

**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 19****10 April 2014**

Review. Chapter Four: Verses 4.47-4. 48. Being conscientious about abandoning afflictions (cont'd). C. Cultivating joy that it is possible to abandon the afflictions, if effort is made. Chapter Five: Guarding Introspection. Verses 5.1-5.5. A. An extensive explanation of the way to practice. 1. The method for guarding the trainings: guarding the mind. A. By guarding the mind, one comes to guard all.

**REVIEW**

As we have seen, it is mentioned in the text that afflictions arise from the erroneous mind. As such, it is possible to eradicate the afflictions. We have the capacity to destroy them by developing the wisdom realising selflessness in our own mind. The afflictions are not going to go away or disappear on their own accord but through developing the wisdom realising selflessness, we will be able to destroy the afflictions in the same way that illumination overcomes darkness. When the wisdom realising selflessness arises, the afflictions are pacified so when the wisdom realising selflessness is developed, the afflictions cease there and then. They do not go anywhere but rather they dissolve into the clear light.

Because of our lack of wisdom and very weak state of mind, we are unable to overcome or destroy our afflictions. It is said that the afflictions will be destroyed easily when we are able to develop the wisdom realising selflessness. With the wisdom realising selflessness, destroying the inner enemy, the afflictions, will be a much easier task than overcoming the outer enemy.

As said in the last line of verse 4.46, “Although this is so, weak-minded, I have been reduced to making no effort.” Because we do not have the wisdom realising selflessness or because this wisdom realising selflessness is weak, therefore we are not able to vanquish or destroy the afflictions. The next verse basically explains that the afflictions can be overcome because the afflictions do not truly exist.

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

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

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*

In Gyaltsab Je's commentary, he states that there may be some people who may raise this qualm. "Since the afflictions are generated in one's own continuum, therefore they have to exist inherently. If so, how can the afflictions be abandoned?"

This is what we think. When we look at our own afflictions, the afflictions look as if they have always been there, they look so real and solid, existing from their own side. Therefore we wonder whether it is really possible to overcome them.

The next verse is in response to this qualm.

Verse 4.47 a,b

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?

This verse talks about how the afflictions are not inherently existent and explains how we can reflect on this fact when the afflictions, such as anger or attachment, arise in our minds.

When an affliction such as attachment or anger arises strongly, we can check whether the affliction exists from the side of the object of attachment or the object of anger or not. Does the affliction exist inherently on either the object of attachment or the enemy?

Our afflictions do not exist inherently from the side of the loved one nor does it exist inherently from the side of the enemy. For example, when we talk about attachment, attachment and desire does not exist inherently on the form that we are attached to. The form that we are attracted to or the enemy that we are upset with do not exist from their own side, i.e., from the side of the object.

If the affliction were to exist inherently on the object of attachment or object of anger, then whoever comes into contact with that object would necessarily have to generate attachment or anger. But when foe-destroyers come into contact with form, they do not generate attachment towards the form that they perceive.

This is something that you can think about. When we talk about attachment, attachment does not exist inherently from the side of the object that we are attached to, let's say, our loved one. Nor does anger exist inherently from the side of the enemy.

But when you examine your own experience, when you are very upset with a situation or with someone, the anger appears to exist within the object, i.e., from the side of the object. We never ever think the anger is coming from our own side and is made up by our own mind.

Similarly, when we are attached to an object or to a person, again there is this attachment, this energy that seems to be coming from the side of the object or person. We never ever think, “This is coming from me. This is coming from my mind.”

This is what we believe and this is how things appear to us experientially.

It is said in the teachings that afflictions such as attachment and anger arise from incorrect mental attention. When you investigate the very root of this incorrect mental attention, it is this innate belief in and apprehension of inherent existence or true existence, that there is something real right there.

How does attachment operate? From the view of this attachment, there is an appearance of an inherently existent object of attachment as a very nice object or a very nice person. Then incorrect mental attention comes in and exaggerates the qualities of the object beyond what they actually are. From that arises a very strong emotional involvement and very strong grasping.

Likewise from the view of anger, when an unpleasant situation occurs or an unpleasant object appears, first there is an appearance of a truly existent or inherently existent enemy or unpleasant object. Then incorrect mental attention exaggerates the situation or qualities of the object beyond what they actually are and that leads to very strong aversion.

This is how afflictions arise and how they work. The basis is always an apprehension of inherent existence. With that as the basis then we have incorrect mental attention that superimposes features and characteristics on to that object of attachment or anger beyond what they actually are. That mind reacts and there is then very strong attachment or strong anger. Strong attachment and strong anger lead us to accumulate karma that in turn leads us to experience all the various problems and suffering of samsara.

Your experience of every single problem is the ripening result of the karma that you have accumulated. Karma is accumulated, motivated and driven by the afflictions. All the afflictions are based on the apprehension of inherent existence.

All problems and suffering come from karma and the afflictions. Of the two, the afflictions are the principal cause for it is said that when there are no afflictions, even if there is karma, it will not be able to give rise to its effects. So of the two, the afflictions are much more powerful.

The very thing that can directly oppose this ignorance, the apprehension of inherent existence, is the wisdom directly perceiving selflessness. When the wisdom directly perceiving selflessness is generated, it renders ignorance powerless in that, henceforth, one will not accumulate fresh projecting karma.

Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Treatise on Wisdom* states that problems and suffering arise from karma and the afflictions. Afflictions come from incorrect mental attention. The root of all afflictions is ignorance, the apprehension of inherent existence. This ignorance is overcome by the wisdom directly realising emptiness.

So when we look at the process of how afflictions arise, they arise through our own incorrect mental attention, through the root of our ignorance, i.e., being ignorant. Basically they come from our own mind. This is the reality but we never think that the afflictions are made up by our mind. We believe that they come from the side of the object, whether it is an object of attachment or an unpleasant object.

When we are very attached to an object, our attachment is due to the fact that we feel there is something coming from the side of the object. We never ever think our attachment is a projection of our mind. To us, it is coming right there from the side of the very pleasant object or person.

It is the same with anger. When we get upset, we think that everything is coming completely from the side of the object. We never ever think it is a projection of our mind. Never!

In short, the afflictions do not abide within objects despite what we may believe innately. When we are attached or we get upset, we feel that this energy, this affliction, is coming from the side of the object, from the pleasant or unpleasant object.

But if the afflictions are coming from the side of the object as we believe innately to be the case, it follows then that whoever comes into contact with that same object will necessarily develop afflictions, whether it be attachment or anger. But this is not the case.

When we are very attached to a person or an object, there is this appearance and belief that everything that is pleasant about that object is coming completely from the side of the object. Or when we are upset with a situation, an object or person, again all the unpleasant characteristics, whatever we dislike about the object or person, in our experience, we believe they are completely coming from the side of the object. They have absolutely nothing to do with our mind!

Although this is what we believe to be true but the reality is that the afflictions do *not* exist inherently within the objects. If the afflictions exist inherently within the objects, it absurdly follows that whoever comes into contact with those objects will necessarily generate afflictions.

- The afflictions do not exist inherently within the objects.
- The afflictions do not exist inherently within the sense powers.
- The afflictions do not exist inherently within the mental consciousness.

Why is this so?

If the afflictions exist inherently within the sense powers, it absurdly follows that whenever the sense powers are in operation, one will necessarily be in an afflicted state, i.e., there will always be afflictions. If the afflictions exist inherently within the sense powers, it necessarily follows that whenever we see or hear things and so forth, all those experiences will be pervaded necessarily by afflictions. But this is not

the case. It does not mean that whenever we are looking at something or hearing something, afflictions will necessarily arise.

If the afflictions are abiding inherently within the consciousness, it absurdly follows that as long as there is a consciousness or mind, afflictions will always manifest.

If the afflictions exist inherently in the various sense powers and within the consciousness, this would mean that whenever the sense powers came into existence and whenever the consciousness arose, the afflictions were already there from day one. If the afflictions exist inherently, they have to exist in such a way. They would have to be one with the sense powers or one with the consciousness. It will absurdly follow that arhats will have afflictions because they have sense powers and they also have a mind.

The point is that it is wrong to believe or think that the afflictions are inherently one with the sense powers or one with the consciousness because there will be many logical fallacies.

Although the afflictions do not exist inherently in these ways, when we look at, conceive or think about our afflictions, how do they appear to us? They appear so real, they appear to be inherently existent. But just because they *appear* to exist inherently, it does not mean that they *are* inherently existent.

The afflictions do not exist inherently within the objects nor do they exist within the sense powers. What about somewhere in between these two? But the text says the afflictions also do not exist, “between the two.”

If the afflictions do not inherently exist within the objects, the afflictions do not inherently exist within the sense powers and it cannot be found somewhere in between these two, does it mean that it is somewhere else other than in between these two? Of course the answer is also no. The point is that the afflictions *do not* exist inherently.

These afflictions that have been harming us since beginningless time up to now are not inherently existent. If they are not inherently existent, how are we then harmed by them?

If afflictions do not exist inherently within the objects, do not exist inherently within the sense powers, do not exist inherently between these two, then how can inherently existent afflictions harm us? Inherently existent afflictions cannot harm us because afflictions do not exist inherently.

We deal with the afflictions when they arise by reflecting in this way. First you suppress them, then you eliminate them from the root.

Next is how to deal with the afflictions by understanding that they exist conventionally.

Verse 4.47 c,d

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?

We have to understand that the afflictions are like illusions. There are no such thing as inherently existent afflictions. Although afflictions do not exist inherently, they *appear* to be inherently existent. Therefore they are like illusions.

Understanding all this, we overcome the fear of not being able to abandon the afflictions due to thinking that they are inherently existent. Therefore it is correct to strive in abandoning the afflictions through developing wisdom. If this is the case then why should we allow ourselves to go to the hell realms and suffer there now that we know that the afflictions can be destroyed?

In short, we deal with the afflictions by reflecting on how they are not inherently existent and that they are like illusions. The teachings are saying that when afflictions arise, we should not follow them but rather we should investigate, “Why and how is this affliction arising? What is its cause, i.e., what is it arising from?” Then we look for the very source, the origin and root of the afflictions. It is through generating the wisdom realising selflessness that we are able to cut the root of the afflictions. The teachings tell us that once we are able to develop this wisdom realising selflessness, we will be able to destroy the afflictions.

#### *Synopsis*

Verse 4.48

Therefore, having thought about this,

I should make effort for the sake of accomplishing the trainings explained.

If the doctor’s instructions are ignored,

How will a patient in need of treatment be cured by the medicines?

In all the earlier verses in this chapter, we were told to be conscientious in guarding the bodhicitta that has been generated, to be conscientious in guarding the training. In the first place, we were told to be conscientious in guarding ourselves and not let ourselves be stained by the bodhisattva downfalls and faults. But even when we are stained by the downfalls and faults, we should confess and purify them. Then there was this extensive section on being conscientious in guarding ourselves against the afflictions. All these were explained earlier.

We have to cultivate conscientiousness by reflecting on all the advice given earlier in the chapter. This verse is saying that a patient who is very sick needs to follow the doctor’s advice, take the medicine and undergo the appropriate treatment. Likewise here we have to follow the advice given by the Buddha with regard to being conscientious in our training.

In Gyaltzab Je’s commentary, he concluded the commentary for this chapter by saying, “The freedom from memory of faults and increasing virtue without

degeneration, these depend with certainty on the meditation on conscientiousness. Therefore the proficient should always depend on conscientiousness.”

## **CHAPTER FIVE: GUARDING INTROSPECTION**

The next chapter is the chapter on guarding introspection or vigilance. According to Gyalsab Je’s outline, this chapter relates to, “The way to train in ethics: A specific explanation given with regard to mindfulness and introspection—the methods for purely guarding all virtuous dharmas.”

Essentially, this chapter is an explanation of how to protect one’s ethics (or ethical discipline) and how to keep them pure with mindfulness and introspection.

In order to achieve full enlightenment, it is necessary to enter and engage in a path that is unmistakable and complete. When the path is mistaken, one will not achieve the result. Similarly when there are elements of the path that are missing, i.e., the path is incomplete, the result will not be achieved either.

The teachings tell us that it is insufficient to generate aspirational bodhicitta. Rather on the basis of having generated aspirational bodhicitta, one must take the bodhisattva vows and then engage in the trainings. Otherwise, one will not achieve the result.

All the trainings of the bodhisattvas can be condensed into the six perfections. When we say that the bodhisattvas need to train in the path that is unmistakable and complete, this means the bodhisattvas have to practise the bodhisattva deeds, i.e., the trainings, in particular, of these six perfections. Of the six perfections, in this chapter, the perfection of ethics is the topic of discussion.

Following Gyalsab Je’s outline, the explanation of the body of this chapter is covered in two main points:

- A. An extensive explanation of the way to practise
  - B. The conclusion, as it is necessary to put into practice the meaning without leaving it on the level of mere words
- A. An extensive explanation of the way to practice is covered in four points:
    1. The method for guarding the trainings: guarding the mind
    2. The method for guarding the mind: guarding mindfulness and introspection
    3. The way to train in the conduct of guarding the mind by means of mindfulness and introspection
    4. The branch or method of excellent trainings
  1. The method for guarding the trainings: guarding the mind consists of three points:
    - A. By guarding the mind, one comes to guard all
    - B. The reasons for that
    - C. Making effort in guarding the mind
  - A. By guarding the mind, one comes to guard all consists of three points:
    1. Brief presentation on the necessity of guarding the mind

2. The shortcomings of allowing the mind to degenerate
3. The benefits of guarding the mind

The point is that in order to guard the trainings, one has to guard the mind. Therefore it is very important to guard and protect the mind.

### **THE METHOD FOR GUARDING THE TRAININGS: GUARDING THE MIND**

A. *By guarding the mind, one comes to guard all*

1. *Brief presentation on the necessity of guarding the mind*

Verse 5.1

Those who wish to guard their trainings  
Should very tightly guard their minds.  
Those who do not guard their minds  
Are unable to guard their trainings.

The bodhisattvas have to undertake many trainings. In order to protect their trainings, they have to focus on guarding their minds.

We have to protect the mind from engaging with erroneous objects. When the mind is not protected against erroneous objects, when we do not stop the mind from following and engaging with erroneous objects, then it will be very difficult to protect the trainings. Therefore it is very important to protect and guard the mind.

Our mind is likened to an untamed elephant. How do you tame an untamed elephant? You tie the untamed elephant with a very strong rope to a very stable pillar. Then you check every now and then to see whether the elephant is still tied to the strong pillar. Likewise, we guard our mind with the rope of mindfulness and the guard of introspection. We have to protect our mind from wandering off and engaging with erroneous objects. The way to guard our mind is by relying on mindfulness and introspection.

The thoughts in our mind are likened to waves in the ocean. They come in waves after waves without stopping. The thoughts that arise are not stable and they do not last very long. They only exist for a very short time and are replaced by another.

Mindfulness is the mental factor that does not allow the mind to forget the virtuous object of observation. We have to tie our mind with the rope of mindfulness to a virtuous object of observation. It is mindfulness that stops the mind from forgetting this chosen virtuous object of observation and it is mindfulness that does not allow the mind to forget what to cultivate and what to abandon. This is how mindfulness protects the mind.

Introspection (or vigilance) checks what we are up to, what our body, speech and mind are up to and what they are doing. It is like someone checking up on us. It is through introspection that we continue to engage in and apply mindfulness.

This is the brief explanation of how to guard one's trainings. In short, one guards one's trainings by guarding the mind with mindfulness and introspection.



What happens when the mind degenerates?

2. *The shortcomings of allowing the mind to degenerate*

Verse 5.2

In this [world,] unsubdued and crazed elephants

Do not cause such harms

As the harms of Relentless Torment<sup>1</sup>

Caused by the unleashed elephant of my mind.

When we let the unsubdued mind wander off and do whatever it likes, we will end up accumulating negativities that throw us into the hells. An untamed mind leads to the accumulation of so many negativities that will lead us into the lower realms. The external untamed elephant cannot do this to us. For this reason we have to strive in guarding or protecting the mind.

What are the benefits then when we protect or guard our mind?

3. *The benefits of guarding the mind*

A. *Brief presentation*

Verse 5.3

But if the elephant of my mind is tightly bound

Through all by the rope of mindfulness,

All fears will cease to exist

And all virtues will come into my hand.

Here the verse says that when we bind our mind tightly to a virtuous object of observation, we will protect our mind and we will achieve easily a good rebirth as a human or god and the happiness of liberation.

The teachings are saying that we need to guard our mind with mindfulness and introspection. When we can place our mind strongly on a virtuous object of observation, we will be able to acquire every virtue. When we are able to acquire all the virtues, we will be able to acquire all the different kinds of happiness and overcome non-virtue and suffering for it is said in the sutras that the best thing is to subdue one's mind. When we subdue our minds, we achieve all happiness.

Lama Atisha said, "When we subdue our minds, the external enemy cannot harm us. But when one's mind is not subdued, when one's mind wanders off towards the erroneous object, then we are harmed." When we let our mind wander off to an erroneous object, this external enemy acts as a condition for the inner enemy, the afflictions, to arise. When the inner enemy of afflictions arises, this burns our mind and this is how this inner enemy destroys us. Therefore we have to vanquish or subdue the inner enemy. This is the advice of Lama Atisha.

We may think, "So what if I subdue my mind? Even when I subdue my mind, there are so many difficult external conditions that there is no way that I can protect

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<sup>1</sup> Relentless Torment refers to the Avici hells.

myself against all of them. Therefore there is no way I can completely be free of fear even if I were to subdue my mind.”

The answer to this qualm is in the next verse.

*B. Extensive explanation*

Verse 5.4

Tigers, lions, elephants, bears,  
Snakes, and all my enemies,  
The guardians who are hell beings,  
Evil spirits and likewise cannibals,

Verse 5.5

Will all be bound  
By binding this mind alone,  
And will all be subdued  
By subduing this mind alone.

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*Question:* My question relates to the explanation of Verse 4.47 regarding the relationship between the afflictions and the objects. It sounds like there are two versions: one is when we see the object, we exaggerate its qualities and attachment or aversion arises because we see the object as inherently desirable or inherently horrible. It also seems to say that the affliction is somehow embedded in the object itself.

I can't get my mind around the notion that the affliction is somehow inherently existent *within* the object. Maybe I didn't understand this correctly.

*Answer:* In that verse, it is stated very clearly that the afflictions do not abide within the object. Essentially the meaning of the statement is that the afflictions do not inherently abide within the objects.

*Student:* But the incorrect mental attention thinks that the affliction exists in the object. Is that what we are saying here? I am a bit confused about this.

*Khen Rinpoche:* What are you confused about?

*Student:* The relationship between the afflictions and the objects.

*Answer:* This is an exercise to establish that the afflictions do not inherently exist. In order to establish that they do not inherently exist, we have to establish that:

- the afflictions do not exist inherently within the objects
- the afflictions do not exist inherently in the sense powers
- the afflictions do not exist inherently somewhere in between

That verse is saying that:

- the afflictions do not exist inherently within the objects

- the afflictions do not exist inherently within the sense powers
  - the afflictions do not exist inherently somewhere in between
- Therefore the afflictions do not exist inherently at all.

This is the meaning of the verse 4.47 a, b, “If these afflictions do not abide within objects,/ Not in the collection of sense powers, between the two nor elsewhere.”

*Khen Rinpoche: This is the meaning of the verse. What is your question?*

*Student:* The commentary seems to be saying that there is this conception from our side that thinks the attachment exists *within* the object.

*Khen Rinpoche: Don't we think like that?*

*Student:* No. One doesn't think the attachment is embedded in the object.

*Khen Rinpoche: Don't you feel that your attachment is coming 100% from the object itself? You feel that it is coming from your mind? You see that the attachment is totally coming from the side of the object, isn't that so? Giving this attachment from the object, isn't it?*

*Student:* I see the qualities of the object.

*Khen Rinpoche: So this gives rise to the attachment right? What gives rise to the attachment?*

*Student :* The attachment is arising in my mind.

*Khen Rinpoche: But what produces that attachment? Isn't it 100% produced from the object?*

*Student:* OK. It is just that I never thought about it like that before.

*Khen Rinpoche: When strong attachment arises, you feel that it is 100% attachment given by the object.*

*When you are angry at a person, it is also exactly like that. What you feel is, “I am all right but this person is giving 100% anger to me.” It is totally from the side of the object. You don't feel, “It is my mind that is making me unhappy and angry.”*

*The point is that the object 100% makes your attachment arise. Your mind doesn't think, “I made this attachment.” What you feel is that the object gives you the attachment 100%. It is coming from the side of the object.*

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng & Aki Yeo; edited by Cecilia Tsong.