

**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 23****29 April 2014**

All phenomena are merely imputed by thought. Chapter Five: Verses 5.26-5.37 a, b. 2. The method for guarding the mind: guarding mindfulness and introspection (cont'd). B. Extensive explanation. 2.1. The disadvantages of lacking introspection. 2.2. Guarding mindfulness as a method of guarding introspection. 3. The way to train in the conduct of guarding the mind by means of mindfulness and introspection.

*Questions* posed by Khen Rinpoche in the last lesson:

- Why are the twelve links of dependent origination placed in a particular order?
- How does craving and grasping nourish the karma?

*Student:* The twelve links of dependent origination are placed in a particular order for the purpose of meditation.

*Khen Rinpoche:* What if someone were to ask you: If the actual sequence in which the links operate is not the same, what is the reason for not using this order but presenting the order in that particular way for meditation purposes?

*Student:* I do not have the answer to that.

But regarding the question on how craving and grasping, which are non-virtuous, nourish the actualising karma, I think the answer is the grasping to the “I”. When we experience the process of the twelve links and we go through the death process, at the time of death, we have this innate grasping of the “I” that will nourish potential existence. Because of this strong grasping at the “I”, we have a strong attachment to having another rebirth.

*Khen Rinpoche:* When does that happen?

*Student:* I am not very sure. In order for the throwing karma into a human rebirth to operate, we need to have virtuous projecting karma. With the two causes, the projecting causes and the actualising causes, we have a human rebirth.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Is everyone listening? What is the question? What is the answer?

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**ALL PHENOMENA ARE MERELY IMPUTED BY THOUGHT**

Aryadeva’s *Four Hundred Verses* states,

Because thought exists, therefore phenomena exist.

Essentially, phenomena cannot exist when there is no thought merely positing phenomena. An existent that is not merely posited or merely imputed by thought is like a person in a dream, a dream person. It is important for us to understand that all phenomena are merely posited or merely imputed by thought.

An existent that is not merely imputed by thought is likened to an illusory elephant or a dream person. What exactly is a dream person? A dream person is nothing more than the mere appearance of that person to the dream consciousness, i.e., a mistaken consciousness. There is nothing else that you can call a dream person other than this mere appearance. When the dream consciousness ceases to exist, the dream person will also not appear nor will it exist.

When you think of the example of mistaking a coil of rope to be a snake, the appearance of the snake to that mistaken consciousness that misperceives the coil of rope to be a snake is nothing more than a mere appearance to that mistaken mind. It is nothing more than that.

When we talk about a dream person or the snake that is wrongly imputed on a coil of rope, there is an appearance of a dream person and there is an appearance of a snake. How do they actually exist? Their manner of existence is none other than their appearances to the respective consciousnesses that perceive them. They are nothing more than that.

The dream person cannot exist without the mistaken dream consciousness that it is appearing to. It has to depend on that dream consciousness, i.e., a dream person is just that mere appearance to the dream consciousness. From this example, it is very clear that without depending on the dream consciousness, you cannot posit or talk about a dream person.

Just like this example, when you talk about form, sound, smell, taste and touch, all these are nothing more than mere appearances to the thought that apprehends them. Form, sound, smell, taste and touch are posited by their mere appearance to thought. Without form, sound, smell, taste and touch appearing to thought, you cannot posit them.

We have to think about this using the earlier analogies. We can use form as an example. You cannot posit form without depending on the thought that form appears to. What is form? Form is none other than that which is merely imputed by the thought it appears to.

In short, nothing can exist without being posited by thought. When you point to something that can exist without being merely imputed by thought, this leads to the fallacy that that particular object or phenomena in question is truly existent or exists from its own side. There cannot be a form that exists without being merely imputed by thought. As such, form is something that is merely imputed by thought.

It is essential, on a regular basis, to think about how all phenomena are merely posited by thought but this is a challenging task.

Form is posited as none other than that which appears to the thought apprehending form. It is merely imputed by the thought consciousness apprehending it. As it is established and imputed by thought to be form, form exists as form.

What is the difference then between form and a dream person? They are similar in that both form and a dream person are merely imputed by thought, i.e., they are merely posited through their appearance to the consciousness apprehending them. But while form is form, a dream person is not a person. One is an existent, i.e., form exists but a dream person does not exist as a person.

What determines that something is an existent while others are not as in this case of the dream person not being a person? This requires much further thought.

What I have stated is a brief explanation of how all phenomena are merely imputed by thought. I have tried to explain it briefly through the use of an analogy. First, I gave you an analogy and then I try to apply the analogy to the meaning. By using the analogy of a dream person, a dream person is none other than a mere appearance to the mistaken dream consciousness that it appears to. There is nothing that one can posit to be a dream person other than that.

This analogy is to help you understand how all phenomena are merely imputed by thought. Whether it is form, sound, smell, taste and touch, they are merely posited through their appearance to the thought consciousness apprehending them. It is important to constantly think about how all phenomena are merely imputed by thought by using these analogies.

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In the last lesson, we saw how our wisdom will degenerate when we fail to apply mindfulness and introspection (or vigilance). There are many kinds of wisdom: the wisdom arising from hearing, the wisdom arising from reflection and the wisdom arising from meditation. When we look at the knowledge that we may have gained through the course of our studies, it is subject to degeneration and can be forgotten when we do not exercise mindfulness and introspection.

We need to remember whatever we have heard or learnt. We need to be mindful of the knowledge that we have gained otherwise we will forget them. This is why there are people who say that they have done a fair bit of studying but they do not remember what they have learnt. This is a clear sign that they have not applied mindfulness.

## **2. THE METHOD FOR GUARDING THE MIND: GUARDING MINDFULNESS AND INSTROSPECTION (cont'd)**

### *B. Extensive explanation*

#### *1. The disadvantages of lacking introspection*

*C. Ethics will not become pure*

Verse 5.26

Even those who have plenty of hearing,  
Faith and diligent endeavour  
Will become sullied by a downfall  
Due to the fault of lacking introspection.

When one lacks introspection, one will not be able to develop pure ethics.

This verse is saying that when you have done extensive studies, you will know the essential points of your practice with regard to what you have to cultivate and what you have to abandon. On top of that, you have faith in karma and its effects and you may be joyously exerting effort in your practice. To a certain extent, you may have these qualities.

Even when one has all these qualities but if one does not have mindfulness and introspection, one's ethics will degenerate. When one is not careful, attachment and desire will creep into the mind, one's ethics will degenerate and one becomes stained by downfalls.

The point behind this verse is the great need for introspection for without it, the virtues that one has accumulated can be destroyed.

*D. Virtues accumulated in the past will be destroyed.*

Verse 5.27

The thieves of non-introspection,  
In following upon the degeneration of mindfulness,  
Will steal even the merits I have firmly gathered  
[So that] I shall then proceed to lower realms.

Attachment and anger are likened to robbers and jealousy and pride are likened to thieves. The verse is saying that when one lacks introspection, the inner robbers and thieves of attachment, anger, jealousy and so forth will sneak into our mind and steal our merit just as robbers and thieves plunder the wealth and possessions of others. When our merit are stolen by these inner robbers and thieves, when our merit is depleted, we will not be able to get a good rebirth and we will end up being reborn in the lower realms.

*E. The accomplishment of virtues not previously performed will be hindered*

Verse 5.28

This host of thieves of the afflictions  
Will search for a good opportunity and occasion.  
Having found it, they will steal my virtue  
And destroy even life in a good migration.

With the lack of introspection, besides depleting the merit one has accumulated, it will also hinder the cultivation of new virtues.

Before robbers strike, they usually size up their victims and the situation first. They

look at their targets, analysing whether they will be able to overcome them and rob them of their wealth. When they think that they are able to do this, they will then look for a suitable time, analysing whether it is better to strike in the day or night. After much consideration and having determined that they are likely to succeed, only then will the robbers strike.

Likewise the inner robbers and thieves of anger, attachment, jealousy and pride are always on the lookout to see when they can harm us. Once an opportunity arises, they manifest readily. When they manifest, even when we are in the midst of doing something virtuous, they will stop and prevent us from accumulating virtue.

The afflictions are likened to robbers who are always on the lookout. When they find an opportunity, they strike and deprive us of our merit and deprive us of a good rebirth.

Verse 5.26 talks about how, in the absence of introspection, the merit we have accumulated in the past could be destroyed.

Here verses 5.27 and 5.28 are saying that when we lack introspection, we will not be able to cultivate new virtue, i.e., we will not be able to accumulate virtue that we have not accumulated earlier.

This concludes the explanation of the disadvantages of lacking introspection. The next section is the method for guarding our introspection through guarding our mindfulness.

## 2. *Guarding mindfulness as a method of guarding introspection*

### A. *Brief presentation*

Verse 5.29

Therefore, I shall never let mindfulness depart

From the doorway of my mind.

If it goes, I should recall the harms of the lower realms

And closely place it there.

Here guarding mindfulness is said to be the method for guarding our introspection.

When you talk about the mind as being a house, there will be an entrance. In order to protect the house, you usually place a guard at the entrance. The guard here is mindfulness.

What are you guarding the house against? You are guarding the house of the mind to check whether the mind is engaging erroneously with the object or not, just as you would place a guard at the entrance in order to check whether there are any robbers or thieves approaching or not.

Here the mindfulness is like the guard that stops the mind from being distracted, attaching and involving itself with objects such as form, sound and so forth. When we discover that the mind is distracted by different kinds of objects, engaging them erroneously, then we have to mindfully pull the mind back to a virtuous object of

observation.

By thinking, “If I do not pull my mind back and just let it go astray, I would have to suffer in the lower realms,” you pull back the attention of the mind, place it on a virtuous object of observation and be mindful of that, i.e., when mindfulness degenerates, you have to bring the attention of the mind back to a virtuous object of observation.

Next is the extensive explanation of how guarding mindfulness is the method for guarding introspection. This has three parts:

1. The external condition: relying on the virtuous spiritual teacher
2. The internal condition: having correct mental attention
3. The way alertness is developed through mindfulness

*B. Extensive explanation*

*1. The external condition: relying on the virtuous spiritual teacher*

Verse 5.30

Through the company of gurus,  
Through the subsequent teachings of abbots, and through fear,  
Mindfulness will easily be generated  
In fortunate people who act respectfully.

For beginners, a method to guard their mindfulness, which is still unstable, is to be in the proximity of virtuous friends, their gurus or to mix with friends who are abiding in the pure trainings. The qualified guru shows what is to be abandoned and what is to be cultivated. The trainee or the disciple has to put that into practice correctly.

*2. The internal condition: having correct mental attention*

Verse 5.31

“I am always dwelling in the presence  
Of all those buddhas and bodhisattvas  
Who are endowed  
With unimpeded vision in all.”

Verse 5.32 a, b

By thinking in this way,  
I shall likewise obtain possession of shame, respect, and fear.

The verse is telling us that we should always remind ourselves that the buddhas and bodhisattvas are always around us and with their unimpeded vision, they can see everything we are doing. Therefore they know when we are engaging in non-virtue. We cannot pretend otherwise and cheat them, thinking that they would not see what we have been up to. Keeping that in mind, we restrain ourselves from non-virtue.

We should think that we are in their presence all the time. Just as we are about to engage in non-virtue, out of consideration for ourselves and feeling a sense of shame, we should abstain from committing non-virtues. Out of respect for our training and generating a sense of embarrassment, we should abstain from non-virtue on account of others and fear the consequences of engaging in non-virtue.

This is how we can protect and guard our mindfulness and introspection.

*Khen Rinpoche: I went to someone's house once. She had some pictures of His Holiness and some other gurus in the room. She would put the pictures inside the cupboard and cover them up.*

*So I asked her, "Why do you cover them up?" She said, "I need to watch TV at night but sometimes the TV is showing something that is not so good." She thought it would not be appropriate so she covered up and locked up the pictures.*

*As I knew her well, I told her, "Even if you cover them up, they will still see so it is better not to cover them up." I just made fun of her!*

When you have a good understanding of what the buddhas really are, understanding that they are omniscient and mindful that the buddhas have unimpeded vision of everything that exists, that they are there and can see you all the time, it makes a huge difference to your practice of restraint from non-virtue.

### 3. *The way introspection is developed through mindfulness*

#### A. *The way mindfulness arises*

Verse 5.32 c, d

Also through doing this,

Recollection of the Buddha will repeatedly occur.

When you are able to remember the buddhas in the way suggested in the previous verse, i.e., by recalling that the buddhas are omniscient, that they are always there, that they see everything we do and so forth, then we will be able to remember also the Dharma and the Sangha. With this habit of remembering them, it is said that one will easily generate mindfulness of the Three Jewels.

#### B. *The way introspection arises from that*

Verse 5.33

When mindfulness abides for the purpose

Of guarding against [afflictions] from the doorway of the mind,

Then introspection will come about

And even that which had gone will return.

When you place the guard of mindfulness of not forgetting what is to be cultivated and what is to be discarded at the doorway of your mind, it is said that the introspection investigating whether your body, speech and mind are actually engaging in non-virtue or not will naturally arise. When you have such strong mindfulness placed at the door of your mind, even when your introspection degenerates a little, you will be able to bring back easily the introspection you have lost.

When you have strong and continual mindfulness, you will be able to stop the mind from being distracted from the object of observation and from remaining distracted for a long time without even realising it. This will not happen. When there is strong mindfulness, the introspection that checks and investigates whether the mind is distracted or not will arise of its own accord.

The point is that when mindfulness degenerates, it is more difficult to have introspection. It is more difficult to be aware that one's mind is already distracted. But when there is strong mindfulness, it is much easier to be vigilant, i.e., it is much easier to catch the mind straying away from the object of observation.

Verse 5.33 goes with the outline, "The way introspection arises from that." *That* is referring to mindfulness. When there is strong mindfulness, introspection follows naturally and easily. This is the point.

We have finished with the section on the manner of generating the inner condition of mindfulness and introspection.

What follows is the way to train in the conduct of guarding the mind by means of mindfulness and introspection. This has three major outlines:

- A. The way to train in the ethics of refraining from negative actions
- B. The way to train in the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas
- C. The way to train in the ethics of working for the benefit of sentient beings

The way to train in the ethics of refraining from negative actions or the ethics of restraint will be covered in two parts:

1. Making effort to purify all conduct of the three doors
2. Guarding against all deterioration

Making effort to purify all conduct of the three doors is in turn covered in three parts:

- A. Examining the conduct of body and speech
- B. Examining the conduct of the mind
- C. Explaining the contexts for permitted and prohibited actions

Examining the conduct of body and speech is covered in four points:

1. Examining one's motivation before acting with the body
2. Advice related to actions like looking, etc
3. Application to other behaviours
4. Examining the posture

### **3. THE WAY TO TRAIN IN THE CONDUCT OF GUARDING THE MIND BY MEANS OF MINDFULNESS AND INTROSPECTION**

- A. *The way to train in the ethics of refraining from negative actions*
  1. *Making effort to purify all conduct of the three doors*
    - A. *Examining the conduct of body and speech*
      1. *Examining one's motivation before acting with the body*

Verse 5.34

When, at the beginning,  
Having known that such a mind is with fault,  
At such a time, like a piece of wood,  
I should remain being able to rely [upon the antidote].

Before carrying out an action with our body or speech, first we should investigate



what is the motivation of our wanting to engage in that particular action. Is it virtuous or non-virtuous? Upon checking our motivation, if we discover that it is non-virtuous with the understanding that if we were to proceed with that action, it would bring about negative consequences in this life and our future lives, we should restrain ourselves thoroughly, i.e., we should abide firmly. *Abiding firmly* here means restraining or stopping ourselves from doing that action with our body or speech.

We should not follow through with that intention, restrain ourselves and, at the same time, we should try to eradicate those non-virtuous thoughts.

Most of our physical and verbal actions are manifestations of our thoughts. As such, we should remain mindful and vigilant because when we act out our thoughts physically and verbally, this will lead to negative consequences and we will hurt or harm others.

This verse is advising us to investigate and examine our motivation. When examining our motivation, if we discover that it is a non-virtuous motivation that is making us want to commit that action with our body and speech, we should restrain and stop ourselves from acting out those thoughts.

## 2. *Advice related to actions like looking etc.*

### A. *A general presentation of where to direct one's gaze*

Verse 5.35

Never should I look around  
Distractedly for no purpose.  
With a resolute mind  
I should always keep my eyes cast downwards.

The verse is saying that at all times, we should not look at things that are not in accord with the Dharma, things that are meaningless and pointless and things that will cause our minds to be distracted. While keeping the mind focussed on a chosen virtuous object of observation, physically one's gaze should not be placed beyond the space that is just in front of us, i.e., one should not be looking around and looking afar.

Why is there this advice of focusing our gaze in the area in front of us rather than looking elsewhere? Because when we look around in a distracted manner and we are unable to hold the mind on a virtuous object of observation, then when our gaze happens to fall upon an object of desire or upon an object or person that upsets us, incorrect mental attention will arise. This in turn brings about the manifestation of the afflictions, causing suffering and problems.

Therefore at a mental level, we have to be mindful and not forget the chosen virtuous object of observation. Physically we should look at the space in front of us without looking around and without looking afar.

### B. *How to act when fatigued*

Verse 5.36 a,b

But in order to relax the gaze  
For a short while I should look around.

While the behaviour mentioned in the earlier verse should be adopted at all times, but at times when one is feeling tired and exhausted, if one were to keep looking at things in that manner, one may end up feeling very disturbed. At those times when one needs a rest, one can occasionally look further ahead and look around without losing one's mindfulness of the virtuous object of observation.

*C. How to act when in the presence of other beings*

Verse 5.36 c,d

If someone appears in my field of vision  
I should look at him and say, "It's good that you have come."

Verse 5.37 a,b

To check if there is any danger on the path and so forth  
I should look again and again in the four directions.

In the course of adopting such a physical demeanour—not looking far but usually casting your gaze downwards—if for whatever reason, someone were to appear before you, rather than pretending that you did not see him or her because you are engaging in this mode of conduct, you should acknowledge the presence of the person. The text says you should greet the person and say, "It is good that you have come," or you can acknowledge the presence of the person by saying, "Hello," or, "Welcome."

If you were to walk down a dangerous road where you may encounter robbers or wild animals and you persist in looking downwards as you walk, you are likely to end up in trouble. In such dangerous places, you have to be vigilant and be aware of your surroundings by looking around. But it does not mean that as you look around you allow yourself to be mentally distracted. You can look around but you should never be mentally distracted.

These are all advice pertaining to the need for constant mindfulness and awareness.

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*Question:* With regard to the term, "merely imputed by thought," is "thought" here synonymous with the mind or consciousness or are we referring specifically to the conceptual consciousness? In *lorig*, we tend to use "thought" or "thought consciousness" interchangeably with "conceptual consciousness." Can I just use, "merely imputed by mind"?

*Answer:* In the treatises, sometimes it is written as "merely imputed by mind."

At other times, for example in Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*, it is written as "merely imputed by thought." You may also see the term, "merely imputed by name," and sometimes you see the phrase, "in the nature of mind."

In the phrase, “merely imputed by thought,” can we take “thought” here to be the “thought” that is mentioned in the study of mind and awareness (lorig) where consciousness is divided into the conceptual and the non-conceptual? In lorig, there is the definition of the conceptual mind as a mind that apprehends a sound generality and a meaning generality as suitable to be mixed.

When we talk about “thought,” thought only exists at the level of sentient beings.

Is there any issue or problem with identifying this “thought” to be conceptual thought or conceptuality? In the case of a sentient being, the state of mind in the continuum of a sentient being is either conceptual or non-conceptual, isn’t it? In the phrase, “merely labelled by thought,” I personally think there should not be a problem with identifying “thought” in the phrase, “merely labelled by thought,” to be conceptuality or the conceptual consciousness.

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### **SHARING SESSION ON THE MEDITATION PROGRAM**

There will be sharing session on Sunday, 4th May 2014 at 1.30pm for those who have committed to the meditation program. During this sharing session, you can talk about your experiences, how it is going so far, problems you may be encountering and so forth. The session will last for about 1 ½ hours.

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Patricia Lee & Julia Koh; edited by Cecilia Tsong.