

**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 21**22 April 2014**

Chapter Five: Verses 5.12-5.17. B. The reasons for that (cont'd). 2. Qualities depend upon the mind.

Question: What is the measure of having generated refuge in one's mind?

Answer: When the entity of the refuge is discussed, what exactly is refuge? There are two causes of refuge:

1. the fear of the sufferings of cyclic existence and the fear of the sufferings of the lower realms
2. the conviction that the Three Jewels have the ability and power to protect one from these fears

When you take refuge in the Buddha, having real refuge means that you have complete conviction and trust that the Buddha has the power to protect you from these fears, the fear of the sufferings of cyclic existence and the fear of the sufferings of the lower realms.

This conviction is similar to the conviction that a sick person has in a doctor. When a sick person sees a doctor, this patient has so much trust in the doctor and is willing to carry out all the instructions of the doctor. Having refuge in the Buddha is similar to that in that you completely trust that the Buddha can protect you from these fears.

But first you must have the fear of the sufferings of the lower realms, i.e., the fear of going to the lower realms and suffering there. On top of that, you have the fear of the sufferings of cyclic existence. On the basis of having these fears, then you have the faith, conviction and trust in the ability of the Buddha to protect you from these fears. This faith arises from understanding and thinking, "I trust the Buddha can really protect me from these fears." This is taking refuge in the Buddha.

When you trust the enlightened one, the Buddha, based on that, you will be able to take refuge in his teachings, the Dharma. When you say that you go for refuge to the Dharma, it means that you have the conviction, faith and trust in the words of the Buddha, the teachings, because they were taught by the Buddha himself. So when you have faith in the Buddha, naturally you would have faith in his teachings.

Similarly, you would be able to take refuge and trust in the Sangha, those who are following his teachings.

From this, you will know whether you have refuge or not, whether you have such faith and whether that faith is stable or not. In your mind you know that you have these fears but you have this absolute trust that the Buddha can protect you from them. When you have such trust and faith, that is the sign that you have refuge.

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## THE REASONS FOR THAT (cont'd)

### 2. *Qualities depend upon the mind*

#### C. *Patience relies upon the mind*

##### 1. *The meaning*

Verse 5.12

Unruly sentient beings are like space;  
All of them cannot possibly be overcome.  
But if I overcome the mind of anger alone,  
This will be equivalent to vanquishing all those foes.

This verse is saying that patience depends on and arises from the mind. When we talk about unruly sentient beings, they are everywhere. Wherever there is space, there are sentient beings. As long as sentient beings exist, there will necessarily be sentient beings who will do harm.

This verse points out that there is no way to eliminate or destroy all the sentient beings who harm others. Even if you were to try to do this, you will not succeed. But even though there are such sentient beings, if we overcome the mind of anger, it would be equivalent to having vanquished, conquered or destroyed all these external enemies. There is an analogy to explain this.

##### 2. *The analogy*

Verse 5.13

Where could I possibly find enough leather  
With which to cover the surface of the earth?  
Having leather on just the soles of my shoes  
Is equivalent to covering the earth with it.

##### 3. *Applying the analogy to the meaning*

Verse 5.14

Likewise it is not possible for me  
To counteract things externally;  
But should I counteract this mind of mine,  
What is the need for counteracting others?

The verse says that there is no way that you can eliminate all the external sources of harm even if you were to try. But when you can eliminate or counteract the inner enemy of anger, there is no need to counteract the external sources of harm. It is mentioned in the sutras that when one tames one's anger, the external enemy will be pacified. When anger is not tamed, external enemies will increase in number.

Cultivating patience is for the sake of subduing and pacifying our anger. The practice of patience is a practice of the mind.

*D. Joyous effort relies upon the mind*

Verse 5.15

Although the result of generating a clear mind  
Is Brahma and so forth,  
The results along with body and speech will be  
Weak in conduct, therefore it is not like that.

According to Gyaltsab Je, the explanation for this verse is this: the result of generating the mind of clear joy from meditating on the absorption of the first form realm is rebirth in the place of Brahma and so forth. When one does not have such a strong mind, the result of the mind that comes with the body and speech belongs to the class of behaviour or actions with less joy and one cannot be reborn in the first form realm. Therefore the completion of joyous effort depends on the mind.

The meaning is this: We have talked about the four concentrations (or meditative stabilisations) of the form and the four concentrations of the formless realms.

There are three abodes or three lands in the first concentration of the form realm.

In order to be reborn as a god in the first concentration of the form realm such as the land of Brahma and so forth, that rebirth must be preceded by a realisation of calm-abiding, a quality of the mind. Based on that, one gains access to a level of concentration and based on that, one achieves an actual concentration. All these qualities are dependent on the mind.

Without a clear mind such as a mind that has realised calm-abiding, without having gained access to a concentration and without actualising an actual concentration, it is not possible to be reborn in the form and formless realms such as the land of Brahma. Without the mental qualities of such a clear state of mind, virtue that is the result of the practices of body and speech alone cannot result in such a rebirth.

One can also explain a clear mind here to mean cultivating love and compassion. In short, they are the four immeasurables. It is through cultivating these minds that one can be reborn in the land of Brahma and so forth.

Without joyous effort and the mental qualities of such a clear state of mind, virtue that is the result of the practices of the body and speech cannot result in such a rebirth. One's actions of body and speech will be weak and as such, one's actions of body and speech alone cannot lead one to be reborn in the land of Brahma and so forth.

You accumulate virtue with your body, speech and mind. Enthusiasm is a mental quality. When there is strong enthusiasm for virtue, you accumulate strong virtuous karma. Due to the strong enthusiasm for the activity you are engaging in, it leaves an imprint on the mind.

But in the absence of such strong enthusiasm for virtue, even when you carry out

those virtuous actions with your body and speech, I wonder what is actually being accumulated? When you accumulate virtue with your body and speech with your strong enthusiasm for such activities, you are accumulating something. But in the absence of such enthusiasm for virtue, what exactly is being accumulated when you are just physically or verbally doing those actions?

This is an explanation of how all qualities are very much dependent on the mind.

What exactly is the entity of joyous effort? Joyous effort is a mind that has a virtuous object as its object of observation. It is a clear mind that has enthusiasm for the virtuous object that the joyous effort is focussing on.

In essence, in the context of this verse, the discussion is this: in order to be reborn in the form and formless realms, one must have a clear mind. As explained earlier, without this quality of a clear mind, it does not matter what virtue you create with your body and speech, there is no way to be reborn in these higher realms.

*E. Concentration relies upon the mind*

Verse 5.16

The Knower of Reality taught

That even if recitation and hardships

Are practiced for long periods of time,

They will be meaningless if the mind is distracted elsewhere.

You all know that in the process of carrying out whatever job, activities or tasks that you undertake, when your mind is not concentrated and focused, your heart is not in it and your mind is not there, nothing is accomplished. Even though you may complete the task, it may not be a job that is well done. This is quite clear from your own experiences.

The verse is saying that when you are doing your daily recitation, reciting mantras, undergoing austerities and putting up with hardships during a nyung-na, when those practices are done with a distracted mind, you will not achieve anything that is greatly meaningful. Regardless of how long you engage in those activities—and you may be doing them for a very long time—during the entire time when you are distracted, you will not achieve anything meaningful.

When you look at the words of this verse literally, the teachings are telling you that no matter what you do, as long as you do it with a distracted mind, all your practices including your daily prayers are meaningless.

*Khen Rinpoche: I don't know the expression in English for this. If you ask a guy to do a job such as heavy lifting and the guy cannot do it, normally people will say these negative words, "You are not a man." You know what I am saying? You have such an expression in English?*

There are such expressions, "You are not a human being as you can't do this. Are you human? You cannot even do that!" But of course the person you are referring to is obviously a human being.

Likewise here, the verse is saying that when you practice all these hardships and austerities for a long period of time with a distracted mind, they will be meaningless. Meaningless here does not mean that there is absolutely no benefit or absolutely no meaning. What it is driving at is that you will not achieve anything that is really meaningful.

In short, without a concentrated mind, without some level of attention and focus, the teachings are telling you that you will not achieve your purpose and goals. But when you focus on what you are doing single-pointedly, you will achieve your goals. So achieving your goals and purposes are dependent on your mind.

Practices like our daily recitations and daily prayers are methods for us to stabilise and focus the mind and they should become the methods for achieving these aims.

The Buddha said in one sutra, “Oh bhikshus, austerities, prayers and so forth that distract the mind towards the desire realms do not have a result.” This means that whatever practices and whatever virtuous activities of the body and speech you are engaged in, they have to be done without a distracted mind. Otherwise they will not bring about any great result.

*F. Wisdom relies upon the mind*

Verse 5.17

Even those who wish to obtain happiness and overcome suffering  
Will wander with no aim  
If they do not comprehend the secret of the mind –  
The principal Dharma

What is “the secret of the mind” mentioned in this verse? There are different ways to explain this phrase, “the secret of the mind.” The Dharma to be known, the Dharma to be learnt and the Dharma to be understood are none other than “the secret of the mind.” In this context, “the secret of the mind” is the mind’s emptiness of inherent existence.

When you take “the secret of the mind” to mean the mind’s emptiness of inherent existence or the mind’s emptiness of true existence, why is it a secret? Because you should not reveal the teachings of emptiness to unsuitable people whose minds are not ripe for that understanding. As such, it is a secret of the mind. This is one explanation.

The mind’s emptiness of inherent existence is a quality that every sentient being has. As long as one is a sentient being, that sentient being has a consciousness whose ultimate nature is its emptiness of existing inherently. Although this is the reality, most sentient beings do not know or do not realise the ultimate nature of the mind. As such, for them, it remains a secret.

The ultimate nature of all phenomena, including one’s mind, is their emptiness of inherent existence. All phenomena arise from this ultimate nature, this emptiness of inherent existence and as such, all phenomena are the display of emptiness.

The mind is like a mirror and all phenomena are appearances and reflections of the mind. They are creations of the mind.

This verse is talking about the principal or primary Dharma, i.e., the ultimate nature of all phenomena. Every phenomenon including the mind is empty of existing inherently. All phenomena are displays of emptiness and all external objects are creations of the mind. Understanding this fact constitutes the principal Dharma.

Without realising how all phenomena arise from emptiness and are displays of emptiness and how all external phenomena are projections or creations of the mind, one will not be able to achieve nirvana and peace and one will not be able to achieve full enlightenment.

When the highest school, the Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS), talks about external objects, they do not refute the existence of external objects. They do assert external objects. It is just that they assert external objects do not exist truly. Often when people hear the words, “external objects,” and when they think about external objects, they think that external objects are something that is separate from the mind, i.e., they exist from their own side, but this is not what an external object means according to the CMWS.

From the viewpoint of the CMWS, they assert external objects but they assert that external objects do *not* exist truly. They are *not* saying that external objects are the mind but that external objects are projections of the mind and as such are distinct entities from the mind.

Without realising this “secret of the mind,” there is no nirvana, no liberation and no omniscience. One would have to continue circling over and over again in cyclic existence. So in order to achieve nirvana and omniscience, one must understand and realise this “secret of the mind.”

Having some understanding of and reflecting on how phenomena are projections and creations of the mind is very helpful. One could relate this to the enemy, i.e., reflecting on how the enemy is a creation and projection of our own mind.

As we have seen before, the foundation of all problems is the apprehension of true existence. This is ignorance. In the perspective of this mind of ignorance, whatever appears appears to be truly existent or inherently existent. Furthermore we assent to this appearance and believe it to be so. With that belief as the basis, incorrect mental attention arises, exaggerating or deprecating the situation or the object. Based on such incorrect mental attention, this is how the object of attachment arises and how the object of hatred arises.

Because of our attachment and anger, we create the object of attachment and we create the enemy. This understanding is helpful for the mind. We understand how this object of attachment and this enemy are the creations of our own incorrect mental attention, of our own mind. There is no beautiful, pleasant and attractive object from the side of the object. Rather it is a projection of our attachment.

Likewise there is no enemy from the side of the object or the person. It is very important to understand how everything is the display of the mind and how everything is projected by the mind.

As discussed earlier in the context of anger, the external enemy is a projection, a creation of our anger. When there is no anger, there is no enemy. The enemy comes into existence because we are upset or we do not like something. But when there is no anger, nothing appears as an enemy. As such, there is no enemy. Even when someone does something bad to us because there is no projection of an enemy, it is as if there is no enemy at all. From this you can see how the enemy is a projection or creation of our own mind. But when there is anger, the enemy arises. When there is no anger, there is no labelling, “enemy.”

Similarly with attachment, the object of attachment is a projection of one’s attachment. Because one exaggerates the object, the object appears desirable in the view of that attachment. In the view of one’s attachment, there is an object of attachment that appears to be very attractive. In the absence of such attachment, there will be no attachment even though the object is there. Because there is no attachment, that pleasant object has nothing to appear to.

Even wisdom is a quality that is dependent on the mind. In this context, wisdom here refers to the wisdom realising selflessness and this wisdom is dependent on the mind. Without this wisdom, there is no nirvana and there is no omniscience.

#### *Explanation of hand gestures used in monastic debates*

By now many of you may have seen how a debate session is traditionally conducted in monasteries such as Sera Je.

The debate is carried out with certain hand gestures including the clapping of hands.

*Khen Rinpoche: Haven’t you seen this? You may think the monks are doing some kung fu!*

In debate, the challenger puts out his left hand with the palm facing upwards. He then raises his right hand and hits his left hand with the right.

*Khen Rinpoche: You must remember that. Tomorrow we need to debate!*

There is a symbolism behind that hand gesture depending on what is being visualised. The theory is this:

- One visualises that all the six types of migratory beings are on the palm of the left hand.
- The raised right hand is the sword of wisdom.
- When the right hand comes down on the left hand and claps, this symbolises the sword of wisdom cutting, destroying and eliminating the darkness of confusion or ignorance in the minds of the six types of migratory beings.
- Once that is done, one’s left palm faces downwards.
- Then one raises one’s right hand again with the palm facing towards oneself. This symbolises that having eliminated the ignorance of the six types of migratory

beings, one leads and guides them to enlightenment.

At the beginning of every debate session, when the hands are clapped, one will hear the debaters shouting DHIH very loudly. When one is debating for the very first time, one is supposed to recite OM AH RA PA DZA NA DHIH very quickly but as one claps one's hands, one recites DHIH loudly.

*Meaning of the syllables AH, RA, PA, DZA*

- AH refers to phenomena not being established by their own entities, i.e., it is referring to emptiness. There are the extensive, middling, short and condensed versions of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*. The condensed version is the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. The most condensed version is the perfection of wisdom expressed in a single letter, AH.

*Khen Rinpoche: If you know AH, that's it!*

- RA means that all phenomena are devoid of, separated from or free of dust. *Dust* here refers to true existence. This means that all phenomena are free from true existence, i.e., all phenomena are not truly existent.
- PA refers to the ultimate, i.e., the emptiness of all phenomena.
- Dza refers to no birth and no death. When we examine the ultimate nature of all phenomena, ultimately there is no production and there is no disintegration. As such, when one relates this to a human being or sentient being, ultimately there is no birth and ultimately there is no death.
- NA is explained as free of name.

*Khen Rinpoche: I do not know exactly what "free of name" means. Does it mean free of a label? It is merely labelled so it is free of a label? I'm not sure what the explanation is.*

I wonder how you can explain NA to be free from name or free from labelling. Yes, all phenomena are established in mere name but phenomena are not the names. Could that be the explanation of how all phenomena are "free of name"?

*Khen Rinpoche: Could we say that all phenomena are names or not?*

The CMWS asserts that all phenomena exist as mere names. Does that mean that all phenomena are names? If you say that phenomena are not names, then you can say that this is the meaning of "free of name."

Lama Tsongkhapa phrased it as, "free from name." But the question is what exactly does this mean? What is a name?

*Khen Rinpoche: What is a name?*

Among the three divisions of functioning things, is it a form, a consciousness or a non-associated compositional factor?



*Khen Rinpoche: Is name not form? I think name is form. I don't know.*

(Student's response is inaudible).

*Khen Rinpoche: So name is just a sound? Anyway it does not matter whatever it is!*

Right in the beginning, when one engages in the debate, as one makes the first clap, one recites OM AH RA PA DZA NA and end with DHIH quickly. This is the whole explanation of emptiness.

After DHIH comes the prayer, "May we come to realise the meaning of emptiness exactly as it is intended."

Next one observes the non-objectifying three circles. This means recognising that as one proceeds with the debate:

- One focuses on oneself, the debater, as not existing inherently.
- The opponent whom one is debating with does not exist inherently.
- The activity of debate itself does not exist inherently.

The motivation behind doing this kind of debate and analysis is to eliminate the darkness of confusion or ignorance in one's mind and in the mind of others but primarily, it is to eliminate the ignorance and confusion in one's own mind. Of course the goal is to realise the ultimate nature of reality.

Therefore from the beginning of one's formal entry into engaging in this whole exercise of debate, starting from the very first clap, one generates the motivation to be able to arrive at and settle the view of selflessness one day that can only be achieved when one's confusion or darkness of ignorance is removed. One engages in such debates with the intention to be able to realise the ultimate nature of reality, selflessness. Until this realisation is achieved, one will have to continue to circle in samsara and suffer.

Anyway that is the main intention behind engaging in debate. From the first day, one sets this motivation. Ideally this should be one's mindset all the time when one is engaging in such debates.

But often we are unable to continuously focus the mind on that intention, the mind becomes distracted and then the distinction between oneself as the challenger and the other as defender, i.e., I vs. you, arises. In the process, we get upset with one another during the debate. This becomes a condition for one to become very arrogant or very proud. This happens all the time.

In the course of engaging in such debates, it helps if one can maintain mindfulness on the fact that all phenomena do not exist inherently such as oneself and the person one is debating with. Such concentration and focus help the mind not to be distracted and to end up in a state of anger or pride.

Right from the very beginning, when one is formally entering into such debates, one

is introduced to the purpose behind such an exercise together with a brief statement of the meaning of emptiness.

In our context here, it is important to have the same kind of motivation whenever we engage in discussion. That exercise is also to help one another to eliminate the darkness of ignorance. Otherwise sometimes during the discussion, one may be unhappy with someone else's answers or questions. When that happens often, one's discussion partner becomes an enemy. Of course such things happen. At that time it is as if medicine has been transformed into poison and it loses its power to cure the sickness or disease.

It would be ideal if we can maintain the understanding of emptiness of inherent existence during discussion. If not, then as much as possible, one should remember in the back of one's mind that the point of the exercise is to help one another eliminate each other's ignorance.

If you can memorise and think about verse 5.17, it is quite helpful. Up to this particular verse, i.e., from verses 5.6 to 5.16, are the explanations of how all the faults and how all the positive qualities arise from the mind. The conclusion then is that since all the faults and all the qualities arise from the mind, it is essential to guard the mind.

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