

**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 24**6 May 2014**

Chapter Five: Verses 5.37 c, d - 5.54. 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. 2. Guarding against all deterioration. A. Guarding against deterioration in the training of the body.

We have been talking about guarding our mind with mindfulness and introspection. In the context of this text, we have to guard our training in the bodhisattva deeds with mindfulness and introspection. With regard to our training, this refers primarily to guarding our training in ethics (or ethical discipline). As you know, there are three types of ethics:

1. the ethics of refraining from negative actions (or the ethics of restraint)
2. the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas
3. the ethics of working for the benefit of sentient beings

We are now looking at the ethics of refraining from negative actions. With regard to this particular ethics of restraint, in this text, Shantideva talks about keeping our behaviour and actions of our body, speech and mind pure.

**3. THE WAY TO TRAIN IN THE CONDUCT OF GUARDING THE MIND BY MEANS OF
MINDFULNESS AND INTROSPECTION (cont'd)**

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*

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

D. *How to act when resting*

Verse 5.37 **c, d**

To rest, I should turn my head around
And then look behind me.

Prior to this, there was a discussion of how we should look at our surroundings. We were advised not to look about in a distracted way but rather, we should cast our gaze downwards towards the space in front of us. Why is this so? For if we were to look around, there is the danger that the mind will be distracted by some objects.

“To rest, I should turn my head around/ And then look behind me.”: This is in the context of being in a dangerous area where there may be wild animals or robbers around. When we are adopting the physical demeanour of not looking around us but

just looking ahead by gazing downwards, when we are tired, we can take a rest. But if we see some danger behind us, we should continue to move forward. However if we see some danger ahead of us, obviously we have to move backward.

Khen Rinpoche: Shantideva is teaching you how to move and how to walk.

3. Application to other behaviours

Verse 5.38

Having examined both ahead and behind,
I should proceed to either come or go.
Being aware of the necessity
I should act like this in all situations.

For ordained people, whether they are in the monastery, going to town, seated in a prayer session, eating, walking, talking and so forth, whether they are doing something to benefit themselves or others, this is the kind of conduct that they are supposed to engage in.

The point here is that with regard to whatever activities one may be engaged in, one is supposed to do so with a mind of introspection. When one is a Dharma practitioner, this is what one has to do whether one is eating, walking, sitting, sleeping and so forth. One should engage in these actions with introspection.

4. Examining the posture

Verse 5.39

Having prepared for an action with the thought,
“My body will remain in such a way,”
Then periodically I should look to see
“How is the body abiding?”

For example, when we are engaged in a practice session, right from the beginning of the session, we are seated in the sevenfold posture of Vairocana. We generate the intention to remain seated in that posture throughout the entire session. Only then do we start our session. But that does not mean that we will necessarily be able to remain seated in that posture throughout the session. So every now and then, we should investigate with introspection to check whether we are sitting in the correct posture or not.

We have now finished the section on examining the conduct of the body and speech. Next we have to examine the conduct of the mind itself.

B. Examining the conduct of the mind

1. Focusing the mind on a virtuous object

Verse 5.40

With utmost effort I should check
To see that the crazed elephant of my mind
Is not wandering off but is bound
To the great pillar of thinking about the Dharma.

Here the untamed and crazy elephant is used as an analogy. When we have such an untamed and crazy elephant on our hands, it is extremely important to tie it up to a strong pillar to prevent it from doing what it wishes and causing a lot of damage.

Our untamed and unsubdued mind is likened to this untamed and crazy elephant. We have an unsubdued mind that is afflicted with anger, attachment and other afflictions, yet we do not fasten our mind to a virtuous object of observation by using mindfulness and introspection. Rather we allow this untamed mind to wander off to wherever it wishes to go. Then when the untamed and unsubdued mind comes into contact with an object that causes it to be upset or to be attached to it, that will lead to the accumulation of all kinds of non-virtuous karma. This in turn will lead us to the lower realms. So rather than let our mind wander off and run after external objects, we should fasten our mind to the great pillar of the Dharma.

“... bound/ To the great pillar of thinking about the Dharma”: We can explain this to mean that when we are reflecting on the meaning of the teachings, we should fasten our mind to the meaning of whatever Dharma or practice that we are doing. Even when we are meditating, we should fasten our mind to the chosen virtuous object of observation with mindfulness and introspection. In this way, we will not lose our object of observation.

This advice also applies to when we are listening to the teachings. Whenever we are listening to the teachings, we should apply mindfulness and introspection so that we can remain focused on hearing what has been said, i.e., remain focused on the words and their meaning.

2. Examining whether or not the mind is one-pointed in virtue

Verse 5.41

I who strive by all means for meditative stabilization
Should not wander off even for a moment.
Thinking, “What is this mind of mine doing?”
I should investigate my mind.

When we are striving to achieve concentration, it is extremely important to fasten the mind to the object of observation and to investigate whether our focus and attention is being placed on the chosen object of observation or not.

Concentration means being able to stay focused on the chosen object of observation without being distracted. With mindfulness and introspection, when we find our mind going off somewhere else rather than being focused on the object of observation, we should hook our mind back and bring its attention back to the object of observation.

C. Explaining the contexts for permitted and prohibited actions

Verse 5.42

But if I am unable to do this when involved in fear or
Celebrations and the like, then I should relax.
Thus it has been taught that at times of giving,
You may be indifferent to ethics.

Generally speaking, there are certain actions of the body and mind that we are supposed to engage in. However in certain situations—such as when there is a danger to our life, there is a special occasion where we are focusing on paying homage, making obeisance and making offerings to the Three Jewels or where one has to engage in certain actions that will bring about great benefit to others—then perhaps there are exceptions.

For example, one is engaged in a sustained practice of developing concentration and there is some special opportunity in a Buddhist festival to pay homage or make offerings to the Three Jewels. At that time, it is all right to stop temporarily one's practice of concentration and engage in making offerings while maintaining one's mindfulness and introspection.

The essence is that when there is a special purpose or occasion, then it is all right if one is unable to adopt certain subtle behaviours or actions of the body and speech that normally one has to engage in.

Another example explained in the commentary is when one is engaged in the practice of generosity and one wants to further strengthen that practice. In those situations when one is actually carrying out the practice of generosity, it is said that it is all right that one is unable to engage in certain modes of conduct that are required when one is practising ethics.

To give an example, generally speaking, in the training of an ordained person, when one is walking around, one is not allowed to do so while making all kinds of unnecessary gestures with the hands. For instance, one is not supposed to walk around swinging one's arms as this is considered an unnecessary gesture. However when one is practising generosity, one has to distribute gifts with one's hands, i.e., one has to walk around and move one's hands. This is an exception.

The other point is that when one is primarily engaged in the practice of generosity at a particular point in time, during this time, it is permissible that one does not adhere to some of the subtler aspects of the practice of ethics.

Yet another example is this. Say you are engaged in the practice of the generosity of fearlessness, i.e., you are protecting others from fear. In that context, if you were to see an animal pass by and a hunter comes along and asks you, "Did you see the animal?" since you are supposed to give fearlessness and protect that animal, you are permitted to say, "No, I didn't see it."

You saw that animal pass by but you say to the hunter, "I didn't see the animal." This is a lie and is necessarily a non-virtue. Did the Buddha give permission to engage in a natural misdeed? Lying is a natural misdeed and is by nature non-virtuous. But in one commentary, in such a situation, it is said that it is all right for you to say, "I didn't see the animal." One mind training text suggests that you could say, "I didn't see the truly existent animal!"

Khen Rinpoche: Is that lying? You are not lying, isn't it? You are telling the truth but you still deceived the person.

There is an account of one of the past lives of the Buddha before he became a buddha. He was travelling in a ship with many people and he discovered that one of the passengers on board planned to kill everyone else. The Buddha-to-be then killed that person.

In essence, this particular verse is saying that when one is primarily engaged in or focusing on the practice of generosity, during that training, it is all right if one is unable to guard some of the subtler aspects of the training in ethics.

But isn't the practice of ethics superior to the practice of generosity? As such is it not wrong to be indifferent to the practice of ethics while one is engaged in the practice of generosity? What would you say to this?

Verse 5.43

I should undertake whatever deed I have intended to do
And think of doing nothing other than it.
With my mind focused upon that,
I should set about for the time being to accomplish it.

Prior to engaging in any practice or before doing any work or job, at the very beginning, we need to set the intention to start that particular task and to accomplish it. Normally we tell ourselves, "Until I complete this task, I will continue with it." For example, when you are studying this text here, Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, right from the beginning when you decide to start, you have to tell yourself that you are going to finish studying it. If you do not do that but in between you decide to study another text, then you will not be able to accomplish the task of studying Shantideva's text.

Back to the question about being indifferent to one's practice of ethics while one is engaged in the practice of generosity. The context here is referring to someone who is primarily focused on the practice of generosity. For someone who is primarily focused on the practice of generosity, she has to start with the practice and make sure that she brings that practice to completion. However, during that process, if she were to get distracted and start doing something else, then she will never be able to finish the practice of generosity.

For a person who is primarily focused on the practice of generosity but who does not stay the course because her attention is diverted elsewhere thinking, "I'm going to do this that and the other," in the end, she achieves nothing. There is no practice of generosity to speak of and neither is there any practice of ethics.

Khen Rinpoche: This is from my own example. When I read a book because others say, "This book is very good," maybe I read 10 pages. After that, I think, "Oh, maybe this other book is good." Then I read 10 pages of another book.

In the end, I never complete any book. The idea is that when you read a book, you should focus on completing the book. When you complete one book, then you read another book. I'm sharing my own experience of how bad I am with regard to reading books. I never complete any book except the texts that I studied. Those are different

because I have to finish them.

Whether it is your studies or your practice, you have to do them in an orderly way. You should not skip about, i.e., first, you have to finish the earlier practices before you begin the later ones. Otherwise you will never finish anything. You start on something and before you can actualise that practice, you turn to something else. Then you move on again to something else. You will never achieve anything. It has to be done in an orderly manner. You have to start from the beginning of your practice. You cannot jump about as you have to finish the earlier practices. Once you have accomplished that, then you move on to the next practice and so forth. Only then can you complete your practice and bring it to fulfilment.

For example, when you walk, you lift up your right leg. But before you plant your right foot on the ground, you would not lift your left leg, right? That only happens when your right foot is firmly planted on the ground. If your right foot is still in mid-air and you try to lift your left leg, then you know what will happen next.

While it is true that the practice of ethics is superior to the practice of generosity, until one has gained some stability and familiarity with one's practice of generosity and have done it well, one cannot move on to the next practice.

Up to here, in the sections prior to the next verse, those verses are talking about investigating our body, speech and mind.

(Verse 5.44¹ was not covered in class).

Next is guarding oneself from deterioration. Here we are talking about gaining mastery or control of one's training.

¹ Verse 5.44

By acting in this way, all will be done well,
Otherwise neither will be done.
There will thus be no increase
In the secondary affliction of non-introspection.

In this context, the secondary affliction of non-introspection is the ignorance of the order of the proper stages of training the mind in the path. When we understand the proper stages of training the mind in the path, the secondary affliction of non-introspection will not increase. This is the explanation of the last two lines of verse 5.44, "There will thus be no increase/ In the secondary affliction of non-introspection."

The point here is to have a good understanding of the proper stages of the path, of the ways of training the mind. This is a gradual process and the order must be correct. First, we should ascertain the order of the proper stages of training in the path. We must follow the proper way of transforming the mind according to the actual stages. On the basis of having ascertained the proper stages of the path, we should then train our mind according to that ascertainment, ensuring that we finish our training in the first topic before we move on to the next topic and so forth.

When we do not do this, we will not achieve much. This is applicable to our practice. In the beginning, nothing is stable. Sometimes people look for initiations or lamas, doing different kinds of daily prayers without developing a stable relationship or practice with a single teacher. Then they move on to the next teacher, the next deity or the next practice. At the end of the day, nothing is achieved. (First Basic Program, Module 5, Lesson 29, page 3).

Guarding against all deterioration consists of two points:

- A. Guarding against deterioration in the training of the body
- B. Guarding against deterioration in the training of the mind

Guarding against deterioration in the training of the body will be covered in these points:

1. Not allowing oneself to fall under the sway of distraction
2. Abandoning pointless activities
3. Examining the motivational thought when acting

2. *Guarding against all deterioration*

A. *Guarding against deterioration in the training of the body*

1. *Not allowing oneself to fall under the sway of distraction*

Verse 5.45

If I engage in a variety
Of senseless talk
Or in many kinds of spectacular shows,
I should abandon attachment towards them.

It says here that it is possible that, for the purpose of benefiting someone, one may engage in meaningless talk, singing, dancing or some such activities, i.e., “spectacular shows.” But one has to engage in these activities mindfully without attachment. In the first place, meaningless chatter, singing, dancing, seeing shows and so forth are distractions. But when there is a purpose for engaging in such activities in order to protect the minds of others, then one must engage in them mindfully and without attachment. The point here is that it is never correct to let the mind be distracted.

2. *Abandoning pointless activities*

Verse 5.46

If for no reason I dig the earth,
Cut grass, draw patterns in the earth, and the like,
Then, recalling the advice of the Sugatas,
I should immediately stop out of fear.

Some people cannot sit still and have to do something. In a distracted state of mind, they end up digging holes in the ground or just plucking leaves from the plants or trees for no reason.

Khen Rinpoche: There is one restaurant here where they put a piece of paper and chalk for you to do something. They purposely put them there. They know what we want to do!

Some of these examples that are mentioned such as cutting grass and so forth primarily relate to the vows of a fully ordained monk. Fully ordained monks are not supposed to do these things. There is a purpose behind these vows. For example, we are not supposed to cut grass because there is a danger of killing if we were to do that. So that is the purpose.

The point is that when we find ourselves distracted and about to engage in some of

these meaningless activities, we have to bring our mind back with mindfulness and introspection. We have to remember that it is mentioned in the bodhisattva trainings that we should not engage in any activity that does not bring any benefit to sentient beings.

Next is analysing or checking one's motivation at the time of the action. Under the outline, examining the motivational thought when acting, there are the:

- A. Brief presentation
- B. Extensive explanation
- C. Synopsis

3. *Examining the motivational thought when acting*

A. *Brief presentation*

Verse 5.47

Whenever I have the desire
To move or to say something,
First of all I should examine my mind
And then, with steadiness, act in the proper way.

Before we start to move or walk around, before we change or adjust our physical posture, before we speak or say something—whatever it is, this verse is telling us that we should examine and check our motivation for wanting to do so.

Whatever physical or verbal activity we are about to engage in, prior to engaging in it, we should investigate and check what our motivation is. Of course, if it is non-virtuous, ideally we should stop ourselves and not do it. If it is virtuous, we can engage in it. It is through checking our motivation that we can stop ourselves from committing faults and downfalls.

For a person who is seriously committed to and engaging in the practice of the training to develop bodhicitta, before she engages in any activity—before moving about, walking, sitting, talking and so forth—ideally, she would look at her own mind. She would examine her own motivation to see whether her motivation for wanting to do the action is motivated by self-cherishing or by the thought of benefiting others. Upon such examination, if the motivation is found to be that of self-cherishing, she would not engage in that action. If the action is motivated primarily by the heartfelt thought of benefiting others, she would proceed with that action.

B. *Extensive explanation*

1. *How to act when one wishes for afflictions to arise*

Verse 5.48

Whenever there is attachment in my mind
And whenever there is the desire to be angry,
I should not do anything nor say anything,
But remain like a piece of wood.

When we see something desirable, an external object or a person, there is a wish to be attached to it. The mind is desirous of that object. When we think of or see an unpleasant object then there arises the wish to be upset and angry.

At those times, the verse is saying that we should remain still and not do or say anything. The advice is that, in those situations, we should remain physically and verbally still. We should not move or do or say anything.

In those situations, doesn't the mind also wish to follow after one's attachment? Doesn't the mind wish to follow after one's anger? So the point here is not to let ourselves follow after the afflictions of attachment or anger physically, verbally and mentally. We should remain still on those three levels.

2. How to act when excitement and so forth arise

Verse 5.49

Whenever I have excitement, the wish to verbally belittle others,
Pride and arrogance;
When I have the thought to describe the faults of others,
Cunningness and the thought to deceive others;

Verse 5.50

Whenever I am eager for praise
Or have the desire to blame others;
Whenever I have the wish to scold and quarrel;
At such times I should remain like a piece of wood.

The examples given here are those times when we find that pride and arrogance are arising or there is a wish to expose the faults or mistakes of others and so forth. The advice is the same. We should not follow after the desire to engage in those actions but rather we should remain still.

3. How to act when [you are the recipient of] gain and honour

Verse 5.51

Whenever I desire material gain, honor, or fame;
Whenever I seek servants or a retinue,
And when in my mind I wish to be served;
At these times I should remain like a piece of wood.

Once again, the advice is the same. When one has the desire for and is hankering after wealth, praise, good reputation and cultivating and having many followers, we are advised to remain still and not to follow such thoughts.

4. How to act when thinking of others' welfare

Verse 5.52

Whenever I have the mind wishing to neglect the welfare of others
And to pursue my own welfare,
Wishing to say something,
At these times I should remain like a piece of wood.

For a person who is seriously engaging in the practice of cultivating bodhicitta, benefiting others takes priority over benefiting himself. When such a person has thoughts of cherishing himself at the expense of others or the thought of neglecting the welfare of others arises, I guess he would have to remain still. He should not

entertain or follow those thoughts of self-cherishing or thoughts of benefiting himself.

When there is the desire to say something motivated by self-cherishing, or that benefits oneself or when one feels like saying something because one is angry or upset, at those times, one should remain silent and not say anything.

There is a saying in Tibetan, “Our mouth is like the treasury of negativities.”

Essentially, the advice is for us to remain still physically, verbally and mentally in situations where we are about to engage in non-virtuous actions. It is about checking our motivation.

5. *How to act when you wish for fury and discouragement etc. to arise*

Verse 5.53

Whenever impatience, laziness, fear,
And likewise shamelessness or the talking of nonsense,
And thoughts of partiality arise,
At these times too I should remain like a piece of wood.

C. *Synopsis*

Verse 5.54

Having in this way examined his mind for afflictions
And for thoughts that strive for meaningless things,
The hero should hold his mind steady
By means of the antidotes.

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*Question:* Why is it that when you are lazy, you are advised to remain like a piece of wood and continue to be lazy?

*Answer:* Joyous effort is the mind that is enthusiastic about virtue. The opposite of that is laziness which is the mind that is unenthusiastic about virtue. When laziness arises, we have to stop our mind from following that thought.

*Khen Rinpoche:* *If you follow that thought, you become lazier. So it is better not to follow that thought. Maybe this is what the text means.*

*Question:* When Shantideva says, “remain like a piece of wood,” does that mean if I want to go to sleep because I am lazy—and I have already been sleeping the whole day—I try to check myself by not following my laziness and my thought of wanting to lie down again when I am near the bed?

*Khen Rinpoche:* *So you do not lie down. You stand still. (Laughter).*

*Question:* So the spirit of this section is that when you are going to engage in some action with a wrong motivation, you do not carry out that action. But if I am going to

get angry, I cannot just remain still. If I were to remain still, my anger will simply build up. So while I am remaining still, what should I be doing?

*Khen Rinpoche: When you are angry, do not say anything!*

*Student:* But if I do not say anything, my anger will just build up. Maybe I can remain still for one or two minutes but five minutes later, something will come out of my mouth!

*Khen Rinpoche: This is why it should not come out, i.e., you should not say anything.*

*Student:* From a practical point of view, I feel that other than remaining still I should be doing something else.

*Khen Rinpoche: You can do something else but the whole idea is not to follow that emotional thought.*

*Student:* So it is all right as long as I do something to stop the anger from building up and making me want to shout back?

*Khen Rinpoche: Yes.*

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