

**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 13****20 March 2014**

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Chapter Three: Verses 3.10-3.22 Dedicating virtue (cont'd). Training in the mind that gives away body, material wealth and roots of virtue. Explanation of what an eon is.

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**DEDICATING VIRTUE (cont'd)**

*Dedicating [so that virtue acts] as the cause for all that one wishes*

We were discussing the branch of dedication in the last lesson. Now we are at verse 3.10, dedicating the virtue for the fulfilment of all of one's wishes.

Now Verse 3.10

May I become an inexhaustible treasure

For those who are poor and destitute.

May I turn into various articles of all necessities

And abide close before them.

Prior to dedicating the merit that we have accumulated, there were the earlier practices of urging the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma, requesting them not to pass away into nirvana and so forth. By using the verses here, we are dedicating the virtues that we have accumulated through these practices.

One dedicates the merit that one has accumulated for it to become an inexhaustible treasure for sentient beings, so that it becomes:

- food for those who are hungry
- water for those who are thirsty
- the objects of enjoyment and wealth for those who are poor

The context of our discussion here is the generation of bodhicitta. This chapter focuses on adopting bodhicitta. Prior to that, one has to purify one's negativities, i.e., the unfavourable conditions, and accumulate merit, i.e., the favourable conditions. Having done all that, one then needs to train the mind before adopting bodhicitta.

**TRAINING IN THE MIND THAT GIVES AWAY THE BODY, MATERIAL WEALTH AND ROOTS OF VIRTUE**

Initially one trains in the thought of dedicating and giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue to others. Before one can generate bodhicitta, first one has to eliminate the self-cherishing thought and instead develop the thought of wanting to benefit others. To this end, prior to developing bodhicitta, one has to train the mind in these different mental attitudes.

The objects of bodhicitta are the limitless and numberless sentient beings. Of course at the present moment, one does not have the ability to actually benefit all sentient beings and one is incapable of giving or dedicating oneself fully to them. Nevertheless one has to start by training in and developing these thoughts in one's mind. The teachings tell us that on the basis of training in these thoughts, gradually there will come a time when one will be able to dedicate and actually give away one's body, possessions and so forth, to others.

The objects of giving here are primarily one's body, possessions and merit or roots of virtue. Of the three, it is said that it is most important to dedicate one's body as our body is the very thing that we cherish, grasp and hold on to the most, identifying it as *my* body. Then in order to bring about happiness for and pleasure to this body, we go about accumulating wealth, possessions and even merit in order to take care of the body. In order to remove this grasping to our body, we train in the thought of dedicating it to others.

*The way to give them away*

Verse 3.11

Without any sense of loss

I shall give my body and resources,

As well as all my virtues of the three times,

For the sake of accomplishing the welfare of all sentient beings.

This verse is talking about dedicating and giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue accumulated in the past, present and future for the accomplishment of the happiness and welfare of sentient beings. This dedication of one's body, possessions and roots of virtue has to be done without a sense of loss.

You train your mind in developing this thought of dedicating your body, possessions and roots of virtue of the three times to all sentient beings mainly through reciting this verse and, at the same time, allowing this thought to arise from your heart.

Your mind has to familiarise itself with this thought, particularly when worry or fear arises when you feel threatened or you are experiencing some harm. At those times, it is even more important to train the mind in dedicating your body away. In such situations, when you are familiar with this practice of dedicating your body to others, if you were to think, "I have already dedicated my body to others. It belongs to them now." perhaps there will be less fear or even no fear at all.

When you have wholeheartedly dedicated your body to others, there is no basis to continue having the idea, "This is mine." Since you are no longer holding onto your body as being "mine," the mind will be very peaceful and relaxed.

Likewise, when you lose an object that belongs to you, when your mind is familiarised with this way of thinking, you can remind yourself, "I have already completely dedicated and given this away to others." When the idea of holding on to that object as "mine" is no longer there, even when you lose that object, it does not cause you a great deal of worry. You will not get uptight as your mind is very peaceful.

Whether something belongs to you or not depends on whether you have a sense of ownership. When you have the idea that the object is yours and you hold on to it as yours, it is yours. But when you do not have the idea and feeling that the object is yours because you have given it away to others, even when something happens to the object or you lose the object, there is no real basis for the mind to be uptight and disturbed. Therefore it is said that it is beneficial and important to train in this mind of giving and dedicating your body and so forth to others.

At those times when you are physically harmed or experiencing disturbances from non-humans or your possessions are damaged or lost, when you are familiar with this thought of dedicating everything to others, the mind will not be disturbed.

We talk about the practice of cutting or *chöd* in Tibetan, i.e., cutting the ego-grasping or self-grasping. By cutting your ego-grasping, you will no longer have the sense of self-cherishing. You will then be able to dedicate and give away your body without any sense of loss.

The practice of *chöd* is the practice of dedicating and giving one's body away to others:

- Inner *chöd* involves imagining cutting up one's body and dedicating and giving it away sincerely from one's heart to different kinds of non-human beings.
- Outer *chöd* is cutting one's ties with others and living alone in isolation.

*The reason it is reasonable to give away in a definite manner*

There are valid reasons as to why it is appropriate to engage in the practice of giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue.

~ *Due to abandoning attachment to all and giving, one will attain nirvana*

Verse 3.12 a,b

By giving all, I shall transcend sorrow

And my mind will accomplish nirvana.

~ *As sentient beings are the supreme field, it is reasonable to give to them*

Verse 3.12 c,d

All will be given similarly;

It is best that I give to all sentient beings.

By dedicating one's body, possessions and roots of virtue accumulated in the three times and giving them away to others, what one gets in return is the sorrowless state, i.e., a state of existence whereby there is no suffering whatsoever. Essentially, the sorrowless state is what we get from giving and the sorrowless state is what we want. Putting these two together, it is highly appropriate to give our body, possessions and roots of virtue to others.

The teachings state that we should dedicate these things to all sentient beings:

- Whether we give and dedicate our body to others or not, we will have to leave it behind at the time of death.
- Whether we give away and dedicate our possessions to others or not, we will

have to part with them one day.

- Whether we dedicate our roots of virtue to others or not, they will be destroyed by anger anyway. Even when they are not destroyed by anger, once the merit ripens, i.e., once one experience the fruitional effects of those particular virtues, they cease to have any further effect anyway.

So for these reasons, it is highly appropriate to dedicate our body and so forth to others since we now have the opportunity to do so. While the opportunity is still there, before the opportunity is gone, before all these things are lost, the best thing to do is to dedicate and give them away to others.

*How to practise once one has given them away*

After you have dedicated your body, possessions and roots of virtue to others, how are you supposed to behave? How are you supposed to practise once you have given them all to others? For instance, what does one do after one has dedicated one's body to others?

~ *Discarding, from this day forward, the mind that thinks, "My body is independent"*

Verse 3.13

Having already given this body as what makes them happy  
For the pleasure of all embodied beings,  
Depending on what pleases them,  
Constantly killing, abusing, or beating it,

After one has wholeheartedly and completely dedicated one's body to others, one has to develop or train in the thought that they can do whatever they want with one's body. They can beat it or criticise it. They can even kill one. One needs to generate the intention that others will be allowed to do whatever they want with one's body.

~ *Explaining the meaning of that extensively*

Verse 3.14

Although they may play with my body  
And make it a basis of jest and blame,  
Because I have already given this body of mine to them  
Why do I act with concern?

Whether they use one's body for amusement or ridicule in the presence of many people, since one has given it completely to others, one should not have the idea, "Oh, what they are doing is bad. They should not be doing this." The point here is to cut the thought that the body is "mine," to cut the sense of ownership or possession of one's body.

We get very excited when we are praised. But when we are criticised or someone points out our faults, we get very disturbed. When someone points to a nice feature that one's body possesses, again one gets very excited. But when someone points out certain faults of one's body, one gets very upset. So one experiences the up and down of this emotional rollercoaster. All this turmoil comes from one's very strong self-cherishing. When one does not have self-cherishing or one's self-cherishing is lessened, the corresponding emotional turmoil of ups and downs will likewise be lessened. When one can think along these lines, I guess one will not experience so

many mental upheavals and so much turmoil. One can also concentrate on and think more about others.

~ *Applying that to appropriate activity*

Verse 3.15 a,b

I shall make it do whatever action  
That will not cause any harm.

We should use the body to engage in actions that are not harmful to others and in action that are beneficial to others.

We have now finished the section on dedicating one's body and the practice to be followed after one has dedicated it to others.

*Aspiring for virtue to become a cause that does not go to waste*

~ *Aspiring for [virtue] to act solely as a cause for the benefit of others*

Verse 3.15 c,d

When anyone encounters me  
May it never be meaningless for him.

Here one dedicates the merit to be a source of inexhaustible virtue and one trains in the thought, "Whoever thinks of me or pays attention to me, may it never become meaningless for that person."

~ *Aspiring for [virtue] to act as a cause preventing such thoughts from going to waste*

Verse 3.16

If in those who encounter me  
A faithful or an angry mind arises,  
May that eternally become the cause  
For fulfilling all their aims.

The verse is saying that whether a person is angry at you or has faith and devotion in you, whether that persons wants to help you or harm you, it does not matter. Simply through making that connection, may it become meaningful for them and may all their wishes and desires be fulfilled. The point here is that regardless of the intentions or the attitudes of the person who encounters you, from your side, you dedicate the merit and pray that may the connection become a cause to fulfil all their wishes.

~ *Aspiring for virtue to act as a cause preventing the action from going to waste*

Verse 3.17

May all who say bad things to me  
Or cause me any other harm,  
And those who mock and insult me,  
Have the fortune to become enlightened.

This verse is saying that regardless of whoever criticises you, abuses you verbally or insults you behind your back or who harms your possessions, you dedicate and pray that they have the good fortune to become enlightened. You dedicate your roots of

virtue, “Whoever comes into contact with me, just by seeing, hearing or remembering me, may all of them achieve enlightenment.”

*Aspiring for virtue to become a cause for material resources and so forth*

Bear in mind that in the context of the discussion here, these are practices for training the mind prior to adopting bodhicitta through a ritual. These exercises for training the mind are essential for without training the mind in these ways, there is no basis for adopting bodhicitta through a ritual.

~ *Aspiring for yourself to act as a cause [providing] all the necessities of others*

Next is dedicating the merit and dedicating oneself to be the cause of enjoyment for others.

Verse 3.18

May I be a protector for those without one,  
A helmsman for travelers, and  
A ship, a boat, and a bridge  
For all who wish to cross

Here one is training the mind and thinking to become a saviour for those who lack one, a helmsman or guide to show them the path and, for those who wish to travel, to become a ship, a boat and a bridge.

Verse 3.19

May I be an island for those who seek one  
And a lamp for those desiring one.  
May I be a bed for all who desire one  
And a slave for all who want an embodied slave.

“May I be an island for those who seek one”: For travellers who are tired after travelling for a long time, they need a place to rest so may one be an island or place of rest for others.

May one be a lamp for those who are ignorant as to what needs to be adopted and what need to be abandoned.

May one become a bed for those who need a bed, a servant or care giver for those who need one such as the sick and elderly. “Slave” here is referring to a care giver or servant. May one be like a slave following the orders of the king.

Verse 3.20

May I be a wish-fulfilling jewel, a good vase,  
Knowledge- mantras that accomplish, and great medicine.  
May I become a wish-fulfilling tree  
And a wish-fulfilling cow for embodied beings.

~ *Aspiring for more extensive times and functions*

Verse 3.21

Just like the great elements, such as earth,

And like space,  
May I always be many varieties of bases of sustenance  
For the boundless sentient beings.

~ *Aspiring for no discontinuity in object and times*

Verse 3.22

Likewise, until all attain nirvana,  
May I also be the source of sustenance  
For all the realms of sentient beings  
That reach unto the ends of space.

This concludes the making of dedication prayers in training the mind. Next is the actual adoption of the bodhicitta through a ritual. I will talk about adopting bodhicitta through a ritual in another lesson.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SUNDAY, 22ND MARCH 2014

1. What are the three qualities (or features) of the excellent abandonments and the three qualities (or features) of the excellent realisations?
2. It is said that achieving the human life of freedoms and endowments is extremely difficult. Why is this so?
3. It is said that when bodhicitta arises in the mind, even very heavy negativities are purified and wishes are fulfilled. Why is this so?
4. How is merit accumulated by offering unowned substances and making mentally transformed offerings?
5. How should we confess our negativities and how are negativities purified?

We have not finished with our talk of what an eon is.

*Khen Rinpoche: It seems like people are not so interested in bodhicitta.*

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#### **WHAT IS AN EON?**

(This section is a consolidation of Khen Rinpoche's presentation of what an eon is from lessons 12 & 13)

I thought to give some explanation of what an eon is. We talk about accumulating merit and wisdom over a period of three countless great eons. What then is one great eon?

#### **GREAT EON**

One great eon is made up of four eons:

1. the eon of formation
2. the eon of abiding
3. the eon of destruction
4. the eon of nothingness

The duration of each of these four eons are the same. The eon of formation is made up of 20 intermediate eons. Similarly, the eon of abiding is made up of 20 intermediate eons and so forth. Altogether 80 intermediate eons or *kalpas* (in Sanskrit) make up one great eon.

| ONE GREAT EON IS MADE UP OF: |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. The eon of formation      | 20 intermediate eons |
| 2. The eon of abiding        | 20 intermediate eons |
| 3. The eon of destruction    | 20 intermediate eons |
| 4. The eon of nothingness    | 20 intermediate eons |
| TOTAL                        | 80 intermediate eons |

## EON OF ABIDING

Let us focus our attention on the 20 intermediate eons of the eon of abiding. Within these intermediate eons, there is the cycle of the diminishing and increasing average lifespans of sentient beings. For instance, in the beginning (the first intermediate eon), the lifespan of sentient beings decreases but at the very end, during the 20<sup>th</sup> intermediate eon, the lifespan increases. In the intervening intermediate eons, there is a recurring cycle of diminishing lifespan followed by the lifespan increasing in duration.

### *The descent of the buddhas*

In our world system, we talk about the descent of 1000 buddhas. The 1000 buddhas will descend during these 20 intermediate eons of the eon of abiding.

At the beginning of the eon of abiding, the lifespan of sentient beings was said to be infinite or very long. This lifespan gradually decreased over time but the rate of decrease was very slow. This infinitely long lifespan slowly decreased to an average lifespan of 80,000 years. From an average lifespan of 80,000 years, it decreased to an average lifespan of 40,000 years.

- When the average lifespan of sentient beings during this eon of abiding reached 40,000 years, this was when the first of the 1000 buddhas, Krakucchanda Buddha (Korwajig in Tibetan) appeared in this world and taught the Dharma.
- Then the Dharma declined and when the average lifespan of sentient beings reached an average of 30,000 years, the second buddha, Kanakamuni Buddha (or Serthub) descended.
- When the average lifespan of sentient beings declined to 20,000 years, the third buddha, Kasyapa Buddha (or Odsung) appeared and turned the wheel of Dharma.
- When the average lifespan of human beings reached 100 years, i.e., now, Shakyamuni Buddha descended and taught the Dharma.

| AVERAGE LIFESPAN OF SENTIENT BEINGS | BUDDHAS WHO APPEARED DURING THE EON OF ABIDING |                     |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 80,000 years                        | No buddha appeared                             |                     |
| 40,000 years                        | 1 <sup>st</sup> buddha                         | Krakucchanda Buddha |
| 30,000 years                        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> buddha                         | Kanakamuni Buddha   |
| 20,000 years                        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> buddha                         | Kasyapa Buddha      |



100 years

4<sup>th</sup> buddha

Shakyamuni Buddha

*The 5,000 years of the teachings of the Buddha*

According to the sutric tradition, it is said that the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching will abide for only 5000 years. Breaking up these 5000 years into periods of 500 years each, you have ten periods of 500 years.

*~ The periods of actualising the fruits*

The first three 500-year periods are known as the three periods of actualising the fruits.

- During the first 500 years, many sentient beings achieved arhatship.
- During the second 500-year period, there were fewer sentient beings achieving arhatship but there were many who achieved the state of a non-returner.
- During the third 500-year period, the number of sentient beings achieving the state of a non-returner declined but there were many who achieved the state of a stream-enterer.

*~ The periods of actualisations or attainments*

The next three 500-year periods are three periods of actualisations or attainments that were related to the three higher trainings.

- Of the three, the first 500-year period was related to the higher training in wisdom. This is the fourth 500-year period. The number of beings actualising the fruits become much fewer but there were people who attained the wisdom realising selflessness.
- During the fifth 500-year period, the number of people actualising the wisdom realising selflessness became fewer but there were many people who were practising and actualising single-pointed concentration.
- During the sixth 500-year period, the number of sentient beings practising and actualising single-pointed concentration became fewer but there were many people who were practising ethical discipline.

Going by this time-line, we are now in the period where the practice of ethical discipline remains.

*Khen Rinpoche: So there are no attainments, no wisdom, no concentration. The time now is for trying to keep some precepts.*

*~ The periods of transmissions*

The next three 500-year periods are called the periods of transmission that are related to the study of the three scriptural collections, the Abhidharma or knowledge scriptural collection, the sutras and vinaya.

- In the seventh 500-year period, the number of people who are engaged in the practice of the three higher trainings becomes very few but there will be many who will be studying the scriptural collection on knowledge or the Abhidharma.
- In the eighth 500-year period, the number of people who are studying and learning the Abhidharma becomes very few and people will just concentrate on learning the sutra scriptural collection.
- In the ninth 500-year period, the number of people who are expounding the Sutra Pitaka becomes very few. Most people who are teaching are only teaching the vinaya scriptural collection.

*~ The period of the mere sign*

Then in the final tenth 500-year period, there will be ordained people but the ordained are without vows and without any knowledge of the vinaya. This final period is called the period of the mere sign. This means that you will only see people who look like ordained people, i.e., they are bearing the sign of wearing robes but they have no vows and they have no knowledge of the vinaya. This will happen during the last 500-year period.

When that period comes to an end so will the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni.

This is how the Buddhist teachings will pan out over this 5000-year period and is a timeline that shows how the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni will decline over time.

| <b>HOW THE TEACHINGS OF BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI WILL ABIDE FOR 5,000 YEARS</b>           |                            |                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The periods of actualising the fruits                                              | 1 <sup>st</sup> 500 years  | Many sentient beings achieved arhatship.                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                                    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> 500 years  | The number of sentient beings achieving arhatship declined but there were many who achieved the state of a non-returner.                                                                      |
|                                                                                    | 3 <sup>rd</sup> 500 years  | The number of sentient beings achieving the state of a non-returner declined but there were many who achieved the state of a stream enterer.                                                  |
| The periods of actualisations or attainments related to the three higher trainings | 4 <sup>th</sup> 500 years  | There were fewer beings actualising the fruits but there were people attaining the wisdom realising selflessness.                                                                             |
|                                                                                    | 5 <sup>th</sup> 500 years  | There were much fewer people actualising the wisdom realising selflessness but there were many people who were practising and actualising single-pointed concentration.                       |
|                                                                                    | 6 <sup>th</sup> 500 years  | There were much fewer sentient beings practising and actualising single-pointed concentration but there were many people who were practising ethical discipline.                              |
| The periods of transmission related to the three scriptural collections            | 7 <sup>th</sup> 500 years  | The number of people engaged in the practice of the three higher trainings becomes very few but there will be many who are studying the scriptural collection on knowledge or the Abhidharma. |
|                                                                                    | 8 <sup>th</sup> 500 years  | The number of people who are studying and learning the Abhidharma will become very few and people will concentrate on learning the Sutra Pitaka.                                              |
|                                                                                    | 9 <sup>th</sup> 500 years  | The number of people who are expounding on the Sutra Pitaka becomes very few. Most of the people who are teaching are only teaching the vinaya scriptural collection.                         |
| The period of the mere sign                                                        | 10 <sup>th</sup> 500 years | There will be ordained people bearing the sign of wearing robes but they will have no vows and have no knowledge of the vinaya.                                                               |

*Where are we now?*

Presently the average lifespan of human beings in this world is about 100 years. There will come a time when the average lifespan will decrease all the way to 30, 20 and finally 10 years. This is said to be the result of the vast accumulation of non-virtue and negative karma.

In terms of the diagram below that shows the cycle of fluctuating lifespans, we are presently still on the slope of decline of the first intermediate eon of the eon of abiding. We have yet to enter the actual cycle of increasing and declining lifespans. What I have said up to now covering the descent of the first four buddhas is all happening in the first intermediate eon of the 20 intermediate eons.

~ *The eons of famine, sickness and weapons*

The eons of famine, sickness and weapons will occur when the average lifespan of human beings reach 10 years.

- The eon of famine is when many sentient beings will die due to not being able to find food and water.
- The eon of sickness is when many sentient beings will die from sicknesses and diseases.
- The eon of weapons is when anything that sentient beings pick up becomes weapons to be used to hack at one another. The world will be transformed into a living hell.

The three dedications that were mentioned (Verses 3.7 -3.9) are related to the eon of famine, the eon of sickness and the eon of weapons. We dedicate our roots of virtue so that:

- during the eon of famine, we transform into food and drink
- during the eon of sickness, we transform into a doctor, medicine and nurse
- during the eon of weapons, all weapons transform into flowers

During the eon of weapons, many sentient beings will be killed but there will be some who will survive. They will be extremely disenchanted with killing and they will abandon killing. Due to the roots of virtue of abandoning killing, their lifespan will gradually increase. Gradually over time, sentient beings will also abandon the other non-virtues. They will then live in the ethical discipline of abandoning the ten non-virtues. As a result of these roots of virtue, the average lifespan of human beings will gradually increase from 10 years to 20 years to 30 years and all the way up to 80,000 years.

*When the buddhas will not appear*

- When the average lifespan of sentient beings is increasing, i.e., when the cycle is moving upwards, it is said that the buddhas do not appear because it is unlikely that sentient beings will generate disenchantment at that time.
- The buddhas also do not descend at the time when the average lifespan is below 100 years.
- The buddhas will also not descend when the lifespan is more than 80,000 years.

I have read somewhere that when the average lifespan of human beings is 10 years, human beings will get married around the age of five.

*Khen Rinpoche: There is no surprise there because they live for only 10 years.*

*Duration in terms of years*

In terms of years, how many years does an eon take? Starting from the beginning

when the lifespan of sentient beings is infinitely long and then it gradually declines all the way to only 10 years, how many billion years is that? It is nine billion years. You then repeat this another 19 times!

*More on the intermediate eons of the eon of abiding*

There are 20 intermediate eons. In term of years, each intermediate eon lasts for 9 billion years. Between the first and the last intermediate eons, there 18 intermediate eons. Each of these 18 intermediate eons feature a cycle of both an increase and decline in the average lifespan of sentient beings unlike the first and final intermediate eons.

~ *The first intermediate eon*

The first intermediate eon starts from an infinite lifespan that gradually declines to an average lifespan of 10 years. The rate of decline is said to be very slow

~ *The final (20<sup>th</sup>) intermediate eon*

In the final intermediate eon, the average lifespan is on the ascendance again and increases from 10 years to an infinite lifespan. The rate of increase is also said to be very slow.

~ *The intervening 18 intermediate eons (from 2<sup>nd</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> intermediate eon)*

Each of these 18 intermediate eons feature one cycle of both an increase and decline in the average lifespan of sentient beings unlike the first (i.e. only decreasing lifespan) and final (i.e. only increasing lifespan) intermediate eons.

The duration of each intermediate eon, i.e., 9 billion years, is divided here into 4.5 billion years of increasing lifespan and 4.5 billion years of declining lifespan. For instance, as we enter the second intermediate eon, the average lifespan increases rapidly over 4.5 billion years from 10 years to an average lifespan of 80,000 years.

When the average lifespan reaches 80,000 years, it will decline again. The rate of decline is very fast. The period of decline will also last another 4.5 billion years.

| <b>20 INTERMEDIATE EONS OF THE EON OF ABIDING</b>                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> intermediate eon                                                | The average lifespan of sentient beings gradually decrease from an infinite lifespan to 10 years old over a period of 9 billion years. The rate of decrease is slow.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> intermediate eons<br>(18 intermediate eons) | Each intermediate eon will feature one cycle of increasing and declining average lifespan. Each period of increasing lifespan and each period of declining lifespan will take 4.5 billion years, i.e., one cycle will also last 9 billion years.<br>The average lifespan of sentient beings will increase rapidly from 10 years to 80, 000 years over a period of 4.5 billion years. The average lifespan will then decline rapidly over a period of 4.5 billion years from 80,000 years to 10 years. |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> intermediate eon                                               | The average lifespan of sentient beings will increase gradually from 10 years to an infinite lifespan over a period of 9 billion years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

*Khen Rinpoche: This is like a teaching on the stock market!*

In the second intermediate eon, the average lifespan reaches 80,000 years. It will then start to decline. When the decline starts, this is when Maitreya Buddha will

descend.

It is said that during this time when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha prevail, whoever takes ordination, builds a representation or image of Maitreya Buddha, meditates on Maitreya Buddha or recites the mantra of Maitreya Buddha—all these actions become the causes for one to be reborn at the time when Maitreya Buddha descends into the world, to be among his direct disciples and then achieve enlightenment.

Likewise the remaining 1000 Buddhas will only descend when the average lifespan decreases from 80,000 to 10 years, i.e., the buddhas will descend when the average lifespan is between 80,000 years to 10 years old.

During all the intermediate eons when the average lifespan is increasing from 10 years to 80,000 years, the remaining 1000 Buddhas will not descend. As I mentioned before, the buddhas will also not descend when the average lifespan of human beings is below 10 years old.

The 1000 buddhas will *only* descend into this world during the 20 intermediate eons of the eon of abiding. Thus the eon of abiding is referred to as the fortunate eon.

There are also the 20 intermediate eons of the eon of formation, the 20 intermediate eons of the eon of destruction and the 20 intermediate eons of the eon of nothingness. The buddhas will not descend during these 60 intermediate eons.

When you think about it, even during the eon of abiding, the buddhas will only descend half the time. Furthermore in this era, our founder, Shakyamuni Buddha, did not abide for a long time and it is said that his teachings will only survive for 5000 years.

## **EON OF DESTRUCTION**

It is said that the destruction of the abodes of sentient beings will take one intermediate eon and the destruction of the sentient beings who inhabit those abodes will take 19 intermediate eons.

The sentient beings that will disappear starts from the sentient beings in the hell realms, animals, hungry ghosts, human beings, demigods, gods of the desire realm and the gods of the first three levels of concentration of the form realms.

Where do they go? For instance, some of the the hell beings who have completely exhausted their negative karma to be reborn in the hells will take rebirth as the gods of the fourth level of concentration of the form realms. If their karma to be reborn as hell beings is not exhausted, they will be reborn in a hell realm of another world system.

In terms of the abodes that will be destroyed:

- The abodes of the desire realms and the abode of the first level of concentration will be destroyed by fire.

- The abode of the second level of concentration will be destroyed by water.
  - The abode of the third level of concentration will be destroyed by wind.
- The abodes above the third level of concentration of the form realms will not be destroyed by the elements.

### **EON OF NOTHINGNESS**

The new world does not form during this time. For 20 intermediate eons which is a very long time, there is literally nothingness.

### **EON OF FORMATION**

The eon of formation starts after the end of the eon of nothingness.

The world will form starting with the wind element followed by the fire element, the water element and then the earth element. The formation of the physical abode takes one intermediate eon. The sentient beings who will be born and inhabit that world will come into being over 19 intermediate eons.

So there are 20 intermediate eons of formation, 20 intermediate eons of abiding, 20 intermediate eons of destruction and 20 intermediate eons of nothingness. These eighty 20 intermediate eons collectively form one great eon.

Remember this verse at the beginning of this text that says:

Verse 1.5

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

Based on what we know now about the formation of the universe and when the buddhas descend, you can see that the eons of darkness are very, very long whereas the eon of illumination, i.e., when there is the illumination of the Dharma, is comparatively very short.

When you think about this, you will see how difficult it is to be born at the time when the Buddha has actually descended into the world and taught the Dharma. We have met the Dharma and furthermore we have the opportunity to practise it. Maybe what we do is only a small practice but we are very, very fortunate to be able to do even that. As the verse says, “Just as a flash of lightning brightly illuminates/ For an instant within the clouds on a dark night.”

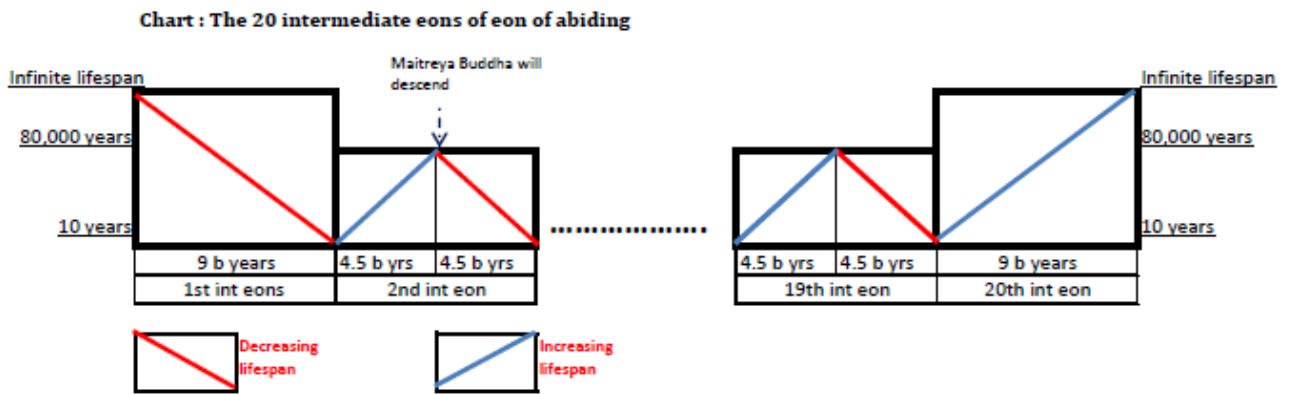
This presentation of what an eon is is according to the *Abidharmakosha* but in Asanga’s treatises, he said that when the average lifespan of the human beings in this world reaches:

- 30 years old that is when the eon of famine will occur
- 20 years old that is when the eon of sickness will occur
- 10 years old that is when the eon of weapons will occur

It is also mentioned in some of the teachings that you can offer weapons in order not to be reborn during the eon of weapons. There is a tradition of offering weapons by inserting them into the base of holy objects such as statues. It is like saying, “I am giving up this weapon by offering it.” This acts as a cause not to be reborn during the eon of weapons.

It is said that sentient beings who are born during the eon of weapons, the moment they come into contact with one another, they get upset and become extremely violent. Whatever they pick up will transform into a weapon and they will start hacking at one another. This is a lot of suffering.

The main cause for not being born during the eon of weapons is to abandon killing and to cultivate love and compassion. Keeping this in mind, as much as possible, we should guard our ethical discipline and cultivate love and compassion.



(For lesson 12)  
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(For lesson 13)  
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