions is only the Dharma. The disease of the afflictions is so powerful and the only cure for it is the Dharma.

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