

**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 22****24 April 2014**

Projections of the Mind. Chapter Five: Verses 5.17-5.25. 1. The method for guarding the trainings: guarding the mind. B. The reasons for that (cont'd). C. Making effort in guarding the mind. 2. The method for guarding the mind: guarding mindfulness and introspection

**PROJECTIONS OF THE MIND**

This is a verse from the Seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso:

All phenomena of both samsara and nirvana are the projections of conceptual thought. By apprehending phenomena to exist ultimately, we are deceived. As such, do not apprehend phenomena to be truly existent but rather see them as empty.

This verse is saying that everything in samsara—all the harms, all the problems—and everything about nirvana or liberation are the projections (or creations, fabrications) of the mind, i.e., they are all merely posited by thought.

So far what we have seen in the text are the descriptions of all the suffering and problems of this life and all the suffering and problems of future lives as projections of the mind. They all arise from the mind. These are the problems of samsara. This verse is saying that all sufferings and problems of samsara are the projections of the mind, i.e., they come into existence as something that is merely posited by thought.

Liberation (or nirvana) is also a quality that is dependent on the mind and is achieved through the mind. When we talk about non-abiding nirvana, it also comes from the mind.

In the last lesson, we saw how the six perfections are all qualities that are dependent on the mind. This includes the wisdom perceiving the ultimate nature of reality, the wisdom realising selflessness. This is also a quality that is dependent on the mind and is achieved through the mind.

The verse I quoted earlier is saying that everything in samsara and nirvana is the projection of the mind and is merely posited by conceptual thought. This is the reality of every phenomenon in both samsara and nirvana, i.e., they exist as merely designated or imputed by thought.

Although this is the reality, when everything that is included in both samara and nirvana appears back to us, it does *not* appear to us to be the creation of the mind or

designated or imputed by the mind. Rather it appears back to us as something that is existing from the side of the object, i.e., existing inherently from its own side. All phenomena in samsara and nirvana appear back to us in that way and we believe and accept that appearance. This is how we are deceived and cheated.

Just as in the example of the truly existent enemy we discussed before, in reality, our enemies are the projections and creations of our own mind. There is an enemy out there only because of our own anger so it is a creation of our own mind. When there is no anger from our side, the enemy—the person who harms us or bothers us—does not exist. But because we have anger, the enemy exists causing us pain and problems. There is the appearance of an enemy only from the perspective of our own anger. We then believe that the enemy exists.

Imagine a situation when you have no anger at all. Then no matter how that person harms you, it does not matter. As long as anger does not exist in your mind, the label, “enemy,” does not exist. It only exists when anger arises. It is clear from this example that the enemy is the creation of your own mind.

Furthermore, when the mind understands that the label, “enemy,” is a mere designation and is a projection of the mind, then there is no real enemy existing from the side of the object. The anger becomes very weak and powerless because there is no basis for you to be so upset.

But for you, there is the appearance of the enemy from its own side, which has nothing to do with your mind, i.e., the issue does not lie with you but lies completely with the object. All the problems exist from the side of the object so there is a real enemy existing right there. This is how the enemy appears back to your mind. The mind assents to the appearance and then believes in it. This is how strong anger arises. Therefore the verse says:

All the phenomena of both samsara and nirvana are the projections  
of conceptual thought. By apprehending phenomena to exist  
ultimately, we are deceived.

When we are deceived in such a way, we experience suffering.

The verse ends with:

As such, do not apprehend phenomena to be truly existent but  
rather see them as empty.

So do not believe in and assent to the mistaken appearance of inherent existence.

Do not assent to or believe in the mistaken appearance of the enemy existing from its own side but rather see it as a mere projection of the mind, looking instead at that appearance to be empty. Understand that that mistaken appearance is not reality and that it does not exist in the way it appears. Therefore it is empty.

Verses like the one that I just cited are quite useful. When you can memorise them

and reflect on them, it would be very useful for you. Likewise in the last class I mentioned it would be very useful for you to memorise and think about verse 5.17.

## **B. THE REASONS FOR THAT (cont'd)**

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

#### *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

The “secret of the mind” is “the principal Dharma.” Here the “secret of the mind” is the ultimate nature of the mind which is also the ultimate nature of all phenomena. The mind and all phenomena do not exist from their own side and they do not exist inherently, i.e., they are empty of existing inherently. This is the ultimate nature of the mind and all phenomena. Without understanding this, no matter what you do, you will always run into problems.

## **C. MAKING EFFORT IN GUARDING THE MIND**

### *1. Brief presentation*

Verse 5.18

This being so,  
I shall hold and guard my mind well.  
Except for the mode of conduct of guarding the mind,  
What use are many other modes of conduct?

As we had seen in the earlier sections of this chapter, all the suffering, problems and fears of this life and all the suffering, problems and fears that we will experience in future lives are the products of the mind. Likewise all the happiness and bliss of this life and all the happiness and bliss that we will experience in future lives are also the products of the mind. Therefore there is nothing that is more important than guarding the mind.

In order to guard the mind, we have to be mindful of what we need to cultivate and practise. We also need to be mindful of what we need to abandon and discard. Being mindful means not forgetting what we need to cultivate and not forgetting what we need to abandon.

Every now and then, we should apply introspection or vigilance and check what the mind is up to. This is how we guard our mind.

This verse says that we have to continually guard our mind without letting our mindfulness and introspection degenerate. There are many modes of conduct, behaviour and practice that we can undertake with our body and speech. But when we engage in such behaviour and practices with our body and speech while, at the same time, neglecting to guard the mind, what is the use of engaging in such conduct

when they will not bring about any great purpose?

We should understand from the very beginning that all the different modes of conduct, behaviour and practice that we engage in with our body and speech are methods for subduing the mind. We need to remember this from the very beginning. We should then ensure that ultimately our conduct, behaviour and practice have to benefit the mind and contribute towards the protection of the mind.

This verse is pointing out that when we neglect to guard and protect our mind, no matter how much effort we put in and no matter how much physical or verbal hardship we are enduring, we will not achieve any great purpose or experience any great benefit from our activities.

There are many people who mistakenly think, “There is no use doing practices such as prostrations, circumambulations and daily recitations. What is the point of doing them when they do not contribute to the betterment of the mind?” With that as the reason, they give up engaging in these activities. At the same time they are not doing anything with their mind, i.e., they are not working on guarding and protecting their mind. This is a huge mistake because they end up with nothing.

If you are not doing any of these practices with your body and speech but in reality you are really guarding and protecting your mind with mindfulness and introspection, perhaps something can be said for that. But most people end up with nothing. It is important not to end up like that.

It is important not to misinterpret the meaning of these verses, using them as reasons not to engage in any of these practices such as circumambulations or prostrations. You may say, “Shantideva said, ‘Except for the mode of conduct of guarding the mind,/ What use are many other modes of conduct?,’ so what is the point of doing them?”

Alternatively, people may quote verse 5.16 and say, “You can recite your prayers, engage in all sort of hardships for long periods of time but when you are doing all that with a distracted mind, what is the point?” When you use that reason to substantiate your wrong position, i.e., believing there is no point doing any of these activities anyway, you are wrong.

The intent of the Buddha behind these statements is that when you engage in these practices with a distracted mind, you will not achieve any great purpose. He did not say that you will not achieve anything at all. There are still some benefit. It is just that such activities done with a distracted mind will not yield their complete actual benefit but it is not as if you end up with nothing.

The point behind these verses is that there is a need to protect and guard our mind and to change our mind for the better. Such a positive change of the mind, such mental transformation, comes from within and depends on the mind. Therefore it is important to guard the mind.

## 2. Extensive explanation

### A. The way to guard the mind

#### Verse 5.19

Just as I would be attentive and conscientious of a wound  
 When amidst an unruly, freed crowd,  
 So I should always guard the wounds of my mind  
 When dwelling among negative people.

Imagine you are going to a place that is full of people who you know are quite careless and not conscientious. They do not have much mindfulness nor are they vigilant. If you have an injury or an open wound and have no choice but to go among such people, you would be very careful and be on the constant lookout to make sure that they would not hurt your wound. You will do everything you can to protect yourself.

Likewise, this verse is saying that when you have to go into a crowd and mix with people, there will always be people who will agitate you or who may stir up your attachment. In those situations, you have to be careful and rely constantly on mindfulness and introspection to guard the mind against anger and attachment.

You have to apply introspection and check, “Am I developing anger because there are such people around?” or “Is my desire or attachment arising because of all these objects of attachment around me?”

When you are not mindful and you do not apply introspection when you are mixing with people, then when you come into contact with an undesirable object, you will get upset and angry. When you come into contact with a desirable or pleasant object, there is the danger that you may develop strong desire and attachment. Of course, when you are upset or your attachment arises, you suffer so much pain. Therefore you have to guard your mind.

The teachings say that ideally beginners should dwell in isolation, staying far away from objects of anger and staying far away from objects of desire. This is especially so in the beginning when one is training one’s mind because the mind is still weak. When one meets with the object, the mind is affected and changes immediately. In order to make the initial training a little easier and more stable, beginners should live in hermitages, in isolation or live alone to give oneself some space to work with the mind. The reason of course is that one needs to protect and guard the mind.

For beginners, the mind is so easily affected by the external environment. When one meets with an object of anger or attachment, the mind is affected immediately and becomes angry or attached. So if one really wants to tame and subdue one’s mind—one will always see this advice in the teachings—ideally, one should live in isolation or go on retreat in order to tame the mind.

When we look at the advice for those who want to develop calm abiding, in order to develop calm abiding, one’s mind needs to be free of mental chatter and discursive thoughts. One needs to have as few discursive thoughts as possible so that one can develop calm abiding. Therefore one needs to develop calm abiding in isolation, by

isolating oneself from the hustle and bustle of a busy life.

*B. The reasons it is necessary to guard it*

Why is it necessary to guard the mind in such a way?

Verse 5.20

If I am conscientious of a wound  
Through fear of the small suffering of a wound,  
Then why do I not guard the wounds of my mind  
Through fear of being crushed by the mountains of Mass  
Destruction?

The verse starts with a worldly analogy. When you happen to have an injury or an open wound, if something bad comes into contact with the wound, you will suffer tremendously with a lot of pain. Therefore you are usually very careful when you have an open wound and you will do everything you can to protect it. You will be very mindful and you will apply introspection in protecting your wound.

You are so conscientious with regard to protecting your wound. But you are not mindful and you do not apply introspection when it comes to guarding your mind. Instead you end up following after the negative mind and accumulating negativities that will result in so much suffering in future lives such as the sufferings in the lower realms. Therefore you should place greater attention into guarding the wound of your mind.

Recalling Verse 5.7,

Who intentionally created  
The weapons of hell beings?  
Who created the burning iron ground?  
From what did all those hosts of women ensue?

All these unbelievable sufferings of the lower realms and the hell realms are the results of and come from the untamed negative mind. Since you do not want these sufferings, you have to stop the negative mind by guarding the mind.

*C. The benefits of guarding it*

Verse 5.21

Should I behave in such a way,  
Then whether among negative people  
Or even in the midst of women,  
The steady effort of restraint will not decline.

People who are constantly mindful and vigilant are able to maintain their trainings in any situation and will not be affected by them. They are also very stable in those situations. So when you are constantly mindful and vigilant, it does not matter what kind of situation you are in.

You can be in a situation where there are many negative people or where there are many objects of desire and attachment such as women and so forth. But when you are constantly mindful and vigilant, it does not matter what the situation may be. It will not affect your practice of restraining or taming your mind.

The verse here says, “... even in the midst of women.” Shantideva was a monk and a man. From the male perspective, generally speaking, women are objects of attachment or desire. But it is not just about women. If you are a female, then you have to apply, “... even in the midst of men.”

This is the benefit. The verse is saying that when you are able to be mindful and vigilant continuously, then it does not matter what situation you are in. You will be able to keep your trainings and keep your vows.

*D. Devoting oneself to mindfulness in order to guard the mind*

Verse 5.22

It is better to be without gain,  
Honor, body, and sustenance,  
And it is better to let other virtues degenerate,  
Rather than ever to let the mind degenerate.

According to Gyaltshab Je’s commentary, it is a small matter not to have any gain, honour or respect from people and not to have any possessions or sources of sustenance. Even if you hardly engage in virtuous actions of the body and speech and even if those practices should degenerate, it is a small matter.

But it is a serious matter if you were to allow your mind to degenerate. Here degenerating the mind means that you let your good heart, your bodhicitta, degenerate. That should never degenerate because you have to remember that in the context of our discussion here, we are talking about protecting and guarding the mind and the context of the bigger picture of cultivating the altruistic intention, bodhicitta. Allowing your mind to degenerate will result in a great loss.

Verses 5.18 – 5.22 show us why we need to strive in guarding the mind.

## **2. THE METHOD FOR GUARDING THE MIND: GUARDING MINDFULNESS AND INTROSPECTION**

*A. Brief presentation*

Verse 5:23

To you who wish to guard your minds,  
I thus fold my hands [and urge you],  
“At the cost of your life, guard  
Mindfulness and introspection!”

Prior to this verse, there was already an explanation of all the problems that come from not guarding the mind and the reasons why it is important to do so. We have completed that section.

Now Shantideva is imploring and urging his followers to guard their mindfulness and introspection even at the cost of their lives. He is asking those who believe in him and who wish to follow him not to let their mindfulness of virtue degenerate and not to let their introspection degenerate.

Likewise with folded hands, Shantideva is urging us to guard our mindfulness and introspection. He is not showing his respect for or faith in us with his folded hands but rather it is a gesture of showing his understanding of the importance of guarding one's mindfulness and introspection. He is emphasising how important they are.

*B. Extensive explanation*

The extensive explanation has two points:

1. the disadvantages of lacking introspection
2. guarding mindfulness as a method of guarding introspection

The disadvantages of lacking introspection have five points:

1. If one is separated from mindfulness and introspection, any action one performs has little force
2. Wisdom will not become pure
3. Ethics will not become pure
4. Virtues accumulated in the past will be destroyed
5. The accomplishment of virtues not previously performed will be hindered

*1. The disadvantages of lacking introspection*

- A. If one is separated from mindfulness and introspection, any action one performs has little force*

Verse 5.24

People who are disturbed by sickness

Lack strength in all actions.

Likewise, the minds disturbed by confusion

Lack strength in all actions.

Those who are sick find it difficult to go to work and even if they do go to work, probably they will not be able to do a good job. Likewise the virtuous actions of those whose minds are confused or disturbed by ignorance will have little power.

The functions of mindfulness and introspection are different:

- The function of mindfulness is non-forgetfulness, i.e., to allow us not to forget what we are supposed to do and not to forget what virtue and non-virtue are.
- The function of introspection is to enable us to know whether a particular action that we are going to do or that we are engaging in is correct or incorrect.

When we engage in an action without applying introspection, we will not be able to tell whether the action is good or bad. Then obviously that action will have little power. The verse here is saying that when there is no introspection, the virtuous action one is engaging in will have little power or efficacy.

*B. Wisdom will not become pure*

Verse 5.25



Whatever has been heard, contemplated, and meditated  
By those whose minds lack introspection,  
Just like water in a leaking vase,  
Will not remain in mindfulness.

When one lacks introspection, one will not generate pure wisdom. The verse is saying that in the absence of introspection, whatever wisdom one may develop will slowly degenerate or disappear as the mind tends to wander and be easily distracted.

When one is not vigilant, even when one manages to develop some wisdom, such as the wisdoms arising from hearing, reflection and perhaps even from meditation, these different wisdoms will slowly degenerate and disappear.

The analogy of a leaking vase is used in this verse. This is to highlight the fact that when a vase has holes or cracks in its bottom, no matter how much water one pours in, slowly the water will just trickle away.

The verse is also telling us that having mindfulness alone is not sufficient. One needs to have introspection and be vigilant. In this context, without introspection, even the wisdom one develops will slowly degenerate and disappear.

#### **QUESTION POSED BY KHEN RINPOCHE**

Think about this. Remember actualising karma from the twelve links? The teachings mention that this actualising karma has to be nourished by craving and grasping.

So where do you draw the line between an actualising karma that is nourished by craving and grasping and an actualising karma that is not nourished by craving and grasping? Where is the boundary between these two?

The point is this: the actualising karma has to be nourished by craving and grasping before death comes. So does it happen one month before we die, one week before we die, on the day we die or one minute before we actually die?

*Khen Rinpoche: You all know the twelve links. Haven't all of you graduated from the twelve links? I think you are clear about the question, aren't you?*

*No? I think I will have to teach the twelve links again!*

In other words, when is the actualising karma activated? Being born as a human being is a rebirth in the desire realms and is activated by craving and grasping. So to be born as a human being, when is that karma nourished by craving and grasping?

Is the craving and grasping that activate the karma to be born as a human being virtue or non-virtue? Is the desire or attachment of the desire realms virtue or non-virtue?

*Khen Rinpoche: Is it non-virtue or virtue? Attachment is virtue or non-virtue? No doubt it is non-virtue. You have to accept that it is non-virtue. It cannot be virtue.*

It follows then that it is actually a non-virtue, which activates the karma that causes us to be reborn as a human being, i.e., it is a good rebirth. So non-virtue plays a very important part as it brings together the conditions for us to be born as a human being.

It seems then that a non-virtuous mind has brought about a good rebirth. How is that so? If that is the case, then at the time of death, you do not have to worry about dying with non-virtuous thoughts and you do not need to put in so much effort to die with virtuous thoughts.

*Khen Rinpoche: Are you getting my question? You must get the question that I am asking you.*

The question is that the karma to be born as a human being is necessarily nourished or activated by craving and grasping. But craving and grasping are afflictions and are non-virtues. Are we then saying that a good rebirth can be the result of and be brought about by non-virtue?

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