

**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 18****8 April 2014**

Review. Chapter Four: Verses 4.36-4.47. Being conscientious about abandoning afflictions: A. Reflecting on the disadvantages of the afflictions (cont'd). B. It is inappropriate to feel weary of the hardships involved in abandoning the afflictions. C. Cultivating joy that it is possible to abandon the afflictions, if effort is made.

Student 1: Brahma and Indra were Hindu gods. How come they had the wisdom to request the Buddha to teach? The Buddha then taught and we get the benefits. In the first place, how come Brahma and Indra were known as Hindu gods? Since they knew how to request for teachings from the Buddha, they should be Buddhists! There seem to be some contradiction here.

Khen Rinpoche: Someone come to the front of the mike and answer this question. Who would like to volunteer to answer? Any suggestions?

(Khen Rinpoche then asked one student to answer the question)

Student 2: Bodhgaya is a Buddhist holy place but it is also supposedly a holy place for Hindus as well. They also see the Buddha as a holy being. I heard that he is supposed to be related to one of the Hindu gods, maybe Shiva. Perhaps that is why Brahma and Indra requested the Buddha to teach even though they didn't realise he is the Buddha. They probably realised that the Buddha was a very special holy being.

Another possibility is that they may be the manifestations of some bodhisattvas that we don't know about.

Another possibility could be that this is to show that the teachings of the Buddha are for the benefit of everyone. It doesn't matter what religion one may have.

Student 1 mentioned that Brahma and Indra should be Buddhists. Before the Buddha taught, technically speaking, there wouldn't be any Buddhists around. Until the Buddha turned the first wheel of Dharma, Brahma and Indra could not be Buddhists. At that time, the prevailing religion was Hinduism.

Khen Rinpoche: When the Buddha was born, gods such as Indra and Brahma went to his birthplace and offered an ablution or bath to the newborn baby who later became the Buddha.

Gods such as Indra and Brahma were worldly gods who were in samsara, whereas our founder and teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha, was free from samsara. As such, from

the time the Buddha was born, i.e., descended into this world, due to the fact that he was free from samsara, his existence outshone that of all other samsaric beings. Due to the fact that the Buddha was a buddha and was free of samsara, I guess this is why his very presence would automatically gather together all these worldly beings. As the Buddha was able to outshine them, he gathered them and gained control over them.

It is possible that these powerful worldly beings like Indra and Brahma could recognise that the Buddha was a special being who would benefit the world and I guess for this reason perhaps this is why they requested the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma to benefit others.

Brahma is said to be the creator of the world and is regarded as the owner of this world. In the teachings it is mentioned that when you request the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma, you can visualise yourself as Brahma making offerings of thousand-spoked golden dharmachakras.

Because it was these powerful gods such as Brahma, Indra and so forth who requested the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma, this shows to others that the Buddha was a very special person who was more exalted than these powerful gods. It is said that the natural splendour of the exalted body of the Buddha completely outshone all these worldly gods. I guess maybe for that reason these worldly gods decided to request the Buddha to teach.

Khen Rinpoche: I don't know. I have no idea.

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## **BEING CONSCIENTIOUS ABOUT ABANDONING AFFLICTIONS (cont/'d)**

### *A. Reflecting on the disadvantages of 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.

Prior to this verse, there was already an explanation of the great faults and disadvantages of the afflictions. They are very harmful, can induce great suffering and throw one into the deepest of hells. They have been harming us since our beginningless lifetimes and if we do not counteract them, they will continue to harm us in the future as well.

There was also the explanations of why it is wrong to befriend and be patient with the afflictions. The more we befriend the afflictions, the more patient we are with them, the more we will be harmed by them.

The teachings point out that the inner enemy, the afflictions, is much more powerful than the external enemy. The teachings are telling us that it is not sufficient to just suppress the afflictions. Rather we have to work at destroying the afflictions from their root.

The verse here is telling us that we should generate courage in destroying the afflictions from the root through applying the antidotes. We have to strive at this.

Verse 4.36 gives an analogy of how a normal person who has been criticised will go all out to destroy his critic. This is what a normal person would do. He holds on to his resentment and he will not rest until he destroys the person who criticised him or he has done something about the situation. When so much effort is put into counteracting such a small harm in this life, we should put in even greater effort in destroying the inner enemy, the afflictions.

With that we have finished the section that talks about the way to reflect on the faults of the afflictions.

The next section talks about the need to strive at destroying the afflictions and discusses how it is incorrect or unsuitable to be tired of the difficulties encountered in abandoning the afflictions.

- B. It is inappropriate to feel weary of the hardships involved in abandoning the afflictions*
- 1. Taking up arms capable of destroying the afflictions and not feeling weary about the hardships that come along with that*

Verse 4.37

If at the time of a violent battle,  
Vigorously desiring to conquer those afflicted ones who are  
naturally subject to suffering through death,  
Men, disregarding the pain of being pierced by spears and arrows,  
Do not withdraw until the goal is accomplished,

Verse 4.38

Then what need to mention that I should not despair and be  
indolent,  
Even if I am caused many hundreds of sufferings,  
When now I strive to definitely overcome my natural enemies  
That are the constant cause of all suffering?

Even when you put in a lot of effort but you do not manage to destroy your external enemy, there will come a time when that enemy will cease to exist naturally, i.e., he will die. The teachings here talk about how the external enemies, the pitiful sentient beings, are actually objects of compassion.

When people fight with their enemies, they are very determined to destroy them and during that process, they will put up with many hardships. Even when they are injured by the weapons wielded by their enemies, they will not stop the fight until they win. In reality, however one does not have to try to defeat the enemy because

sooner or later the external enemy will die. Nevertheless in this world people do not behave in this way. What normally happens is that they will attack, try to destroy the enemy and will continue to do so until the enemy is killed.

The moment the afflictions arise, they are harmful. Just as the nature of fire is to generate heat and burn, afflictions are such that when they arise, they harm and disturb us. This naturally existent inner enemy, the afflictions, will not die on their own accord unless we destroy them.

As mentioned earlier, the afflictions harm everyone from those at the very top to those at the bottom rungs and everyone in between in limitless ways. They bring us the very worst of suffering, the suffering of the Avici Hell. This being so, it is only appropriate and correct to strive in destroying this natural enemy, the afflictions.

In the process of destroying the afflictions, we will meet with all kinds of problems and sufferings. Nevertheless we have to accept these difficulties that arise in the process of destroying the afflictions, putting up with them and generating the determination and courage to carry on destroying the afflictions.

The teachings tell us that it is incorrect to feel, “I am not capable of destroying the afflictions. I am not capable of applying the antidote,” and remaining discouraged, not doing anything and not applying any antidote to destroy the afflictions. Succumbing to laziness is also incorrect.

In essence, these two verses are telling us that when we can put up with all kinds of difficulties and hardships in overcoming external enemies, then all the more we should put in even greater effort in destroying the afflictions. We need to be patient to put up with the hardships that accompany such a task and not be discouraged and lazy.

## *2. The benefits of joyous effort in destroying the afflictions*

*A. It would be reasonable to be patient with hardships, as such efforts are the cause for the excellences that fulfil one’s own welfare*

Verse 4.39

If even scars inflicted by meaningless enemies  
Are worn upon the body like ornaments,  
Then why is suffering a cause of harm to me  
Who impeccably strive to fulfil the great purpose?

Normal worldly people will fight with one another and destroy the enemy for some small problem. Sometimes when people fight, they are wounded and when the wounds heal, scars are left behind on the body. There are people who regard such scars as ornaments to be proud of and to show off.

*Khen Rinpoche: Has anyone here done this before? No? Sometimes you can see that in Nepal. Not everyone is like that but some Nepalis when they fight, they end up with some scars on their heads. They will say, “When I was young, I fought.” They do not see that as bad. They think they are brave and they consider their scars as decoration. The example in the text is something like that.*

*Here maybe people don't fight. Do people fight in Singapore? Maybe only the mouths fight!*

*Interestingly I observed how Indians fight. They don't hit each other. It is always like that (Khen Rinpoche shows the gesture of mouths arguing). They don't touch the other person but they argue so hard with each other.*

*Tibetans are not like that. They don't argue much. They just fight. Maybe Chinese people are the same. I don't know. Most Himalayan people don't argue with the mouth. One or two argument maybe and then the hand starts to move. But for the Indians, they never use their hands. Only their mouths are fighting. But in Nepal it is not like that. In Himalayan places, they really fight. The fighting is real fighting.*

When scars from fighting ordinary external enemies can be regarded as ornaments by some, then we should regard all the hardships we meet while practising to achieve enlightenment for the welfare of sentient beings as ornaments too. No matter how much suffering we may experience, we should consider and look upon them as something that is most beneficial and meaningful, regarding these hardships and suffering as ornaments.

Since we are putting up with these hardships and suffering to help us accomplish our own goals, wishes and purposes, therefore it is entirely appropriate to put up with all the hardships and suffering that arise in the process of destroying the afflictions.

*B. It would be reasonable to bear hardships as such efforts are the cause for the excellences that fulfil the welfare of others*

Verse 4.40

If fishermen, outcasts, farmers, and so forth,  
Thinking merely of their own livelihood,  
Endure the harms of heat and cold,  
Why do I not endure them for the sake of the happiness of  
migrating beings?

When fishermen and farmers can endure the heat and cold while pursuing their livelihoods in order to sustain themselves, it would be appropriate for us to put up with whatever hardships and suffering that may arise in the process of defeating the afflictions in order to accomplish the happiness and the welfare of sentient beings.

*C. The reasons why it is necessary to work to bring to completion the pledges one has made in the past*

Verse 4.41

When I promised to liberate migrating beings  
Dwelling in the ten directions as far as the ends of space  
From their afflictions,  
I myself was not yet freed from the afflictions.

Verse 4.42ab

Thus unaware of even my own capacity,  
Was it not somewhat crazy to have spoken like that?

*Khen Rinpoche: Is this crazy or not?*

A qualm is raised here: one has made the promise to destroy the afflictions in the continua of others but it is inappropriate to strive to destroy the afflictions in one's own continuum because one would then fall into the extreme of peace. Therefore it is incorrect for a bodhisattva to strive to destroy the afflictions in her own continuum.

Although there is such a qualm, of course it is wrong. I guess it would be all right to say that at the time when one made the promise to liberate all sentient beings and to destroy their afflictions, one also took the oath and made the promise to destroy the afflictions in one's own continuum.

If you remember, the mind of enlightenment is made up of two aspirations:

1. the aspiration to accomplish the welfare of others
2. the aspiration to achieve omniscience

The aspiration to accomplish the welfare of others is the main cause. It is said that the aspiration to be omniscient is an assisting factor, playing a complementary role.

In order to accomplish the welfare of others and to destroy the afflictions in their continua, first one must destroy the afflictions in one's own continuum. Otherwise, one will be powerless to destroy the afflictions of others.

When one is bound by cyclic existence oneself, one cannot accomplish the welfare of others. Therefore one should strive to abandon the afflictions in one's continuum. There is no danger of the bodhisattvas falling into the extreme of peace when they are working to destroy the afflictions in their own continua. In fact, their understanding of and their disgust and disenchantment with the faults of cyclic existence are much more intense and powerful than that possessed by the hearers and solitary realisers.

3. *It is reasonable to be diligent in the practice of destroying the afflictions*

A. *One should make effort in the antidotes to the afflictions*

Verse 4.42 c,d

Since this is the case I should never withdraw  
From vanquishing the afflictions.

Verse 4.43 a,b

I shall adhere to this and,  
Resenting them, I shall meet them in battle!

We should never back down from destroying the afflictions and we should always regard them as objects to be abandoned. With this thought we should always strive to destroy them.

Another qualm may arise, "When you become emotionally involved with and attached to destroying the afflictions, doesn't that become a problem in itself? Doesn't that become an affliction? When you are upset with the afflictions and your anger is directed at the afflictions, isn't that also a problem, an affliction? Therefore,

you should abandon these attitudes.”

The answers to such a qualm is as follows.

Verse 4.43 c,d  
But afflictions such as these types  
Destroy afflictions and are not included.

Gyaltsab Je’s commentary states that attachment to the antidotes and anger directed at what has to be abandoned may appear like afflictions but actually they belong to the class of antidotes that destroys the afflictions. They are therefore not included in the category of the abandonments and are *not* afflictions.

Essentially, the desire to destroy the afflictions and the desire to apply the antidotes are parts of a strong aspiration. With such an aspiration comes strong mindfulness and introspection when one is applying the antidotes to the afflictions. So the desire may appear like an attachment to the antidotes when one is very wrapped up in wanting to destroy the afflictions, but it is not. Rather, it is an aspiration. Mindfulness and introspection come along with this aspiration to destroy the afflictions. In this context, the attachment, wanting to destroy the afflictions, is an aspiration.

The mind that is mindful and introspective with regard to the faults of the afflictions recognise that all these afflictions must be abandoned and it is helpful and necessary in destroying the afflictions. They form an antidote to the afflictions and they do not become an affliction.

In short, there is a mind that looks upon the afflictions as an enemy through seeing the faults of the afflictions. This mind understands the value, the need for and the purpose of the antidotes. The mind understands this based on mindfulness and introspection.

This mind may look like an attachment to the antidotes. It may look like an angry mind that is upset with the afflictions. Although these minds *look like* afflictions, actually they are *not* afflictions. They are part of the antidotes to the afflictions. That is the meaning of the verse 4.43 c, d.

*B. One should make effort so that one does not come under the power of the afflictions at any time*

Verse 4.44  
I would rather be burned and killed,  
And even have my head cut off,  
Than to ever bow down  
To the enemy that is the afflictions in any way.

This verse is pointing out that we have to work at destroying the afflictions, not letting the mind come under their control.

A qualm may arise: If it is so difficult to deal with the afflictions and, in the process of trying to destroy them, so many problems will arise, isn’t it better just to follow the

afflictions?

*Khen Rinpoche: No? Is it not like that, that we should follow the afflictions and solve the problem? This is what we think.*

Verse 4.44 is the answer to that qualm. It says that it is a small matter to have one's limbs or one's head cut off. What is the worst thing that can happen to us? At the very most, we lose our lives. This is about it. Having our limbs and heads chopped off will only bring an end to our lives but it will not send us to the lower realms.

But when we let ourselves be controlled by our afflictions, our afflictions will send us to the lower realms. This will obstruct our achievement of full enlightenment. Therefore the afflictions are far more dangerous because they can bring us the greatest suffering, preventing us from achieving full enlightenment that is the most beneficial and meaningful accomplishment for us.

These verses are very useful and beneficial for our mind. We should read and think about them regularly, gradually familiarising ourselves with these verses. We have to understand the faults of our afflictions. Because of the reasons given, we have to work at not letting ourselves come under the control of the afflictions for when this happens, the afflictions will bring us the greatest suffering and prevent us from achieving that which is most meaningful.

This concludes the section that talks about how it is inappropriate to be weary of the hardships involved in abandoning the afflictions. Up to this point, these verses are telling us to be enthusiastic. We should take joy in destroying the afflictions and be enthusiastic about doing so rather than allow ourselves to become disenchanted with the task.

*C. Cultivating joy that it is possible to abandon the afflictions if effort is made*

1. *If the afflictions in your own continuum are completely uprooted, there is no place supportive of them in your mind*

Verse 4.45

Ordinary enemies when expelled from one country  
Simply settle down in another and embrace it,  
And when their capability is recovered they then return;  
But the way of this enemy, my afflictions, is different.

It is possible that the external enemy can recover and return to haunt you even if you have expelled and kicked him off to some faraway place. However the inner enemy of the afflictions is not like that. Once the inner enemy of the afflictions is vanquished through the force of the antidotes, they can never return again. Once they are destroyed completely from the root, they can never return.

2. *As the cause of the afflictions arises from error, if one applies diligence, one will be able to abandon them*

Verse 4.46

Afflictions, afflictions! When abandoned by the eye of wisdom  
And dispelled from my mind, where will you go?



Where will you dwell and return to harm me?  
Although this is so, weak-minded, I have been reduced to making  
no effort.

“Afflictions, afflictions,” is actually an expression of how lowly the afflictions are. When you analyse them properly, you will see that they can be vanquished because they arise from a mistaken cause. We need to abandon the afflictions through generating the eye of wisdom, i.e., the wisdom realising emptiness.

Once vanquished and eliminated by the wisdom realising emptiness, the afflictions that abide in our continuum will have nowhere else to go. It is not as if they will leave your mind, go somewhere else to recover and then come back to harm you. This will not happen with the afflictions.

The next verse is about emptiness.

3. *If they are completely uprooted, there is absolutely no place that supports their existence and thus it is reasonable to say that they can be abandoned*

Verse 4.47

If these afflictions do not abide within objects,  
Not in the collection of sense powers, between the two nor  
elsewhere,  
Then where do they abide and how do they harm all migrating  
beings?  
They are like an illusion. Thus I should dispel the fear within my  
heart and strive for the sake of wisdom.  
For no meaning, why am I harmed in hell and so forth?

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Question: It was explained that the mind that generates an aversion towards afflictions is an aspiration. There can be another kind of mind. Sometimes one may think, “After so many years of study and practice, I still see so many afflictions in the mind.” One may feel very discouraged and generate a lot of self-judgment, “Why am I still like that after so many years of study and practice?” Is this kind of mind an affliction?

Khen Rinpoche: “After so many years of practice”? What are you saying?

Student: Sorry, no practice. So many years of external activities!

Khen Rinpoche: We are supporting the afflictions, not destroying them, isn’t that so? This is why there is still no improvement. The answer is there.

In the first place, we do not put in the effort to abandon the afflictions. We never do that. Instead we are always following the afflictions. So what can you hope for? There is no hope.

All the advice is here. You can recognise the disadvantages of the afflictions and how

they harm us. There is so much advice here: how the afflictions control our minds, how much they harm us. They are not like the external enemy. This is what the text is trying to say here.

For example, someone says some harsh words to you. Even just that, you can't sleep thinking of how much this person hurts you. You keep thinking of what you are going to say in retaliation. "I am really going to tell him off!" Even with that, you cannot sleep. Small words can harm you. You put in so much effort thinking of what to say back, how to reply to this person and to make sure this person would not say it again next time. We put that kind of effort into a small thing.

What Shantideva said here about the afflictions and how they harm us, we never think about that at all. These are the real enemies but we never think like that. We think they are our best friends, never recognising they are our worst enemies. We always consider them to be our best friends.

You always try to follow whatever this enemy, the delusion, says. And you feel happy about doing so. We never recognise how the delusions deceive us.

All the advice here is to recognise that the delusion is your inner enemy. Don't fight with the enemy outside. Fight the enemy inside. I think this is the advice that Shantideva is giving us. You do not need to destroy and kill the outside enemy. That enemy will die anyway. But you need to kill the inside enemy. You need to destroy it. Also the delusion won't disappear after you die. It will continue. This is why you must put in the effort to destroy it.

What we have read so far is in very simple language. With two to three sentences, we have finished with this Shantideva text. It is saying that you must understand that the delusion is the real enemy. We must understand that.

Whenever we are having a difficult time fighting with the delusion, it is important to purify. No matter how difficult a time you may be having fighting the delusion, whatever suffering you may encounter, these become the causes to achieve enlightenment, a chance to purify your negative karma.

The text also says that the delusion has no basis. It comes from a wrong mind. When you put in the effort, you will be able to destroy it. With the understanding or the realisation of emptiness, you can destroy the delusions. This is what the text is saying.

Question: Previously, Khen Rinpoche, you talked about all the causes for this precious human rebirth—the practice of pure morality, all the different types of practices related to the six perfections and so forth—and how it is so difficult and rare to get a precious human rebirth. It takes so many conditions.

My issue has always been that if it took so much virtue and merit to generate a precious human rebirth, why is it that during this time when we are experiencing the precious human rebirth, the afflictions seem as powerful as ever before. In this life, it is almost impossible to think that in some past life, I had actually practised pure morality and those other practices in order to achieve the precious human rebirth that I enjoy now. The afflictions are very strong. The attachment is very strong. The

aversion is very strong. The ignorance is definitely there.

If I had practiced so powerfully in the past to get a precious human rebirth, surely those virtuous imprints should be very powerful in this lifetime as well but it doesn't seem to be the case.

Khen Rinpoche: I don't think you meditated on emptiness in your past lives.

Student: Granted!

Khen Rinpoche: It is not necessary to have meditated on emptiness in your past lives in order to get your precious human rebirth, right? If you had done some meditation on emptiness in your past lives, then maybe there will be less delusions in this life, I think.

Student: My basic point is that we practised so much virtue in the past to get a precious human rebirth. That virtuous mind should be very powerful. In terms of percentages, it should be like 70% virtue and 30% afflictions but actually, in this life, my mind seems to have 99% afflictions and maybe 1% virtue.

I am having a hard time reconciling how it was possible for me to actually have practised well enough to get a precious human rebirth. If I'm enjoying my precious human rebirth now, why are the afflictions still so strong?

Answer: Generally speaking, all rebirths in samsara happen without choice and occur under the control of karma and afflictions. This applies also to the human life of freedoms and endowments.

A human life of freedoms and endowments like the one we have is the result of contaminated virtue and is a rebirth that is propelled by the ignorance that comes up in the twelve links of dependent origination. A human life of freedoms and endowments is the result of ignorance. Therefore it is under the control of the afflictions.

Because we did not apply the antidotes to the afflictions in the past, therefore now our state of existence is under the control of karma and afflictions.

Did we accumulate strong virtue in the past? Yes. Otherwise there is no way to get such a human life of freedoms and endowments.

Did we practise some kind of ethical discipline? Yes, definitely there was the practice of ethical discipline to some extent.

Did we apply the antidotes to our afflictions and meditate strongly on them? That is the question.

It is clearly evident that because we didn't apply the antidotes to the afflictions strongly; therefore now in this life the afflictions are still very strong. When we look at what we do in this life—we have a human life of freedoms and endowments, we have met and understand the teachings, we have listened to the teaching on the faults of afflictions—at the end of the day, are we applying the antidotes to the

afflictions?

Are there people who will spend even five minutes to sit down and really look at the problems and the faults of the afflictions? Even that is rare. It is not a question of not being able to do it. It is about not doing it at all. The problem lies in not doing it. It is not about not being able to do so.

When you look at this whole chapter, from beginning to end, basically it is just imploring us to start, “You have a perfect human rebirth. You have this, you have that. Now is the time to start. You should do it now!” From beginning to end, it is all about that.

(Khen Rinpoche makes a gesture, indicating, for us, it is one ear in and one ear out).

Dealing with the afflictions and abandoning them is no easy task because they have been there since beginningless lifetimes. We are thoroughly familiarised with the afflictions. It is impossible to deal with the afflictions by applying the antidote just once. Therefore there is a verse that says you have to apply the antidotes like the flow of the river, i.e., continuously. Otherwise it is not possible to overcome them at all.

As such, there should never be a time, at least for now, that we can ask, “Why is it that my afflictions are not subsiding? Why are they not becoming weaker?” In the first place, we are not doing anything about them. We shouldn’t even ask this question. If we have been applying the antidotes continuously, really working on the afflictions and after years of practice, if we still find it difficult, perhaps then we can wonder why.

Khen Rinpoche: That is the right time to ask your question, “Why is it that I put in so much effort, it is still like that. Why? Why? Why?” Now is not the time for that question!

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