

**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 26**20 May 2014**

Chapter Five: Verses 5.55 - 5.76. **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. 2. Guarding against all deterioration. **B.** The way to train in the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas. 1. Abandoning attachment to the body: the cause for not training in ethics. 2. One should be knowledgeable about accomplishing virtue

We have been talking about guarding ourselves from deterioration. This involves:

1. guarding against deterioration in the training of the body
2. guarding against deterioration in the training of the mind

We have completed the section on guarding against deterioration in the training of the body.

Guarding against deterioration in the training of the mind has three parts:

1. Guarding by means of the individual antidote
2. The common antidotes
3. The way to apply oneself to cultivating the antidote

**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*
2. *Guarding against all deterioration*
 - B. Guarding against deterioration in the training of the mind*
 1. *Guarding by means of the individual antidote*

Verse 5.55

Being very resolute and faithful,
Steady, respectful, polite,
With a sense of shame, fear, and pacification,
I should strive to make others happy.

Verse 5.56

I should not be disheartened by the whims
Of the childish who are in discord with one another;
I should be merciful, thinking, "This mind of theirs
Is due to the generation of afflictions."

With respect to whatever practice one is going to undertake, three things have to be done: (1) the preliminaries, (2) the actual practice and (3) the conclusion of the

practice. It is said to be very important not to have any doubts about the practice that one is undertaking with regard to these three stages—the beginning, the middle and the end.

One should eliminate any doubts, wrong concepts or wrong understanding of one's practice. At the very least, one should have a correctly assuming consciousness, i.e., a correct valid belief, with respect to one's practice. If one has a valid cognition of the practice that one is undertaking, that would be wonderful. The point is that one has to be very resolute in one's practice, i.e., there must not be any doubt or wrong understanding of the practice.

Verse 5.55 starts with, "Being very resolute" This is what it means. We must have a strong ascertainment of the topic or practice that we are going to do and having eliminated all doubts and wrong understanding, we should think, "It is as it is. It is like this, not something else."

Based on such ascertainment, we generate the faith of conviction that is indicated by the remainder of the first line of Verse 5.55, "... and faithful."

Based on such faith, we then have to engage in our practice with proper thought and action. We must have a stable intention, stable thought and stable action when carrying out the practice. Having a stable intention means being resolute and determined with regard to doing our practice. We generate the determination to persevere with our practice and not be side-tracked by unfavourable conditions such as sicknesses or other problems. They should not become the reasons for us to discontinue our practice.

It becomes very important that whatever practice we are doing, we must want to do it from the bottom of our heart and do it with great enthusiasm.

It is also mentioned here that, with respect to our conversations with others, such as our teachers or those who are senior in training to ourselves, they should be conducted respectfully and the nature of the conversation should be soft and gentle. We should then extend this manner of conducting gentle conversations to everyone else.

"With a sense of shame" means that we should have a sense of shame, i.e., restraining ourselves from negativities on account of ourselves, by remembering the fruitional effects we would have to experience in the future if we were to engage in such negativities. By reflecting on these negative consequences in the future if we were to engage in negativities, we subdue our senses.

When we restrain our eye sense power and ear sense power, we also have to restrain our mind. We have to be vigilant by restraining our eye sense power. Otherwise, depending on what we see, it is possible to generate all kinds of negative thoughts and afflictions. It is the same with hearing things. When we hear certain things, they may act as the conditions for our afflictions to arise. Likewise, we work on subduing or taming our mind.

By subduing our body and mind, as the text says, the behaviour of our body and mind, “should strive to make others happy.” Here we are talking specifically about the training of and advice for bodhisattvas. They have to assume a very subdued manner in striving to make others happy. One reason for them doing so is to stop others from creating negativities in relation to themselves, i.e., the bodhisattvas. Otherwise, others may create negativities in relation to the bodhisattvas. People who create negativities in relation to bodhisattvas accumulate very strong negativities.

Here it is said that the bodhisattvas have to live harmoniously with others. But nevertheless, conflicts may still arise. When bodhisattvas relate to others, there may be people who may be upset with them and cause them problems. In those instances, the bodhisattvas are reminded that they must not get disheartened.

In a bodhisattva’s dealings with others, in spite of showing her love for them, some sentient beings may respond in a very negative way and be upset with the bodhisattva. If the bodhisattva were to feel upset and disheartened, there is a danger that the bodhisattva may degenerate her own bodhicitta. Therefore the bodhisattva has to be careful. In situations where a bodhisattva faces such hostility from a sentient being, the bodhisattva has to remind herself that **there is a wide variety of disposition and inclinations among sentient beings** and that this sentient being is acting under the control of his own afflictions. Then this becomes a reason for the bodhisattva to show even more love and affection towards that sentient being.

According to the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra*, it says

By thinking how they are without power due to their constant faults,
possessing that mind, do not hold it against beings.

Aryadeva’s *Four Hundred Stanzas* say,

Just as a doctor does not fight but helps
Patients who are possessed by spirits, though they get angry,
So the Sage sees that the afflictions are at fault,
Not the persons who have the afflictions.¹

This is the advice for bodhisattvas not to get disheartened when they meet with negative or difficult people. They have to remind themselves and understand that all sentient beings are afflicted and are acting in this way due to their afflictions. As such, the bodhisattvas should cherish them even more and show them even more love and affection.

2. *The common antidotes*

Verse 5.57

Having control over that which is actually not misdeeds
In myself and other sentient beings,
I should always hold my mind

¹ Page 161, Volume 2, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, Lam Rim Chen Mo* by Tsong-kha-pa, Snow Lion Publications, 2004.

Like an emanation without an I.

This verse is saying that with regard to whatever activity we are engaging in—whether it is for ourselves, such as when we are eating or engaging in virtue, or for the benefit of others such as giving teachings—we should do them without a sense of self-importance, i.e., that what we are doing is so important and wonderful.

The advice is to carry out those activities without holding on to the “I” or self by reflecting on how phenomena are like illusions and are empty in nature.

3. The way to apply oneself to cultivating the antidote

Verse 5.58

By thinking again and again that
After a long time I have obtained the supreme leasures,
Thus I should hold my mind
As utterly unshakeable as Mount Meru.

This is something that we have to remember constantly—this human life of freedoms and endowments that we possess now is obtained only once and is the result of having worked very hard for a very long time over many lifetimes in the past.

On the basis of having found this human life of freedoms and endowments, it is said that we can achieve so many meaningful objectives and goals. Yet it will end and we will have to part with it. It is only a matter of time. By reflecting on these points, we should persuade ourselves to move our mind towards practising the Dharma. We must protect the mind that wants to practise the Dharma and engage in virtue and make sure that it is as stable as a mountain.

Khen Rinpoche: That mind should be as stable as a mountain, not like a water bubble!

Of the three types of ethics, we have finished the first ethics of refraining from negative actions. Next is the way to train in the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas.

One of the reasons why we are unable to guard our ethics and engage in virtuous practices is our attachment to our body. Therefore from the outset, we have to overcome and abandon that attachment. We also have to be skilful when it comes to practising virtue.

In abandoning the attachment to the body, an example is given to show why it is unreasonable to be attached to the body.

B. The way to train in the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas

1. Abandoning attachment to the body: the cause for not training in ethics

A. An example of how it is unreasonable to be attached to the body

Verse 5.59

If, mind, you are not made unhappy
When this body is dragged here and there and
Taken away by vultures attached to flesh,
Then why do you advise so now?

Everyone is very concerned about his or her body. We do everything we can to take care of it. When we are hungry, we look for food. When we are cold, we put on more clothes. We get very worried when something happens to our body. If someone points out some fault in our body, some physical shortcoming, we get very upset. All this happens because we are attached to our body.

But at the time of death, we have to leave our body behind. At that time, whether our body is fed to the vultures, eaten by maggots or burnt by fire, we are not upset. Then why are we upset now when something happens to our body? It is inappropriate to conceive this body as belonging to us, holding on to it so strongly for if we were to do so, all kinds of problems and unhappiness arise.

Verse 5.60 a, b
Holding this body as “mine”,
Why, mind, do you guard it so?

If we were to counter that by saying, “Of course I have to hold this body as mine because I need it. It is a necessity.” The answer to that will be:

Verse 5.60 c, d
Since you and it are separate,
What use can it be to you?

We and our bodies are not the same. They are different and separate. No matter how much we may think that our body is an absolute necessity and that it belongs to us, at the time of death, we have no choice but to discard it. There is nothing we can do to stop ourselves from discarding our body.

This is the same as the outline in the lam-rim on the section on death and impermanence where it says that, at the time of death, the body is of no use to us.

Next is the meditation on the filthiness of the body.

B. Cultivating a sense of the body’s lack of cleanliness
Verse 5.61
Why, confused mind,
Do you not hold onto a clean, wooden form?
Just what is the point of guarding
This rotting machine that is a collection of filth?

This verse is asking us why we are so hung up on this body of ours. Why are we holding on to this body that is by nature filthy and dirty? It is just a filth and dirt-making machine. This point is something that we have to think about over a period of time. It may not be apparent when we look at it superficially.

C. Reflecting on how the body is without essence
1. *If one were to divide the body into parts and examine them, one would find nothing that is in the slightest a reliable essence*

Verse 5.62

First of all, mentally separate
The layers of skin,
And then with the scalpel of wisdom
Also separate the flesh from the skeletal frame.

Verse 5.63

And, having split open even the bones,
Look right down into the marrow.
While examining this ask yourself,
“Where is its essence?”

It was said earlier that there is no purpose to holding on and being attached to this body since it is filthy by nature. It is a filth-producing machine. Nevertheless, it is still possible to think, “Whatever it is, there is still something to hold on to.”

These two verses, 5.62 and 5.63, are telling us that there is no essence and no real meaning to be found in the body.

We have to use our wisdom to investigate whether, in reality, the body has any essence and whether there is something worthwhile for us to hold on to. With the mind of wisdom, first we look beneath the layer of skin. Then we go down to the layer of flesh, down to the bones and then right into the bone marrow. Now we ask ourselves objectively, “What exactly is the essence that we are holding on to and grasping at?”

What we see are the constituents that make up the body. This is reality. But we do not see this reality precisely because we do not perceive our body in this way. We do not think about it. If we do think about it, this is in fact what the body is. When we go beneath the skin, what we see is just flesh, muscle, bone, blood and so forth. We would not find them attractive.

Therefore it is inappropriate to be attached to the body that has no essence.

2. It is unreasonable to be attached to something that has no essence

Verse 5.64

If, even when searching with such effort
You see no essence,
Then why with so much attachment
Are you still guarding this body now?

These are all exercises that we have to do ourselves. What exactly are we so attached to? Its nature is dirty, unclean and filthy. There is no essence in the body. After seeing this, if we are still so attached to and grasping at the body, we have to ask ourselves, “Exactly what are we attached to?”

D. The reasons it is unreasonable to be attached to the body

Verse 5.65

What use is this body to you

If its filth is unfit for you to eat,
If its blood is not fit to drink
And if its intestines are not fit to be sucked?

Verse 5.66 a,b
At second best it is only fit to be guarded
In order to feed the foxes and vultures.

Here the text asks, “What use is this body to you? Can we eat our own flesh or drink our own blood? Can they sustain us? Are we going to eat our intestines?”

If this is not the case and we are not going to do these things, what exactly are we so attached to? Why do we cherish and hold on so tightly to this body? Perhaps if we are taking care of our body because we are going to feed it to wild animals, maybe there is something to be said about that. But this is not the point. The point is to ask ourselves the exact reason for our attachment to and grasping of our body.

Many points are mentioned here for us to deal with our attachment to our body. There is a need to deal with and abandon our attachment to our body. Without abandoning our attachment to our body, it is very difficult to guard our ethics. It is very difficult to engage in virtue.

Also, due to our attachment for the body, we suffer so much. Because of our attachment to our body, the stronger the attachment, the more worries we have. We suffer so much mentally and physically, working so hard to take care of our body. The level of mental disturbance and physical discomfort that we experience due to cherishing and caring for our body is commensurate with the strength of our attachment to it.

Here we are talking about abandoning attachment to the body; as such attachment is one of the unfavourable conditions that stops and prevents us from engaging in virtue.

We have to understand however that these points here are not telling us that we should not take care of our body. This is not the point. What they are saying is that it is inappropriate for us to take care of our body solely due to our attachment to it since so many problems arise from such attachment. Because of this attachment to the body, we cannot engage in much virtue. If that is the case, how then should we use our body? What should we use our body for? We should use it to engage in virtue.

E. As it quickly perishes, it is reasonable to utilise it for virtue

1. *It is reasonable to utilise the perishable body for virtue as death will soon be upon us*

Verse 5.66 c,d
This body of a human being
Should only be put to work.

Verse 5.67
Even though you guard it thus,

Then what will you do
When it is stolen by the merciless Lord of Death
And given to the birds and dogs?

We critically examine the inside and outside of the body and discover that, by nature, the body is filthy and dirty. We then look for its core essence by trying to find out whether there is some meaning there. We again look at the inside and outside of the body. We find that there is nothing we can point to that is really meaningful. If the inside and outside of the body are just dirty and filthy and hold no meaning, then how can we make use of this body to extract its essence?

Our mind must take full control of our body and speech and through that, we should employ our body and speech in virtue.

Among the six types of migratory beings in samsara, the human body is the best basis for practising and actualising the Dharma. Having obtained such an opportunity to do so now, we should employ our body and speech as our servants and use them to engage in virtue. This is the only way of making use of this body of ours.

If we were to behave as we normally do, acting only out of attachment, taking care of our body by giving it food and drink and adorning it with jewellery and make-up, there will still come a day when we have to die. There is nothing we can do then. We still have to discard this body.

2. An example of how it is unreasonable to carry on with craving while not doing a single thing

Verse 5.68

If servants are not given clothing and so forth
When they are unable to be put to work,
Then why do you nourish it in health
When, even though caring for the body, it goes elsewhere?

If you happen to have domestic helpers or subordinates working for you, you are not going to pay them their salary if they do not do their jobs. Isn't this how the world works? You are not going to give them food, accommodation and salary. In fact, you will punish them and subject them to disciplinary actions. Likewise, when you feed, care for, adorn this body and so forth out of attachment despite it not doing anything virtuous, at the time of death, this body will still leave us. All our efforts in caring for it would come to nought and we get nothing in return.

3. Causing one to accomplish one's aims and desires by providing it with incentives

Verse 5.69

Now having paid my body its wages,
I shall make it enact my welfare.
I shall not give it anything
If it is not beneficial.

Khen Rinpoche: Don't give your body anything!

We will feed our body, take care of it and pay it wages. If it is able to do something beneficial for us, then this is all worth it. Otherwise, it is not worth doing those things for it. Now having paid our body its wages by giving it food, sustaining it and so forth, we should employ it in accumulating virtue through learning and reflecting on the Dharma.

4. It is reasonable to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings by considering the body as a boat

Verse 5.70

I should conceive of my body as a boat,
A mere support for coming and going,
And in order to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings
Transform it into a wish-fulfilling body.

We should regard our body as a boat on which we can cross the ocean of samsara, reach the shore of liberation and omniscience and thereby achieve the exalted body of the Conqueror that is like a wish-fulfilling jewel. Any sentient being who comes into contact with this wish-fulfilling jewel of the body of the Conqueror through hearing, seeing, thinking about it and so forth would have their wishes fulfilled.

These are the verses pertaining to abandoning attachment to our body. Next is the section on being skilful when accomplishing virtue, i.e., the importance of beautifying our normal daily actions and behaviour.

2. One should be knowledgeable about accomplishing virtue

A. Performing ordinary activities beautifully

1. How to act when encountering others

Verse 5.71

Now, while I have freedom,
I should always present a smiling face
And cease to frown and look black-faced;
I should be a friend of migrating beings and be straightforward.

First, our body and speech have to come under the control of our mind and our mind has to come under the control of the antidotes. On that basis, when we come into contact with others, “I should always present a smiling face,” without putting on an unhappy facial expression.

We should be a friend to sentient beings. Here it says to, “be straightforward,” in dealings with others. This means that in our interactions with others, there should not be any deceit or guile, pretension and so forth. We should not put on an act but be straightforward and honest. This is how we should act when meeting others.

In short, we should relate to others with a pleasant demeanour and when talking to them, to be honest and truthful without any pretension, deceit or guile.

Next is how to we should handle our possessions.

2. How to act with regard to discarding and adopting basic necessities

Verse 5.72 a, b

I should desist from inconsiderately and noisily
Moving chairs around and so forth,

This is advice for the bodhisattvas. The point is that whatever the bodhisattvas do, they do it without harming or causing any disturbance to others. Therefore, when they are moving chairs, beds or dragging things about, they should not do so with a lot of noise. When they sit down on a seat or cushion, they do not throw themselves to the ground, making a lot of noise in the process but do so gently. The point is not to disturb others and also not to cause others to lose faith in them.

While these are advices for the bodhisattvas, they are also applicable to us. These are the ways in which we can beautify our own ordinary actions. We should make sure that our actions do not disturb or harm others. In that sense it is also relevant for us.

3. Acting at all times with noble demeanour

Verse 5.72 c,d

As well as from violently opening doors;
I should always delight in humility.

Verse 5.73

The stork, the cat, and the thief,
By ambushing and moving silently,
Are able to accomplish what they desire to do;
I should always behave in this way.

Whether it is opening or closing doors, when this is done in a violent manner such as slamming the door on people, such actions disturb and make people unhappy.

With the recognition of our own mistakes and faults, we should also abide in humility.

This is how we should go about conducting ourselves and practising the Dharma. It is best to live a life of simplicity and contentment. This text talked about going into isolation where we do not need to meet people. In that situation, we are better able to subdue our own mind and complete our practice.

With conscientiousness, we have to conduct ourselves in a pacified and subdued manner. This also applies to our practice of the Dharma.

When predators hunt for their prey, they do so in a very subdued manner with a lot of planning and patience. They will plan, take their time and sneak up on their prey. Then they attack and they are able to kill their prey. They do all this in a very hidden and quiet way in order to get their prey.

Likewise, when we are engaging in our practice, we should not advertise, “I did this number of this practice. I’m doing this and I did that.”

“Are able” refer to the able ones who can, “accomplish what they desire to do,” and who always behave in this way. The able ones refer to the bodhisattvas. At all times when bodhisattvas are working for the benefit of sentient beings, they do so with conscientiousness and in a peaceful, subdued manner.

Next is how to behave in relation to well-meant advice.

B. Being knowledgeable in the way of befriending others without incurring misdeeds

1. How to act when someone speaks to you in a beneficial way

Verse 5.74

With respect I should gratefully accept
Unsought for words that are of benefit
And that wisely advise and admonish me.
At all times I should be the pupil of everyone.

When we receive advice, including advice that we did not seek but which is nevertheless useful and beneficial for us, we are advised to listen to it.

Whatever beneficial advice we receive, it says here that we should, metaphorically speaking, place the advice on the crown of our head. This involves the ability to listen to beneficial advice without pride and to consider ourselves to be the students of all who give us good and beneficial advice.

2. How to act when someone speaks truthfully to you

Verse 5.75 a, b

I should say, “Virtuously said,”
To all those who speak well,

In response to well-spoken beneficial advice, we should say, “Well said. It is good.”

3. How to act when you see someone doing virtue

Verse 5.75 c, d

And, if I see someone creating merit,
I should praise him and be well pleased.

We should rejoice when we see or hear of someone creating merit. We should feel happy and directly praise that person in order to increase his enthusiasm for virtue.

4. How to act when remarking on another’s qualities

Verse 5.76

I should discreetly talk about the good qualities
And repeat those recounted.
If my own good qualities are spoken about
I should just know and be aware that I have them.

When there is a possibility that the person you wish to praise may think that you are just flattering her rather than praising her directly, you can do so indirectly by praising her to somebody else.

When somebody mentions to you the good qualities of a third party, you should respond and agree by saying, “Yes, it is like that!”

When it comes to our own qualities or when someone directly praises us, without any conceit, arrogance or pride, we should first check if we actually possess those qualities or not. Even when we do actually possess the qualities, we should simply acknowledge that fact without feeling arrogant or proud.

I seem to remember that it was mentioned in one commentary that when someone praises you and says that you have certain qualities that you actually do not have, you could reply by saying, “How wonderful you say this. It shows that you have a very pure mind.” You can think of the person who is praising you for your non-existent qualities as someone special.

When someone is praised for qualities that he does have, that praise is simply an acknowledgement of those qualities. It is just a verbal statement that this person has such and such qualities. That is it. There is nothing beyond that.

When we see others accumulating merit such as making offerings to the Three Jewels, the text says here that we should encourage them by praising them to enhance their enthusiasm for virtue and to make them feel good about what they are doing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SUNDAY, 25TH MAY 2014

1. What is the difference between mindfulness and introspection (or vigilance)?
2. (a) What are the reasons for guarding the mind?
3. (b) What are the benefits of guarding the mind?
4. What are the faults and what problems will there be when we do not protect the mind?
5. It is said that when we do not possess introspection, our ethics (or ethical discipline) will not be pure. Why is this so?
6. How is introspection generated in dependence upon mindfulness?
7. Explain the exceptions mentioned in Verse 5.42.

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