

**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 17**3 April 2014**

Review. Chapter Four: Verses 4.25–4. 36. Being conscientious about cultivating virtue (cont'd). Being conscientious about abandoning afflictions: A. Reflecting on the disadvantages of the afflictions.

REVIEW

We were at the section of being conscientious with regard to cultivating virtue. When one is not conscientious in accomplishing virtue, we are told that suffering will ensue in this life and also in future lives.

In this chapter, there are two main sections:

1. cultivating conscientiousness with regard to bodhicitta
2. cultivating conscientiousness with regard to the training

The earlier section discussed being conscientious in protecting one's bodhicitta and not letting one's bodhicitta degenerate.

This is followed by a discussion on being conscientious in training in the precepts after one has adopted them. This discussion covers three points:

1. being conscientious about abandoning wrongdoing
2. being conscientious about cultivating virtue
3. being conscientious about abandoning afflictions

Of the three, the first one is being conscientious about abandoning wrongdoing or abandoning the faults. Essentially after having adopted the bodhisattva vows, one has to check every now and then to see whether one is stained by the downfalls and faults.

The next section is being conscientious about cultivating virtue. If you were asked to give a summary of this particular section, what would you say? What is the essence of this section?

What is the difference between these two: being conscientious about abandoning the faults and being conscientious about cultivating virtue?

Khen Rinpoche: Did you get my question? So what is the answer?

The first section, being conscientious about abandoning wrongdoing, is essentially

talking about the need not to be stained by the downfalls and faults. When one is stained by these faults, suffering will follow.

The second section is being conscientious in cultivating virtue.

Can anybody summarise what that whole section is driving at?

The first section, being conscientious about abandoning wrongdoing emphasises not being stained by the downfalls and faults. But the second section, being conscientious about cultivating virtue, is saying that when one is stained by the downfalls and faults, one should confess and purify them. Otherwise, one will have to experience the fruitional effects of having committed those downfalls and faults. This particular section also states that even when one manages to purify the negativities that are accumulated from committing downfalls and faults, one's realisations are postponed or delayed.

I guess the point in the second section, being conscientious about cultivating virtue, is that one has to engage in virtue and purify the downfalls and faults that are accumulated by applying the four opponent powers. When one does not engage in such purification, suffering will ensue. Therefore it is important to engage in virtue in order to counteract whatever negativity one has already accumulated.

BEING CONSCIENTIOUS ABOUT CULTIVATING VIRTUE (cont'd)

C. The reasons why it would be reasonable to make effort in applying the antidotes to negativity

3. One will be tormented with the suffering of the lower realms in the future

Verse 4.25

If my body burns for a long time
In the fires of hell which are difficult to bear,
Inevitably my mind will be tormented
By the blazing fires of unbearable remorse.

The fires of hell are difficult to bear as they are said to be many times hotter than any fire that we know. The verse is saying that when we end up in the hell realms, it will be as if our mind is being burnt in the hell fires, i.e., metaphorically speaking, our mind will be burnt by the great fire of regret on top of our body being actually burnt by the flames.

4. Why it would be reasonable to abandon negativities and make effort in virtue

A. To be led again to the hell realms after having wasted a human life of leisure and opportunity would be utter stupidity

Verse 4.26

Having found by some coincidence
This beneficial state that is so hard to find,
If now while having knowledge
I am once again led into the hells

Verse 4.27 a, b

Then, as though I were confused by mantra,
This mind will be reduced to nothing.

“This beneficial state that is so hard to find” refers to the human life of freedoms and endowments that we have now that is extremely difficult to find. You can understand this through understanding that it is difficult by nature to get such a rebirth. The causes for achieving such a special rebirth are difficult to create. You can also understand, using analogies, the difficulty of getting such a rebirth.

This special basis of the human life of freedoms and endowments that we have obtained now enables us to practise the Dharma readily. The reason we have such an opportunity now is due to the virtue and merit that we accumulated in the past. Finding such an opportunity happens just once.

It is not as if we are not able to distinguish between what is harmful and what is beneficial. We are able to tell the difference between what is harmful and what is beneficial. If in spite of this, we are once again led into the fires of hell that would be very wrong.

If such a thing was to happen, have we lost our mind? Has someone cast a spell on us? Some people become confused in their thoughts and are unable to think when they are under the spell of black magic. Is that what has happened to us? Or is it because we have completely lost our minds?

Despite having all the favourable conditions, we have once again to go to the lower realms. This would be akin to having lost our mind and sanity.

B. It is reasonable to think of [such behaviour] as the cause of delusion

What has led us back into the lower realms? Is it because we have lost our minds? Are we unable to tell the difference between what is harmful and what is beneficial? Or are we confused by some magic spell? The answer to these questions come in the following verse.

Verse 4.27 c, d

Even I do not know what confused me;
What is there inside me?

“Even I do not know what confused me;/ What is there inside me?” is a query directed at ourselves, “What is the very thing that is leading me back to the hell realms?”

We may have thoughts of wanting to learn the teachings, wanting to reflect and meditate on them and wanting to internalise them. We may have thoughts of wanting to practise ethical discipline, i.e., we have the thought of wanting to accomplish the Dharma.

While we may have such thoughts, at the same time, we do not seem to have any independence or freedom in being able to actually carry out our intentions. Whatever

intentions we may have with respect to accomplishing and practising the Dharma, we do not seem to be doing anything about them. We do not seem to have the freedom of choice in carrying out our intentions.

There must be something that is stopping us. What is it? We have to investigate, check and think about this over and over again and discover what exactly the source of this “confusion” is. This is the meaning behind these two lines, “Even I do not know what confused me;/ What is there inside me?”

Of the three headings that come under the outline, cultivating conscientiousness with regard to the training, we finished the second heading, being conscientious about cultivating virtue.

Now we move on to the third heading, being conscientious about abandoning afflictions which is covered under three points:

1. reflecting on the disadvantages of the afflictions
2. it is inappropriate to feel weary of the hardships involved in abandoning the afflictions
3. cultivating joy that it is possible to abandon the afflictions, if effort is made

BEING CONSCIENTIOUS ABOUT ABANDONING AFFLICTIONS

Reflecting on the disadvantages of the afflictions

1. Reflecting on the way the afflictions act to harm oneself

A. The way they rob us of independence of mind and actions

The afflictions cause us suffering in that they take away our freedom, causing us to act without any freedom or control. This is stated in the next verse.

Verse 4.28

Since enemies such as hatred and craving
Have neither arms nor legs,
And are neither courageous nor clever,
How have I been used like a slave by them?

When we connect what we are going to look at here with the earlier question on “What is causing me confusion; ...,” here is the transition where we discuss the answer to that question. In short, it is our afflictions that stop us from carrying out our intention to practise the Dharma and accomplish virtue.

We are identifying here the culprit, the afflictions, that cause us to lose our freedom. Afflictions are our enemies that are anger, craving which encompasses desire and attachment and the omnipresent ignorance. When we expand the list of afflictions, we have the six root afflictions and the twenty secondary afflictions.

Our enemies, the afflictions, are unlike external enemies. They do not have form, hands or legs and they do not carry any weapons. Nor are they courageous, smart, wise or hardworking. Although the afflictions have none of these qualities, they act as if they are hardworking and smart. The afflictions harm everyone. They harm the rich, they harm the poor, they harm the students and they harm the teachers.

Everyone is harmed by the afflictions.

Our afflictions such as our attachment cause us to be emotionally attached to the objects of desire and the objects of enjoyment. We are helplessly led by the nose by these afflictions and day in and day out, without any choice, we run after all these objects of desire and do whatever it takes to acquire these objects of desire. Likewise, anger is also like that. We are controlled by our anger to the point that we do not even care about our own lives as anger can make us disregard our own lives. In essence, all of us, everyone without exception, have been enslaved by their afflictions.

We are slaves to our afflictions because, without any choice, we do exactly what our afflictions tell us to do, carrying out the orders of our afflictions. In that sense, we have become the servants or slaves of our afflictions. The result of being enslaved in this way is suffering.

This verse is telling us that our afflictions have enslaved us and we have lost our independence. As a result of becoming a slave to our afflictions, we are led into boundless suffering.

B. The way they bring us immeasurable suffering

Verse 4.29

While they dwell within my mind,
At their pleasure they cause me harm,
Yet I patiently endure them without any anger.

This is an inappropriate state and patience is a contemptible state.

Where does the enemy, the afflictions, abide? Where is the temple that houses these afflictions? It is none other than our mind. This enemy, the afflictions, abides as a guest in the temple of our mind. While it is there, it gives us orders and tells us what we should do. We happily follow these orders. Although we listen to the afflictions, following their advice and orders, in return, they harm us happily and joyously without holding anything back. This is what the afflictions do.

Since this is what the afflictions do to us, it would be wrong to practise patience and simply accept them. In this sense, it will be a contemptible state of affairs if we were to practise patience with our afflictions and let them do whatever they want. The wise and the holy ones would criticise such behaviour on our part.

This verse is telling us that we should look at the afflictions as our enemy and strive to overcome them.

An affliction is defined as that which, when it arises in the mind, disturbs the mind greatly. This is what is posited as an affliction. It is extremely important to contemplate and realise the faults of our afflictions. From the moment they arise, our minds are greatly disturbed, causing our minds to look at reality in a very distorted way. When the afflictions manifest, they strengthen the non-virtuous imprints in our mind. When an affliction arises, it also causes those afflictions of a similar type to persist in our mind.

- Our afflictions harm us not only in this life but also in future lives.
- They also harm others.
- They disturb our minds, causing us great anguish and suffering and bring about all the problems of samsara.
- They separate us from and lead us further and further away from the permanent happiness of liberation.
- They cause our virtue to degenerate.

The purpose of understanding the faults of the afflictions is to help us regard them as our enemies. We will then be able to strive to defeat the afflictions.

Verse 4.30

Should even all the gods and demi-gods
Rise up against me as my enemies,
They cannot lead me to nor place me in
The fires of Relentless Torment.

Verse 4.31

But this foe, the powerful afflictions,
In an instant can cast me there,
Which when met will cause not even the ashes
Of Mount Meru to remain.

Demigods can also be translated as non-humans. Be it demigods or non-humans, we are talking about the interferers, i.e., the beings who can harm us.

The point here is to think about the great harm our afflictions inflict on us. The verse is telling us that even if all the very powerful gods such as Indra, the demigods and non-human beings were to rise up as our enemies, they cannot do us much harm. The harm they can inflict is limited to destroying our possessions or enjoyments and, at the very most, causing our deaths by taking our lives. No matter how powerful they may be, at the very most, this is what they can do to us. On their own, they can never send us to the lowest of the hell realms, the Avici hells.

Our inner enemy, the afflictions, is far more powerful than these external enemies. In a very short moment of time, they can throw us into the lower realms and even cause us to be reborn in the Avici hells. This causes us many other problems and suffering. Furthermore, they can harm us for a very long period of time. Therefore we have to destroy the real enemy, the afflictions.

C. The time period in which they cause harm is unlimited

Verse 4.32

All other enemies are incapable
Of such a length of time
As can my afflictions,
The long-time enemy with neither beginning nor end.

Our afflictions have harmed us in the past. When we do not apply the antidotes now and destroy them, they would continue to harm us just as they have done in the past.

Our inner enemy, the afflictions, have harmed us in the past and they would continue to harm us in the future if we do not do anything about them.

Our external enemies are not like that insofar as they do not have that capacity to harm us in the way our inner enemy, the afflictions, do. The person we dislike and whom we consider as our enemy may harm us and causes us problems but that is nothing compared to what our afflictions can do.

Our afflictions have harmed us since our beginningless lifetimes. If we do not do anything about them, there will be no end to the harm they can inflict on us. Our external enemies can never harm us in such a way.

In order to destroy this enemy, the afflictions, that have existed for so long, it is insufficient to apply the antidote for just a short period of time or just once or twice. There is no way the afflictions can be defeated by such infrequent application of the antidotes. Rather we have to continuously apply the antidotes to the afflictions like the flow of a river.

The teaching is telling us how to deal with this very powerful enemy, the afflictions. When the enemy is very powerful and has been around for a very long time, if we do not apply persistent effort into dealing with this enemy, there will be nothing we can do about this enemy.

Next is the explanation why it is wrong to make friends with the afflictions.

D. The reasons why it is inappropriate to befriend the afflictions

Verse 4.33

If I agreeably honor and rely upon [others],
All will enact benefit and happiness,
But if I rely upon these afflictions
In return I will be harmed by suffering.

When we give presents to the external enemies in order to befriend them, at the very least, we will get something in return. Maybe we can placate and pacify that external enemy. We may even get some happiness and benefit in return from that external enemy.

But when we befriend the inner enemy, the afflictions—we give them what they want, we do what they want us to do—not only will they not return the favour, they will not give us any happiness and benefit in return. On top of that, they will cause us more harm and more damage. The more we befriend the afflictions, the more we do what they like, the more problems and more harm we will receive in return. Therefore it is wrong to regard them as friends. Rather we have to regard them as enemies and strive hard to destroy them. Destroying this inner enemy of the afflictions is the way to achieve peace and happiness.

The two verses here are saying that while it is appropriate to make friends with the external enemy, it is inappropriate and wrong to make friends with the inner enemy of the afflictions. The external enemy is not omnipresent and is not someone we

spend time with all the time. But the afflictions are ever present. They are there all the time, keeping us company.

Most people will fight the external enemy and make friends with the afflictions. What we have to do is the opposite of that. As *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says, we should make friends with the external enemy and be enemies with the afflictions. This verse is saying that we should not be friends with the afflictions.

Next is the explanation of how it is incorrect and inappropriate to be patient with the afflictions.

2. *To cultivate patience towards the afflictions is unreasonable*

A. *Reflecting on the way they act to harm the mind*

A. Verse 4.34

While in cyclic existence how can I be joyful and unafraid
If in my heart I certainly prepare a place
For this incessant enemy of long duration,
The sole cause for the increase of collections of harms?

As discussed earlier, the afflictions have harmed us in the past for a very long time. The moment an affliction manifests in our mind, immediately we are disturbed and harmed. They bring about all the problems of this life and they will harm us in our future lives.

This enemy of the affliction has been around for a long time, abiding in the centre of our heart:

- When we hold in high regard what the afflictions tell us to do, we will be harmed in a great way.
- When we hold in middling regard what the afflictions tell us to do, we will be harmed in a middling way.
- When we do not hold in much regard what the afflictions tell us to do, then we will be harmed only in a small way.
- When we completely disregard the commands of our afflictions, we will never be harmed.

As long as the afflictions are abiding in the centre of our heart, there is no way to be truly happy in samsara. There is no way to be free of worries and free of fears in samsara.

B. *Reflecting on the way they act to harm the body*

Verse 4.35

How shall I ever have happiness
If in a net of attachment within my mind
There dwell the guardians of the prison of cyclic existence
Who become the slayers who kill me in hell and so forth?

Our afflictions are the guardians of the prison of the three realms. When we are hacked and killed by the hell guardians, when we are in the hell realms, these hell guardians are the products of our afflictions.

There is no room for happiness in this life and in future lives when our minds are snared in the net of afflictions such as attachment. This is the discussion of how the afflictions harm the mind and body. We need to develop the courage to destroy the afflictions.

3. Developing strength of mind in order to destroy them

Verse 4.36

Therefore as long as this enemy is not overcome with certainty before my very eyes,

I shall never give up exerting myself against it.

Self-important people who become angry even at slight short-lived harm

Will not go to sleep until it is overcome.

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*Question:* There are conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta. What is ultimate bodhicitta? What is the definition of ultimate bodhicitta?

*Khen Rinpoche:* *Ultimate bodhicitta is ultimate bodhicitta.*

*Answer:* It can be defined as a Mahayana superior knower that is abiding as a special wisdom that is the subsidence of duality with respect to the final mode of abiding of complete enlightenment.

To keep it simple, the ultimate mind generation is the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness in the continuum of a Mahayana superior. If going by definition, it is what was mentioned earlier.

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