

**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 15****27 March 2014**

Chapter Three: Verses 3.31–3.34. Concluding actions (cont'd). Chapter Four: Teachings on Conscientiousness. Verses 4.1-4. 11. Brief presentation of the way to cultivate conscientiousness. Extensive explanation: Cultivating conscientiousness with regard to bodhicitta.

Question: I refer to Verse 3.26:

Now my life is fruitful
I have attained a good human existence,
Today I have been born in the Buddha lineage.
I have become a child of the Buddha.

The entrance to the Mahayana has been established to be uncontrived bodhicitta or the generation of the mind of enlightenment in meditative equipoise. It seems that the generation of bodhicitta through a ritual is contrived bodhicitta. How can a person who generates contrived bodhicitta be called a bodhisattva, i.e., in this case, how can a person who has not entered the Mahayana path be called a bodhisattva?

Also is there a difference between the terms, buddha lineage and Mahayana lineage?

Answer: One is only a child of the buddhas when one generates bodhicitta. So prior to generating bodhicitta, one is not a child of the buddhas.

When great compassion arises in the mind, the Mahayana lineage is awakened but this is not called the buddha lineage.

Question: At this stage of generating bodhicitta through a ritual, is it still contrived bodhicitta?

Answer: In the context of this text, the discussion refers to someone who develops the actual uncontrived bodhicitta.

Question: Does he generate uncontrived bodhicitta upon taking this ritual or during calm abiding? My understanding is that uncontrived bodhicitta is generated in the meditative equipoise of calm abiding.

Answer: One needs to have developed calm abiding *prior to* actualising uncontrived bodhicitta. That discussion is not about actualising bodhicitta within meditative equipoise.

Khen Rinpoche: Do you understand? If you don't understand, listen again.

It is said that one needs to have calm abiding in order to actualise bodhicitta but there isn't necessarily a pervasion that bodhicitta is developed within calm abiding. That is a separate discussion.

The discussion in this chapter is adopting bodhicitta through a ritual. One generates the aspirational bodhicitta that comes with the commitment and then one takes on the bodhisattva vows. It is within that context that one generates bodhicitta.

Whether bodhicitta is developed *within* calm abiding or not can be discussed further as this is not stated. What is stated in the teachings is that in order to actualise bodhicitta, one must have calm abiding.

The discussion in Chapter Three is about adopting bodhicitta through a ritual and on the basis of that one develops the actual uncontrived bodhicitta.

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### **CONCLUDING ACTIONS (cont'd)**

#### *The accomplishment of others' welfare*

The text says that bodhicitta eliminates the afflictive obscurations and the knowledge obscurations.

In the previous lesson, we saw:

- how the bodhisattvas show the path of liberation to persons of medium capacity in order for them to achieve liberation from cyclic existence
- how the bodhisattvas show the persons of small capacity the methods that will enable them to achieve the higher status of good rebirth as a human being or celestial being

The ultimate goal of the bodhisattva is to lead all these beings to the state of full enlightenment. In order to do this, bodhisattvas have to help sentient beings overcome the manifest afflictions and through that, enable them to develop bodhicitta.

#### *~ Dispelling afflictive obscurations*

Verse 3.31c,d

It is the dawning moon of the mind

That dispels the torment of afflictions of migrating beings.

This shows that bodhicitta eliminates the afflictive obscurations. The teachings liken

bodhicitta to the cool moonlight that can dispel the discomfort of heat, i.e., bodhicitta can protect one from or eliminate the heat of the afflictions. In the context here, this means that bodhicitta has the power to eliminate the manifest or coarse afflictions such as miserliness, bad ethics, anger, attachment and so forth.

~ *Dispelling the obscurations to knowledge*

It is also said that bodhicitta can eliminate the knowledge obscurations.

Verse 3.32 a,b

It is the great sun that annihilates

The cataracts of ignorance of migrating beings.

This shows that bodhicitta can eliminate the knowledge obscurations that interferes with or hinders the achievement of omniscience. As you know, the various Buddhist philosophical systems or tenets posit the knowledge obscurations differently.

Bodhicitta is said to be able to eliminate the knowledge obscurations just as the sun can eliminate the darkness of the three billion-fold world systems.

The only thing that destroys the knowledge obscurations is the wisdom realising selflessness. What is it that gives this wisdom realising selflessness the power to eradicate the knowledge obscurations? It is bodhicitta. Without it, the wisdom realising selflessness does not have the power to eliminate the knowledge obscurations but when it is conjoined with bodhicitta, it can eliminate the knowledge obscurations.

~ *Accomplishing all benefit*

Verse 3.32 c, d

It is the quintessential butter

From the churning of the milk of the holy Dharma.

The Buddha gave numerous teachings. For instance, there were the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma. It is commonly said that the Buddha gave 84,000 teachings but if one were to ask, "What is the very essence of all those teachings?" it is the ultimate good heart, bodhicitta; just as butter is the very essence of milk. When you churn milk, what you get at the end is its essence, butter.

Therefore the ultimate purpose of hearing, reflecting on and practising the teachings is to develop the good heart and to actualise bodhicitta. The teachings tell us that once bodhicitta is generated, it will enable us to achieve all the benefits and every happiness.

~ *Accomplishing all bliss*

Verse 3.33

For all those guests who are migrating beings journeying on the path of cyclic existence

Who wish to utilize the resources of happiness,  
This will place the great travellers of sentient beings  
In supreme happiness and satisfy them.

“The great travellers” are the limitless sentient beings, i.e., the six types of sentient beings.

“The path of cyclic existence” is the entire samsara starting from the lowest Avici hell up to the peak of cyclic existence.

Bodhicitta enables these various sentient beings to partake of all enjoyments as the bodhisattvas abide in cyclic existence to work for sentient beings.

A frequent traveller is someone who does not remain in one place for long but travels very frequently, moving from place to place. The six types of sentient beings in samsara are like that. They do not abide in one state of existence but are constantly moving from one state to another in samsara.

*Khen Rinpoche: It is like when you go to a hotel. The owner would consider the frequent guests as their big guests because they come again and again and give them business. It is similar to this.*

Bodhicitta can actualise all the wishes of and benefit all these sentient beings. These verses are related to rejoicing for oneself.

The last verse, Verse 3.34 is causing others to rejoice.

*Causing others to develop joy*

Verse 3.34

Today in the presence of all the Protectors  
I invite the migrating beings to be guests  
In happiness until they attain the state of Sugata.  
May gods, anti-gods, and so forth be joyful.

The “I” that is mentioned here refers to the person who has developed bodhicitta and adopted it through this ritual and who is now inviting all sentient beings to be his or her guests.

How does one invite all sentient beings to be one’s guests? When one adopts bodhicitta with the buddhas and bodhisattvas as witnesses, one is inviting all sentient beings to be one’s guests in that one pledges to work for their benefit and to accomplish all their temporal and ultimate goals. Since one has done this, may all the gods, demigods and so forth rejoice in what one has done, i.e., one is asking the gods and the demigods to be joyful. Of course when they rejoice, they accumulate merit and it is said that these gods and demigods will thus protect one when one is doing one’s practice.

**CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHINGS ON CONSCIENTIOUSNESS**

The outline of the commentary by Gyaltsab Je is as follows:

The way to train in the conduct of the perfections

1. The way to cultivate conscientiousness: The branch that prevents the deterioration of bodhicitta and its associated conduct<sup>1</sup>
2. The way to train in ethics: A specific explanation given with regard to mindfulness and introspection—the methods for purely guarding all virtuous dharmas<sup>2</sup>
3. Explaining the way to train in the remaining four perfections<sup>3</sup>
4. Explaining, by way of the branch of dedication, the way to train in giving away body, material wealth and the roots of virtue for the welfare of others<sup>4</sup>

The way to cultivate conscientiousness: The branch that prevents the deterioration of bodhicitta and its associated conduct is further divided into:

- A. Explaining the chapter's material
  - 1 A brief presentation of the way to cultivate conscientiousness
  - 2 An extensive explanation
  - 3 Synopsis
- B. The chapter's name

The main point of Chapters Four and Five is practising conscientiousness and introspection or vigilance. Earlier one has adopted bodhicitta through a ritual and in particular, one has taken the bodhisattva vows. When one takes the bodhisattva vows, one has to guard many precepts and trainings without transgressing them. In order to be able to do that, one needs conscientiousness and introspection. Hence we have Chapters Four and Five.

Having adopted bodhicitta through a ritual, it is important not to allow the bodhicitta that has been generated to degenerate and not to transgress the trainings of the bodhisattva vows. Therefore one needs to apply conscientiousness.

**A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE WAY TO CULTIVATE CONSCIENTIOUSNESS**

Verse 4.1

Having firmly upheld the mind of enlightenment in this way,  
A Victors' Child should always make effort  
To not transgress the trainings  
Without ever wavering.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Four

<sup>2</sup> Chapter Five

<sup>3</sup> Chapter Six to Chapter Nine

<sup>4</sup> Chapter Ten

Earlier on, one has generated bodhicitta. In the generation of bodhicitta, there were

- the preliminaries
- the actual adoption of bodhicitta through a ritual
- the conclusion

After this, without postponing the intention of wanting to practise the trainings, thinking, “I am going to do this in the future,” one applies conscientiousness and thinks, “I am going to practise this right away.”

It is very important to apply conscientiousness in order to counteract distractions, laziness and so forth. Conscientiousness is placing one’s mind on a virtuous object without letting the mind become contaminated. This conscientiousness is essentially a derivative of the joyous effort that one is applying.

After taking the bodhisattva vows, one has to guard one’s trainings without letting them degenerate. The trainings here are essentially the six perfections and the four ways of gathering the sentient beings into one’s fold (or the four ways of gathering disciples).

When one has only generated the aspirational bodhicitta that comes with the commitment, one has to guard against and abandon the four black dharmas and cultivate the four white dharmas.

On top of that, when one has taken the bodhisattva vows, one has to guard against the 18 root downfalls and the 46 faults.

To summarise, after taking the bodhisattva vows, there are two things to do:

1. Not to let the bodhicitta that has been generated degenerate.
  2. One also has to prevent the degeneration of one’s training in the perfections.
- Without letting the mind come under the control of laziness and distraction, one applies effort and strives in such training.

This is the brief explanation of the practice of conscientiousness.

#### **EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION:**

##### **A. CULTIVATING CONSCIENTIOUSNESS WITH REGARD TO BODHICITTA**

###### *The reasons it is inappropriate to discard bodhicitta*

Here we are mainly talking about cultivating conscientiousness with regard to bodhicitta. This starts with looking at the reasons why it is inappropriate to give up the bodhicitta that one has generated.

###### Verse 4.2

In the case of a reckless undertaking  
Or one not well examined,  
Although a promise may have been made,

It is reasonable to examine, “Shall I do it or leave it?”

Verse 4.3

But how can I ever withdraw  
From what has been examined by the great wisdom  
Of the buddhas and their children,  
And has been examined and examined by myself?

Verse 4.2 is saying that there are people who undertake certain tasks without examining the pros and cons of the particular course of action. Or they undertake a task without proper examination, i.e., they may think about it a little bit but the task is not thought through well. Whether it is the first or the second situation, there are people who then give up whatever they have undertaken. With regard to such cases in general, whether they follow through with what they have decided to do or they give up after starting on what they have decided to do, it does not matter so much.

But when it comes to talking about bodhicitta, it is a completely different matter. This is because the pros and cons of generating bodhicitta and examining what bodhicitta really is have already been thoroughly analysed by the bodhisattvas who possess great wisdom such as the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Maitreya and so forth.

Likewise here, one should think, “I have thought about the qualities and benefits of bodhicitta and I have a heartfelt appreciation for it. Based on that, I have generated bodhicitta and taken the bodhisattva vows. Now, if I do not train in the bodhisattva vows due to being distracted or due to my laziness that would be incorrect and inappropriate. For that reason, I have to strive in practising the deeds of the bodhisattvas.”

The point is that one must strive in one’s practice and for that one must rely on conscientiousness. There are great disadvantages and faults if one were to give up bodhicitta after generating it. It is said that one would be born in the lower realms if one does that.

*The disadvantages of discarding bodhicitta*

~ *The disadvantage of going to the lower realms*

1. *The reason one migrates to the lower realms*

Verse 4.4

If, having made such a promise,  
I do not accomplish it through action,  
Then by deceiving all those sentient beings  
What kind of rebirth will I take?

At the time of adopting bodhicitta through a ritual, i.e., generating bodhicitta and taking the vows, one took the oath and pledged to work for the benefit of all sentient beings.

After taking that oath, when one does not act on one's promise, then one would have deceived all sentient beings. When one has deceived all sentient beings, the text asks, "What kind of rebirth will I take?" Of course there is no way that one will get a good rebirth. That being the case, one will only get rebirths in the lower realms.

At the time of taking the bodhisattva vows, one had invited all sentient beings to be one's guests and one made the oath to actualise all their temporal and ultimate wishes and to work for their benefit. When one discards bodhicitta, one is discarding that oath and promise to work for one's guests, the migratory sentient beings. When one breaks one's promise to all these numberless sentient beings, the ensuing misdeed would be great because one would have deceived all sentient beings. The result of that can only be rebirth in the lower realms. Keeping this in mind, one should never ever give up one's bodhicitta. Thus one has to rely on conscientiousness after generating bodhicitta in order to stop one's bodhicitta from degenerating.

## 2. *Stating the proof for that*

Verse 4.5

If it has been taught  
That he who does not give away  
The smallest thing he mentally thought to give  
Will become a hungry ghost,

Verse 4.6

Then if I should deceive all migrating beings  
After having from my heart invited them  
To unsurpassable happiness,  
What kind of happy migration will I go to?

It is mentioned in the *Saddharmasmrtyupasthana Sutra*<sup>5</sup> that one will be reborn as a hungry ghost when one does not actually give away what one has intended to give, even if it is a small thing such as a plate of vegetables. If one had intended to give but one did not act on it due to being bound by the bond of miserliness, this becomes a cause for one to be reborn as a hungry ghost (or preta).

If that is the case, then how is it possible for one to get a good rebirth after having invited all sentient beings to be one's guests and making an oath sincerely from the depth of one's heart to fulfil, actualise and accomplish their welfare but thereafter, one does not act on that oath and promise? Is it not the case that one would have deceived all these sentient beings? What kind of rebirth can possibly take place when that happens? Furthermore one would have deceived all the buddhas,

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<sup>5</sup> *Saddharmasmrtyupasthana Sutra, Thog*. Pg. 57: "If one does not give the slightest thing (one) once intended (to give), one can be born as a hungry ghost; and if one does not give something (one) promised (to give), one can be born in hell." (Note no. 8, pages 170-171, *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, translated by Stephen Batchelor. Copyright: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1979.)



bodhisattvas, gods and demigods and so forth.

Keeping this in mind, one should not let the bodhicitta that one has generated to degenerate.

What follows is refuting any objections to this reasoning.

### *3. Abandoning contradictions*

Some people may object to the idea that one would be reborn in the lower realms when one gives up one's bodhicitta.

In a historical account, it was said that after Shariputra generated bodhicitta and was engaged in the practice of the perfections, he was approached by a Brahmin who was an emanation of Mara.

This Mara demanded his right hand. Shariputra cut off his right hand. As Shariputra had cut off his right hand, he had to give his right hand to the Mara using his remaining left hand. The Mara was very unhappy as in the cultural context of that time, this was considered disrespectful.

Shariputra was severely abused, criticised and reprimanded by this Mara. Shariputra became disheartened and gave up his bodhicitta. Although Shariputra gave up his bodhicitta, later on he still became a foe-destroyer, an arhat.

Based on this account, there are people who say that this clearly shows that when one gives up one's bodhicitta, it does not necessarily mean that one is going to the lower realms.

Verse 4.7

Only the Omniscient Ones can discern  
The inconceivable manner of the action of  
Those who give up the mind of enlightenment  
But are liberated.

*Khen Rinpoche: This is the answer to that apparent contradiction. This is all!*

~ *One ceases to work for the sake of others*

- 1. As the deterioration of bodhicitta involves a serious downfall, the welfare of others deteriorates*

When one's bodhicitta degenerates, it is a very heavy downfall that will cause the activities that one does for the welfare of others to degenerate too.

Verse 4.8

This, for a bodhisattva,  
Is the heaviest of downfalls.  
If it were to occur, the welfare of

All sentient beings would be weakened.

Degenerating one's bodhicitta is one of the 18 root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows. When one's bodhicitta degenerates, one commits a root downfall, a very heavy transgression. Due to committing this root downfall, one will not be able to accomplish extensive works for others. Keeping this in mind, one then applies conscientiousness not to let one's bodhicitta degenerate.

The text called the *Superior Compendium* states that although one has practised the paths and ten grounds for ten millions eons, when one generates the wish to be a self-liberator or solitary realiser arhat, then at that moment one's ethical discipline has degenerated and a fault has been committed. So the generation of such a mind is much heavier than the root downfall.

The explanation of this verse in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, also citing the *Superior Compendium*, is that when a bodhisattva with bodhisattva vows gives up his aspirational bodhicitta, then he incurs a root downfall. But in a case of a bodhisattva who does not have bodhisattva vows, the negativity that he incurs from giving up bodhicitta is still heavier than committing a root downfall of the pratimoksha vows.

This seems to be saying that one can generate and have the actual bodhicitta without the bodhisattva vows. When you read this section, this is what the text seems to be implying. Is there such a thing as generating bodhicitta when one does not have the bodhisattva vows?

If this exists and is possible, then the bodhicitta in the mind of this person who has generated bodhicitta but does not have the bodhisattva vows is an aspirational bodhicitta. It is clear in the texts that when engaged bodhicitta is present, the bodhisattva vows are *necessarily* present. Going by this, then the bodhicitta in the mind of the bodhisattva who does not have the bodhisattva vows would be aspirational bodhicitta.

However is there such a thing as having bodhicitta without the bodhisattva vows?

*Khen Rinpoche: What do you think?*

In Gyaltsab Je's commentary, he says very clearly that when a bodhisattva who has the vows gives up bodhicitta, he incurs a root downfall of the bodhisattva vows. That is clear. But when such a bodhisattva has no vows, his negativity (of giving up his bodhicitta) is still heavier than a root downfall of the pratimoksha vows. How are you going to interpret this?

2. *It is equivalent to obstructing the virtue of another bodhisattva [and thus] one migrates to the lower realms*

When one obstructs the work or virtue of another bodhisattva, the ensuing fault is also said to be very heavy. It can even be a cause to go to the lower realms.

## Verse 4.9

Should others for even a single instant  
Hinder or obstruct his merit,  
By weakening the welfare of sentient beings  
There will be no end to their unfortunate rebirths.

In Gyaltsab Je's commentary, he cites the *Sutra of Magical Emanation Definitely Pacifying* that says that it is a heavier transgression to obstruct the virtue of a bodhisattva offering a morsel of food or drink to an animal than to rob all sentient beings of this world of the southern continent of all their possessions and to kill them.<sup>6</sup>

Since this is so, one should be careful regarding this point. One does not know where the bodhisattvas are. So it is very easy to make this mistake. When one is able to protect oneself from this, one will be able to abandon the fault of accumulating or creating such faults with regard to others. The point here is that one should not obstruct or hinder others from engaging in virtuous activities. The commentary is also saying that since we do not know who is or who is not a bodhisattva, one has to be careful about this point so as not to interrupt the virtuous activities of others.

3. *The reasons for that*

## Verse 4.10

If I shall degenerate  
By destroying the happiness of even one sentient being,  
Then what need is there to mention destroying the happiness  
Of all embodied beings vast as space without exception?

The ensuing negativity is very heavy when one interrupts the virtue that someone is accumulating which will enable that person to be reborn as a human being or as a god. That being the case, it goes without saying that the negativity will be very heavy when one hinders or interrupts the work of a bodhisattva that is the cause of happiness of all the sentient beings.

*Attainment of the grounds is postponed*

When one abandons bodhicitta, one is very far from actualising or attaining the grounds.

## Verse 4.11

Thus if those who have the force of a downfall  
And the force of the mind of enlightenment

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<sup>6</sup> *Prasantaviniscayapratiharya Sutra*, Thog. Pg. 59: "Should one person steal the possessions of and kill every being in the world, and should another obstruct the slightest virtue of a bodhisattva, such as that of giving a morsel of food to an animal, the transgression of the latter would be incalculably greater than the former. This is so because he would be obstructing the virtue which gives rise to the occurrence of a buddha." (Note no. 9, page 171, *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, translated by Stephen Batchelor. Copyright: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1979.)

Were to stay revolving within cyclic existence,  
For a long time they would be hindered from attaining the grounds.

It is said that when those who have taken the bodhisattva vows incur the root downfall of abandoning bodhicitta, after that even if they were to generate very strong virtue and generate bodhicitta again, they would remain in cyclic existence. Sometimes they may go to the lower realms. Sometimes they may get a good rebirth but they would still be very far away from actualising the first bodhisattva ground called Very Joyous.

The point is that after one has generated bodhicitta and taken the bodhisattva vows, it is important to strive from the very beginning not to be stained by the downfalls and let one's bodhicitta degenerate.

One may think, "My bodhicitta may degenerate but I can develop it again." It is true that one may be able to develop bodhicitta again but having incurred the root downfall earlier, the consequence is that one will be very far from actualising the bodhisattva grounds.

When one incurs a root downfall, one can purify the negativity accumulated through the practice of confession whereby one applies the four opponent powers. As a result of purifying the negativity, one does not have to experience the result of going to the lower realms. Nevertheless because of having incurred that root downfall in the first place, that acts as a great obstacle to achieving realisations and the higher qualities. Therefore it is important not to be stained by a downfall from the beginning.

Up to this point, we have been discussing how important it is not to let one's bodhicitta degenerate by applying conscientiousness. One does that by thinking of the great negativities that will ensue from letting one's bodhicitta degenerate. Instead one has to try to always strengthen and increase the bodhicitta that one has already generated.

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