

**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 11**13 March 2014**

Advice on fulfilling one's daily commitments. Chapter Two: Verses 2.23–2.65. Confessing negativities with the four powers (cont'd).

ADVICE ON FULFILLING ONE'S DAILY COMMITMENTS

I mentioned before that when we recite the preliminary prayers before class, we should visualise Shakyamuni Buddha in front of us. We then recite the prayers on the basis of recollecting the qualities of his exalted body, speech and mind. We are very fortunate indeed when we are able to do this.

You need to remember all the time that you are very fortunate just to be able to think of the Buddha, recollect his qualities and recite these verses of praise, even if it is only for a few minutes. When you think about this, doing all this makes this particular day meaningful. You should rejoice that you have made this day meaningful.

I thought to mention this. There are many people who have taken on many recitation commitments that come from attending many empowerments. Because of this, they have accumulated whole sets of recitations that they must do. But after some time, most of these people feel that it is pointless doing such prayers and commitments. They feel that it is something that they have to do but they do not see the purpose and the meaning behind these prayers and commitments.

If it is a commitment, one has to do it. Ideally, when one is doing self-generation practices or one's sadhanas, as one recites the words of the practice, one should be reflecting on their meaning. When one is unable to reflect and meditate on the entire practice, at the very least, one can hold on to the divine pride of being the deity and then recite the words. This is one method. We are talking about this in the context of doing self-generation deity practices.

If one is not able to do that, one should at least focus on the six sessions guru yoga. Guru yoga is the main thing so one recites that prayer and reflects on it.

If one cannot handle any meditation or any reflection, then one simply verbally recite the prayer. It is called a daily recitation because it is meant as a recitation.

Some people may then wonder, "Is there any point in just blurting out the words?"

Well, it is a commitment that you have already committed yourself to so you just

have to do it. When you are merely reciting the words in order to fulfil your commitment, at least, you are purifying the negativities and obscurations you have accumulated with your speech. When you pay homage physically, it is said that you purify the negativities of your body. When you recite the prayers of your daily recitation commitments, you will purify the negativities of your speech. By believing in this, you have to continue doing your commitments without giving them up.

This is in response to those people who come and tell me, “Oh, I have all these commitments. I just can’t handle them. Can I just not do them?”

Let’s say you have daily commitments that take one or two hours to do. You just have to recite them. You have to do them. It is better than not doing them.

In my opinion, it is a different matter if, instead of spending the one to two hours simply reciting your prayers, in its place, you are doing some other virtuous and meaningful practices or meditation. Then at least you are doing something as a substitute. But if in place of merely reciting your daily prayers, you decide not to do anything at all and end up doing nothing, then it is far better to spend the one or two hours reciting your prayers rather than not doing anything at all.

When people come and ask me about this, if I were to tell them, “Yes. You can stop your practice,” they will stop their practice. They will stop doing their recitations and end up doing nothing in their place. This would not be right. You should at least replace them by doing something meaningful and virtuous.

It seems that many people have this problem. They take on all these daily recitation commitments or sadhanas. Then some of them do not feel like continuing to do them. They feel that they are a chore and burden but since there is no choice, they just do them.

As I said earlier, ideally, you should be reflecting and meditating as you recite the words and do the practice. When you cannot do that, then at least you have to recite the words of the practice. You have to do this as it is a commitment. Merely reciting the prayers will purify an immeasurable amount of negativities accumulated with your speech. So it is not as if merely reciting the prayers does not have any benefit. There is benefit.

If you cannot do even that, then in its place, if you can do some other good practices and do them well, in my opinion, at least they can act as substitutes. Let’s say in place of your commitments, you think of Chenrezig, recite OM MANI PADME HUM and work on cultivating a good heart. At least you are doing something virtuous. My point is that you have to do something meaningful and virtuous. If you want to give up your commitments, in their place, at least you should do something virtuous. In my opinion, at least this is good.

*Khen Rinpoche: At the same time, I am **not** saying that you can give up your commitments. I am **not** saying that! But when you want to give them up, do something else. But I am **not** saying that you can give up your commitments. Do not misunderstand me.*

One of my teachers had so many commitments. His commitments came up to one thick volume of prayers. He would start his prayers from 5.30 in the morning and he would carry on till 11.30am. I don't know whether he had time to meditate. I am not sure. I saw that he just read them quickly. There were more than 200 to 300 pages of prayers. I don't think he had time to meditate on everything. But even at the age of 80, he was doing that. Probably he was meditating but I am not sure how to tell if he was meditating or not. But I saw that this was how he did his commitments.

I mentioned this because people ask me, "Can I not do my commitments?" It is difficult for me to answer that question. If I was the one who gave the commitment, then I can say, "OK. You do not have to do them."

My idea is that when you really cannot or do not want to do the commitments, then do something else, such as some meditation or some chanting. I think this is the way to go. Hopefully I have answered this question for everyone. Please do not ask me again next time! This is the answer for everyone.

I understand how it feels. Personally, sometimes I feel a little bit like that as well. "What is the point of reciting so many prayers?" When you think like that, then ask yourself, "If I don't do these prayers, what am I going to do in their place? What better alternative do I have?"

If you can meditate as you recite, this should be the way. But even if you cannot meditate, at least reciting the words themselves, i.e., they are the speech and teachings of the Buddha, have the benefit of purifying your negativities.

Everyone likes to recite sutras such as the *Golden Light Sutra* and the *Sanghatastra*. Everyone also likes to recite a long list of mantras and dharanis. Why do you recite them? Because you believe that there is benefit in doing so. So if there is benefit in reciting these sutras and mantras, there must be benefit in reciting your daily prayers as well because they are all teachings of the Buddha.

Here we are talking about commitments. Since you have already promised to take on the commitment of doing the practice, it is best that you continue doing them and not stop doing so.

In the case of self-generation practices, even if you cannot meditate from beginning to end, you can focus on one aspect of the practice, e.g., the section on generating yourself as the deity. At the very least, you can focus on doing that and then you can just recite the rest of the practice.

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

*The power of applying the antidote (or the power of the remedy) (cont'd)*

We started on the power of applying the antidote. The text gives the example of how a sick person would rely on a skilled doctor and follow the doctor's advice. This being the case, it will be even more important that we, who are afflicted by the sickness of

the afflictions, follow the advice given by the skilled doctor, the Buddha.

~ *It is reasonable to practise in accord with the words of the Teacher, the supreme doctor*  
The ordinary sicknesses associated with our physical health are only confined to one life. Sooner or later, the sickness will stop when we die. But the sickness of the afflictions goes beyond one life. It goes on and on and harms us in myriad ways. Not only that. The sickness of the afflictions does not harm us alone. It can potentially cause us to harm numberless sentient beings. Therefore it is appropriate to practise in accordance with the advice of the Buddha to pacify the sickness of the afflictions.

Verse 2.56

Then the intention not to act in accordance  
With the words that can uproot every misery  
Of the all knowing physician  
Is extremely bewildered and an object of scorn.

In order to pacify the sickness of the afflictions, we have to rely on the instructions of the All-Knowing One, the omniscient Buddha, who can help us eliminate the root of all our physical and mental suffering and sicknesses. When we do not follow his advice but engage in behaviours that are contrary to his advice, this will be extremely foolish. Instead of following the teachings of the Buddha, if we were to live our life continuously accumulating negativities, we would become an object of ridicule of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The great master Nagarjuna gave the analogy of someone vomiting into an extremely precious container made of jewels and gold. The person vomiting into that container will be considered very foolish. Likewise, having found this human life of freedoms and endowments, it would be even more foolish if, instead of using it to accomplish what is meaningful, we only engage in negative actions and constantly accumulate non-virtue.

I think this verse is about making a pledge to practise the teachings exactly as they were taught by the Omniscient One, the Buddha who is the supreme physician.

~ *The analogy of an abyss*

Verse 2.57

If I need to be conscientious  
Near a small, ordinary precipice,  
Then how much more so near the precipices of long duration  
That drop for thousands of yojanas?

When we are climbing or going down a flight of stairs, we usually move cautiously knowing that if we are not careful, we may slip and hurt ourselves.

If we are so careful with climbing or going down a flight of stairs due to our fear of slipping and hurting ourselves, it goes without saying that we need to be even more careful and cautious when it comes to creating negative karma. This is because negative karma will throw us into the abyss of the lower realms. Once we fall into the abyss of the lower realms, we will have to stay there for a very long time and it will

be very difficult to be liberated from those realms. Therefore we need to be extra careful and cautious not to create negative karma. Remembering we will go to the lower realms and suffer there for a long time when we accumulate non-virtue, we cultivate conscientiousness.

~ *The reasonableness of making effort quickly*

The text talks about applying the antidotes to the negativities that we accumulate and applying them immediately.

Verse 2.58

It is inappropriate to stay happily  
Thinking, “Today alone I shall not die,”  
For inevitably the time will come  
When I shall go out of existence.

You should apply the antidotes right away and not think that you will do so in the future after a month or even a year. It is inappropriate and incorrect to do that because there is no guarantee that you will not die tomorrow. It is not correct to think, “I will not die today.” Understanding that the time of death is uncertain, you have to apply the antidotes right away since there is no guarantee that tomorrow will come.

~ *As there is absolutely no reason not to fear suffering, being lazy about cultivating the path is unreasonable*

Verse 2.59

Who will grant me fearlessness?  
How can I be surely freed from this?  
If I shall inevitably go out of existence,  
How can I remain in mental happiness?

If you think, “I do not fear death. I will not be afraid at the time of death so there is no point worrying about it,” this is inappropriate because, whether you like it or not, at the time of death, because of having accumulated negativities throughout your life, fear will arise. At that time, nobody can help you. The buddhas cannot take away your fear. The results of those non-virtues will ripen and there will be suffering in the future.

Whether you like it or not, fear will arise at the time of death. There is nobody, not even the buddhas, who can guarantee that you will not experience any fear and any worries at that time. Nobody can do that. Fear will naturally arise. Therefore it is wrong to just live life happily, without worry, eating, sleeping and enjoying yourself and not caring about death. This is wrong.

Without a doubt death will come and at the time of death, there will be worry and fear. Therefore you have to start applying the antidotes right away.

You may think, “I am not afraid of death.” This is only because it has not knocked on your doors yet. Because it has yet to happen, you are confident that death would not be a problem. But when death happens, there will definitely be worries. At the very

least, there will be some fear especially when you know that you did not spend your life in a virtuous way.

It is said that there are three levels of real Dharma practitioners:

- The junior Dharma practitioner dies without regret, knowing that, “At least I did something in this life.”
- The middling Dharma practitioner dies without fear, knowing that, “I did some good practices in this life.”
- The best Dharma practitioner faces death happily as he is ready to go. The teachings say that such practitioners go happily.

We need to keep this in mind. When our time comes, even if we cannot go happily, at least, we should go without regret. We should remind ourselves of the opportunity we have now. We are still healthy and have all the favourable conditions for us to learn and practise. Therefore we should take this opportunity to do as many meaningful and virtuous actions as possible.

This completes the power of applying the antidotes (or the power of the remedy).

*The power of restraint (or the power of turning away from wrongdoing)*

Next is the power of refraining from engaging in negativities. We are talking about relying on the mind of restraint.

~ *As material wealth is unreliable, it is unreasonable to be attached to it*

Verse 2.60

What remains with me now

From the past experiences that have gone?

Through my adherence to them

I have gone against my spiritual masters' advice.

This verse is talking about abandoning attachment to objects of desire. We have been utilising these objects of desire—forms, sounds, smells, tastes or tactile objects—since beginningless lifetimes. When these objects of desire come into contact with the consciousness, we experience pleasure but that pleasure lasts only for a very short time. When the pleasure ends, we carry on looking for the next pleasurable experience. This is how we lead our life, going from one short pleasurable experience to another. Isn't that how we spend our life, looking for the one pleasurable experience after another? But whatever pleasure we may be talking about, it does not last. Then we have to find the next pleasurable experience.

When we experience pleasure again through coming into contact with these objects of desire—forms, sounds, smells, tastes or tactile objects—it is meaningless to be emotionally involved with and attached to that pleasure because that experience is no different and will never be any different from the past pleasurable experience. All the past pleasurable experiences that we had arise and last for a very short time and then they disappear. Whatever new pleasurable experience that may arise will be no different.

The teachings are saying that while we know that whatever pleasure we are going to

experience will never be any different from our past experiences and will only last for a short time, we disregard this fact. We continue to be emotionally involved and attached to this pleasure that we work so hard for.

We disregard the teachings of the guru and the teachings of the buddhas in running after pleasure and letting ourselves be emotionally attached to it. In the process, we keep on accumulating non-virtue and negativities but we disregard that too. This is what many of us are doing and the teachings are telling us not to do that.

Here we are talking about applying the power of restraint by bringing to mind how we have transgressed the advice of the guru and the buddhas thus far.

~ *Inappropriate to be attached to close friends and so forth*

Verse 2.61

Leaving behind this life  
And likewise my friends and relatives,  
If all alone I must go elsewhere  
How appropriate are friends and enemies?

Everything we consider to be so important in our life—our parents, relatives, loved ones and close friends as well as our possessions and so forth—when our time to die and to leave this world come, none of them and nothing can accompany us. When we die and leave for the next life, we have to go alone. It is not as if we can choose where we want to go. This will be determined by our karma, which can throw us anywhere from the deepest hells to the peak of cyclic existence.

On the day when we are going to die, no one can follow us. None of our loved ones will be of any benefit nor can they help us at the time of death. We can only go on alone. The teachings say that at the time of death, the king leaves behind his kingdom while the beggar leaves behind his begging bowl and walking stick. What they leave behind maybe be different but their way of going on to the next life is exactly the same. They have to leave everything behind and they have to go on alone.

The point here is that there is no reason to be attached to or emotionally involved with our friends and loved ones. Why? Because we often accumulate non-virtue due to our attachment to them. By thinking about this, we apply restraint as much as possible in avoiding such non-virtues.

~ *Making effort day and night in the methods for being liberated from negativities*

The next verse talks about the need to strive day and night to liberate ourselves from negativities.

Verse 2.62

“How can I be surely freed  
From non-virtue, the source of suffering?”  
Continually night and day  
Should I only consider this.

At the time of death, loved ones are of no benefit whatsoever and our enemies can no

longer harm us. What can harm us, at the time of death, are all the non-virtues and negativities, i.e., the innumerable instances of the ten non-virtues that we have accumulated for their sake. These non-virtues and negativities that we have accumulated will cause us to experience great suffering. As such, it is only appropriate to strive day and night thinking about how we can be liberated from such negativities.

This involves thinking about the presentation of cause and effect. More importantly, it is about generating the faith of conviction in karma. On the basis of reflecting on and understanding the workings of cause and effect, karma, and, in particular, all the suffering that we have to experience when the non-virtues that we have accumulated ripen, as much as possible, we should strive to purify our negativities day and night.

~ *What is it that one is confessing?*

Next we identify what exactly we are confessing.

Verse 2.63

Through unknowing and ignorance,  
Whatever I have committed,  
Be it a natural misdeed  
Or a stipulated negativity,

The non-virtues that we have accumulated can be divided into a natural misdeed or a stipulated negativity.

A natural misdeed is a non-virtuous action by nature regardless of who the perpetrator may be. It does not matter whether the person who performs that particular karma is holding vows or not. A natural misdeed is by nature non-virtuous. Whoever engages in such a misdeed accumulates non-virtue.

A stipulated negativity only applies to those who have vows and is a negativity that is committed when one contravenes the rules that were laid down by the Buddha. For example, ordained people are not supposed to eat after noon. The act of eating after noon is not a natural misdeed in itself. It is not necessarily negative karma but, for an ordained person, eating after noon becomes a stipulated negativity. A stipulated negativity includes any kind of vows. When one goes against the vows that one has taken, that is a stipulated negativity.

~ *The way to confess*

Verse 2.64

I confess all of them directly  
In the presence of the Protectors  
With folded hands, prostrating again and again,  
My mind terrified by suffering.

You think of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions abiding in the space in front of you. Then you recollect and bring to mind all the negativities that you have accumulated. With folded palms and with intense regret, you confess all those negativities that you have accumulated without concealing anything to the



extent that tears swell up and your hair stand on its ends!

~ *Requesting the attention of holy beings and pledging to turn away from negativities*

The last verse is making a pledge or promise to refrain from negativities after requesting the attention of the holy beings.

Verse 2.65

I request the Guides

To please accept my negativities as being mistakes.

Since they are not good,

I shall not do them again.

This is how one confesses: by acknowledging faults as faults, all the non-virtues that one has accumulated as non-virtues and by pledging not to engage in them again.

This concludes Chapter Two: Confessing Negativities.

## **SUMMARY**

These teachings talk about the great importance of doing the practice of confession. It is very important that we confess our negativities and engage in purification practices. The teachings say that it is due to our negativities and obscurations that when we listen to the teachings, we cannot retain the words. When we reflect on the teachings, we do not understand their meaning and when we meditate on the topics or try to internalise them, we do not achieve any realisations. All this is due to our negativities and obscurations obscuring our mind.

We have to engage in the practice of purification by applying the four powers.

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

The first power is the power of regret or the power of eradication. We have to generate genuine regret for all the non-virtues that we have accumulated since beginningless lifetimes. We confess all the non-virtues that we have performed ourselves and made others engage in. We also have to confess having rejoiced in the non-virtues of others. We also accumulated non-virtues in relation to special powerful karmic objects. We have to bring all these non-virtues to mind and confess them.

The way to generate regret is to bring to mind all the future suffering we will experience when these negativities ripen.

One also develops regret by reflecting on these three points, that:

- death is certain
- the time of death is uncertain
- at the time of death, nothing except the Dharma is of any benefit

We should also generate regret by reflecting on the fear and suffering we will experience at the time of death. On top of that, we have to think about all the future suffering, i.e., the result of our non-virtues, that awaits us after we have taken rebirth.

### *2. The power of the support*

Essentially this is going for refuge to the Three Jewels. Going for refuge, we bring to mind the buddhas and bodhisattvas such as the eight great sons and offer ourselves to them and promise to follow their advice.

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

Here we bring to mind all the faults and disadvantages of the sickness of the afflictions, how it harms us as well as causing us to harm others. With this in mind, we apply the antidotes, i.e., the teachings given by the Buddha, on the basis of acknowledging that the Buddha, the Omniscient One, is the supreme physician.

The teachings also mention the importance of relying constantly on mindfulness and vigilance to spot the arising of any non-virtue in the mind. When we notice that non-virtue has already arisen, i.e., that we have accumulated non-virtue, we should confess and purify it. We should do something about it right away without postponing it till a future time by reflecting on how the time of death is uncertain.

### *4. The power of restraint (or the power of turning away from wrongdoing)*

Here the text talks about recollecting how all the pleasure that we experienced in the past is meaningless. This applies also to all the pleasure that we are currently experiencing. We then restrain ourselves from committing non-virtue out of attachment and so forth.

Chapter Two, this chapter on confession, is telling us to apply the four opponent powers and to purify our negatives as much as possible.

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