

**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 27****22 May 2014**

Seeing the Dharma as a burden. Chapter Five: Verses 5.77 - 5.82. **3.** The way to train in the conduct of guarding the mind by means of mindfulness and introspection (cont'd). **B.** The way to train in the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas. 2. One should be knowledgeable about accomplishing virtue. B. Being knowledgeable in the way of befriending others without incurring misdeeds. C. Being knowledgeable about performing actions of the three doors.

Question: This question relates to the practice itself. The verses in Shantideva's text describe how a bodhisattva should discipline his thoughts, speech and actions. Can the actual practice of training the mind be found in the four placements of mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind and phenomena? Will meditating on the four placements of mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind and phenomena enable us to actually put the training into practice when we face actual situations?

Answer: Chapter 5 is essentially a chapter on mindfulness and introspection. In order to generate mindfulness and introspection, you need a method. The examples you brought up are methods to develop that kind of mindfulness. When developing mindfulness, we can do it on the basis of the four close placements of mindfulness, starting with close placement of mindfulness on the body, followed by feelings, the mind and phenomena.

When we practise the close placement of mindfulness on the body, that involves being mindful of our physical and verbal behaviour, i.e., the kind of posture and physical demeanour we adopt and how we speak to others. We also check the activities that we are undertaking, whether those activities are harmful to others or not.

The four close placements of mindfulness are methods for developing mindfulness. Whatever mindfulness and introspection we develop through these methods, we have to be able to carry them over into our daily lives as we go about our activities.

We are not short of instructions. We have heard so many instructions. We also know many teachings. The problem is that we do not have any experience of them. We have not put them into practice on a constant basis.

Ideally, before helping and working to benefit others, first we have to listen to the teachings, internalise and understand them. Then we have to familiarise our mind with them through constant practice. We have to do this in physical isolation in a retreat. Only when we gain some experience of the teachings will we be in a position

to help others. As Je Rinpoche says in the lam-rim, without subduing our own mind, there is no basis for helping others and there is no way we will be able to subdue others.

Ideally, this is how it should be but we are not like that. We talk about the Dharma. We listen to the Dharma and we know the Dharma but we do not practise it. At the same time, we want to go out and help others.

Khen Rinpoche: Actually not helping but creating more problems. Going to talk to people when one is not subdued, how can one really subdue and calm down other people? It is not possible.

For now, we are just hearing the teachings, learning the theory. I don't know when we are going to the isolated place. I am also not sure when this will happen.

It is not that there is no benefit to learning the theory. Learning the theory is beneficial because having heard the theory, at a later point in time, at least we can remember, "There is such a thing. I should not be doing this," or "I should be doing this." There is this kind of benefit.

Question: Relating to Lesson 25, it was mentioned that beings born in the pure land, simply by virtue of being born there, would have the five super knowledges and automatically, they would have calm abiding. Prior to being born in the pure land, must they already achieve the five super knowledges and calm abiding?

Answer: No need. Otherwise the number of people going to the pure land would be pretty small!

What I mentioned in one of the earlier classes with regard to calm abiding applies to what happens when one is already in the pure land. You do not necessarily have to achieve calm abiding prior to going to the pure land but I am not sure whether everyone who is born in the pure land will achieve calm abiding. Perhaps this only applies to those who are of the Mahayana lineage. Those of the Mahayana lineage seem to have calm abiding automatically when they are reborn in the pure land due to the power of the pure land itself, i.e., the power of the place and environment where one is born.

It is mentioned in Je Rinpoche's explanation of the qualities of the Amitabha pure land that those of the Mahayana lineage will achieve the five super knowledges when they are born in the pure land. But I wonder if everyone who is born in the pure land will actually achieve these automatically.

Question: This relates to the twelve links. At the time of death, one generates single-pointed faith in and think of one's guru, "Guru, please help me. I am dying and going into non-existence." As an ordinary being, obviously, there is craving and grasping.

Would this single-pointed faith in the guru be considered craving and grasping that are virtuous or is it still craving and grasping, i.e., craving for and grasping at the guru for help that are non-virtuous? Would there still be actualising karma also or is

it the power of the object, i.e., one's guru, which propels one into a good rebirth?

Answer: In short, the single-pointed faith in your own guru is not attachment. Rather it is faith. But this single-pointed faith in your guru at the time of death is a condition for one of the virtues that you had accumulated in the past to ripen. So your single-pointed faith in your guru at the time of death in itself is *not* the cause of your next good rebirth. In itself, it is not karma but it is a condition for one of the virtues that you must have already accumulated in the past to ripen.

Student: So the actualising karma is still something else. (My single-pointed faith in the guru at the time of death) is just a condition.

Khen Rinpoche: Yes.

SEEING THE DHARMA AS A BURDEN

Question: In spite of having been a Buddhist for over ten years, whatever I do, 99% of the time, my motivation is to be loved and respected so the motivation is non-virtuous.

So if I follow Shantideva's advice, should I remain like a piece of wood?

As ordinary people, we use the Dharma to solve relationship problems, to overcome our depression and illnesses and so forth. We have not given up this life and the eight worldly concerns.

Now we are studying this text by Shantideva about the practices of the bodhisattvas. A bodhisattva is someone who has calm abiding and has generated bodhicitta. But based on my conversations with some older students, there seem to be two mind sets:

1. feeling disheartened because the mind still grasps at this life despite having listened to the Dharma for so many years, or
2. feeling disheartened because one still engages in activities that do not accord with the bodhisattva's way of life.

So instead of being inspired by the teachings in this text, I find myself using the teachings to beat myself up. How do I stop doing that? How do I adopt an attitude whereby I can benefit from the teachings in this text?

Khen Rinpoche: You said you are being beaten by the teachings? For over ten years, the teachings became a cane for you? That is suffering! You must be quite miserable for over ten years! So long! Sorry about that. I think there are some verses that respond to that.

Right in the beginning of the lam-rim, there is the advice on how we should listen to the teachings. The example of a sick patient is often given. The patient is sick and she knows that she is sick. She goes to various doctors asking for opinions and advice. But after getting all the advice and medicine, she stores up the medicine without taking it.

This is like people who listen to many teachings but feel that the teachings they have heard are a burden for them. When this happens, this is a clear sign that these people have not practised whatever teachings they have received. This is why they feel burdened by the teachings.

We need to analyse whatever teachings we have heard and studied. We need to think about them until we get a taste of them. We ‘taste’ the teachings through reflection. Until we get that experience and until we taste the teachings, all the teachings will become like a burden. Whether it is taking initiations or with regard to whatever vows we have received, we will feel that they are all burdensome.

There are some people who have a lot of faith. This is very helpful, whether it is single-pointed faith in the guru, faith in the guru’s advice and the guru’s speech or single-pointed conviction in the workings of karma and its effects. When one has such conviction and faith in the guru’s speech, the guru’s advice or the workings of karma, this makes a positive difference to the mind.

Then one would not find these teachings or advice a burden but inspirational instead. When one does not have such faith and, in addition to that, when one does not have any experience of the teachings, i.e., not having tasted the teachings through critically thinking about and analysing them, then the Dharma will feel like a burden.

Later on in the text, we will see a verse that mentions that when we practise the Dharma, we have to do it from our own side. We should not be practising the Dharma because other people are doing so and we are just following them, i.e., we are just a follower. This is wrong.

Rather we have to see for ourselves the purpose of Dharma practice and then we voluntarily and happily do it from our own side. This is how the Dharma should be practised.

The goal and the motivation are so important. In the beginning of the lam-rim, before the actual subject matter is discussed, we are taught how to listen to and how to teach the Dharma. There is a very extensive explanation of this.

It all depends on our motivation and what we are looking for. When we are listening to the teachings, we are taught to abandon the three faults of the vessel and we have to cultivate the six attitudes. It is extremely important that we start with this. For us, we do not even get that right from the beginning. Then of course it is going to be difficult.

It is true that most of the teachings we have heard and learnt are out of our reach and there are practices that we do not presently have the ability to train in. Nevertheless, we have to see the purpose of those teachings; how they fit into the grand scheme of things, what is their purpose, their goal and so forth. From our own side, we must not see the Dharma as a burden. This is important. The practices that we cannot train in now are the practices that we can aspire to be able to train in in the future by making aspirational prayers.

The main problems for us are our bad habits coupled with our laziness. We do not bother to think about what is going to happen to us in our future lives. We are just thinking about this life. Because of this, we are stuck. It is not that we do not know the Dharma. It is not that we do not have the ability to practise the Dharma. We have both these conditions but we are stuck because of our bad habits coupled with our laziness and procrastination. We are primarily interested in this life and we do not bother about our next life.

In Tibetan, the people who are only concerned about the affairs of this life are called *tshur tong wa*. Literally this means those who are just focusing on this side, i.e., this life and not looking on the other side, i.e., the next life. There is this group of people.

When we analyse this further, there are some people who are not looking at this life only. They do not even think about tomorrow. All their concerns revolve around what they see right now. There are people who are concerned just with today. They do not really care about what will happen tomorrow. To them, “I am just going to spend my day like that. I am happy today. That is all that matters.” Many people are like that!

Having faith is also very important. There is a quotation that says, “Faith is the prerequisite of all good qualities— / A procreator of them”¹ So without faith, there is no hope and there is no way we can cultivate virtue and white dharma.

What this student said is the exact truth. This is the reality and this is the situation. To be able to practise the transformational Dharma that can actually move our minds is very difficult. To be able to make our practice pure is also very difficult. Therefore it is emphasised and clearly explained many times in the teachings what the boundary between Dharma and non-Dharma is and what the signs of someone who is practising the Dharma are.

If the practice is an antidote to the afflictions, it is Dharma. Any practice that hurts the afflictions is Dharma. So anyone who is practising the Dharma is harming his or her afflictions. Over time the mind becomes more subdued and pacified. This is a real sign that the person is a true Dharma practitioner.

On the other hand, if one thinks that one is a Dharma practitioner and one proclaims oneself to be a Dharma practitioner but whatever one does—be it studying, listening to, meditating and reflecting on or practising the Dharma—in the end, all these activities only serve to increase one’s afflictions, then one is not a Dharma practitioner at all. One may have the appearance of a Dharma practitioner but in reality one is not a Dharma practitioner at all. So this is a case where the person is practising the Dharma but that practice does not become Dharma at all. This is a case of the medicine that is meant to heal becoming a poison. Then there is nothing that can be done. Most of us are like that. Many teachings, rather than benefiting us, are turned by us into poison.

¹ Tsong-kha-pa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, Lam Rim Chen Mo, Volume One*. (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2000), 80.

Khen Rinpoche: They become poison, become painful, become a burden.

Therefore it is really important that we must try to make sure from the very beginning that we do not end up like that.

This is why in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*, right in the beginning, Je Rinpoche gave these extensive explanations of how we should actually study and listen to the Dharma. This is why when we practice according to the stages of the path to enlightenment, we are told to adjust our motivation from the very beginning when we first receive and hear the teachings.

There is this explanation of how we should listen to the teachings and immediately thereafter there is the topic on correctly relying on a virtuous friend, which essentially talks about generating faith.

Having set our motivation in the beginning and generated faith, there is the exhortation imploring and persuading us to practise the Dharma by reflecting on the topic of the human life of freedoms and endowments—identifying what it is, what the great meaningful objectives are, which we can achieve, and the great difficulty to have such an opportunity again.

When we think of these topics in this way in accordance with the stages as outlined, going through the topic, the human life of freedoms and endowments, we will experience only happiness. We will feel so happy just to be able to listen to the teachings because we realise their preciousness and rarity.

This is why when we train our mind according to the stages of the path to enlightenment, I do not think that we will feel the Dharma—including this text by Shantideva—burdensome.

When we see these teachings and know how to think, they only increase our faith in and appreciation of the teachings and also strengthen our determination to practise them.

As pointed out by this student, in essence what we need is analytical meditation. Simply hearing and studying the teachings alone will not prevent the Dharma from appearing burdensome to us. When we meditate on and critically analyse the lam-rim topics, through analytical meditation, starting with the topic of correctly relying on the virtuous friend followed by the human life of freedoms and endowments and then death and impermanence, with that experience, we will not feel that the Dharma is a burden.

So the heart summary is this.

Khen Rinpoche: There are so many summaries but the heart summary is this one.

If you want to know the solution to all these problems, including stopping yourself from feeling that the Dharma is a burden, the heart solution is that you need to reflect and engage in analytical meditation on the lam-rim.

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

- B. The way to train in the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas*
- 2. One should be knowledgeable about accomplishing virtue.*
 - B. Being knowledgeable in the way of befriending others without incurring misdeeds*
 - 5. The benefits of acting in a way that others enjoy*

Verse 5.77

All initiatives are a source of joy
That would be rare even if it could be bought with money.
Therefore, the excellent qualities causing others [joy]
Causes the enjoyment of the happiness of joy.

Verse 5.78

I shall suffer no losses in this life
And in future lives shall find great happiness.
But misdeeds will make me unhappy and bring suffering,
And in future lives I shall find great suffering.

In whatever we do—whether we are doing it for ourselves or we are doing it for others—what exactly are we seeking? If we really think about it, we are seeking happiness, joy and inner satisfaction.

For the bodhisattvas, every single thing they do with their body, speech and mind is only to make others happy. This is their goal and everything they do with their body, speech and mind is to achieve this goal. When others are happy, then by the way, the bodhisattvas are also satisfied and experience much inner peace and happiness. This situation of being able to generate happiness in others and oneself is said to be priceless. It is so priceless that it cannot be bought.

When we see others doing well—accumulating merit, engaging in virtue, having many qualities, enjoyments as well as pleasant physical appearances, possessing good things and having good things happen to them—and we can rejoice in their good fortune, we ourselves will also feel real happiness in the heart. The teachings here are telling us of this very special kind of joy, happiness and great satisfaction that we ourselves will feel when we truly rejoice in the good things of others—their qualities, virtue, possessions and enjoyments. By rejoicing in the good things of others, it will not cause our own possessions and whatever we desire to degenerate. When we are rejoicing in this way, we are not jealous of the good things of others and thus, have great peace in our heart. As a result, our mind is also able to remain very calm, steady and happy. We would also get good rebirth in our future lives.

But instead of rejoicing, when we see others doing better than ourselves, having better looks, more possessions and more qualities, we feel jealous, upset or angry, thinking, “Why him and not me?” We develop this sense of negative competitiveness wanting to compete with this person.

What happens then is that in this life, we will be very unhappy and disturbed. We cannot remain calm. It is said that we will also accumulate the karma to experience suffering in our future lives.

The verse here is an example. It is not a burden is it? It is not as if it is a heavy load that we would have to bear, feeling so miserable about trying to practise what the verse says. It is just an observation of reality. When we see someone who is doing better than ourselves—having more wealth, better looks, more virtue and so forth—if we do not rejoice but feel jealous instead, what does that do to us? Is it not the case that we will become very miserable and very unhappy?

However, if we feel happy for this person and is able to think that she is experiencing the fruitional effects of the virtue that she had accumulated in the past, then the mind is calm. With that kind of attitude, it is easier to make friends with her. Otherwise, we become very miserable and unhappy and it is very difficult to make friends with that person. Is this not obvious? Is this knowledge a burden?

The teachings in this text by Shantideva are all wonderful advice. They are not a burden. We do not want to follow this advice as we are blinded by our ignorance. If we follow this advice, it will definitely be beneficial.

In short, these two verses are saying that when we see the good things of others, do not be jealous because it is pointless and meaningless to do so.

Next is being knowledgeable about performing actions of the three doors:

1. How to act when speaking
2. How to act when viewing
3. Connecting oneself solely with virtuous karma

C. Being knowledgeable about performing actions of the three doors
1. How to act when speaking

Verse 5.79

When talking I should speak from my heart and on what is related.
Making the meaning clear and the speech pleasing.
I should abandon attachment or hatred,
And speak in gentle tones appropriately.

When someone asks us a question, we should answer sincerely and speak in an agreeable manner that fits the mind of the person.

We should speak coherently so that what we say in the earlier part of the conversation is connected with what we say in the later part of the conversation. What we say has to make sense. When the beginning and end of the conversation are unconnected, when we contradict ourselves, then the other party will not believe us. We have to speak clearly in a way that is easily understood by the other person.

This verse is also saying that we should speak without the motivation of strong attachment to our own side or our own position. We should also not have hatred or anger towards others.

Our tone of voice has to be gentle and we are also advised that the length of our reply or conversation should be appropriate, i.e., not too long or too short. There are people who, once they start talking, they never stop. After a while the listener will get tired. At the other extreme, certain people will only give you a monosyllabic answer when you ask them anything. As to the appropriate length of a conversation, this is something we have to figure out for ourselves by watching the facial expression of the person we are talking to.

2. *How to act when viewing*

Verse 5.80

When beholding someone with my eyes,
Thinking, "I shall attain buddhahood
By depending upon this being,"
I should look at him candidly with love.

The teachings here are telling us to look upon others with affection. We can remind ourselves that the person we see is the object for whom we will generate bodhicitta, practise the six perfections and achieve enlightenment. The teachings state that we should look at sentient beings with the same affection and love as a mother looking at her child.

Our engagement with others have to be straightforward and honest without any deceit or guile.

Next is connecting oneself solely with virtuous karma which has three parts:

- A. Giving to the special fields for giving
- B. Virtuous karma occurs through its own power
- C. Entering into higher and higher virtues and having examined whether there is a purpose, acting upon it

3. *Connecting oneself solely with virtuous karma*

A. *Giving to the special fields for giving*

Verse 5.81

Always being motivated by affection
Or being motivated by the antidotes,
In the fields of excellent qualities, benefit, and suffering,
Great virtues will come about.

When giving to the special fields for giving, there are a few features to be considered:

- The feature of time is indicated by the word, "always." This means that one has to always give, doing this continually.
- The feature of the attitude is indicated by the word, "affection." This means

having strong love and affection or faith and refers to having a very strong aspiration.

- The feature of the antidote means this: for example, when we are practising generosity, all the effort that we put into this practice must become an antidote to our miserliness. Similarly, when we are practising ethics, our practice must be an antidote to the discordant class or the opposite of ethics.
 - The field of “excellent qualities” refer to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.
 - The field of “benefit” primarily refers to one’s parents.
 - The field of “suffering” refers to those sentient beings who are suffering.
- By giving to these various objects, we accumulate great virtue.

These are the factors that make virtue strong and powerful:

- The feature of time: When we engage in the same virtue continually over and over again, this makes the virtue very strong.
- The motivation or attitude: When the motivation behind the virtue is virtuous and strongly generated from the depths of our heart, this makes the virtue very powerful.
- When the virtue is directed at special and powerful objects such as, “the fields of excellent qualities, benefit and suffering,” the virtue created will also be very strong.
- When the virtue created becomes an antidote to the various afflictions or an antidote to the discordant classes of that virtue, this also makes the virtue very powerful.

However, some of these features also apply to non-virtues:

- When we engage in non-virtue continually, then the non-virtue will be very strong.
- When we engage in non-virtue motivated by very strong afflictions from the depths of our heart or with the strong intention to engage in such non-virtue, then this will also make the non-virtue very strong.

B. Virtuous karma occurs through its own power

Verse 5.82

I should always perform actions

Endowed with skill and joy.

In all actions

I should not depend upon anyone else.

When we engage in virtue, we should do it from our own side, based on our understanding of the situation in reality and not out of a desire to imitate someone else. When we see someone engaging in virtue and we try to copy and follow this person’s example, we are not going to achieve anything meaningful.

Whatever practice we are doing, be it generating bodhicitta, the practice of the six perfections and so forth, first, we have to know exactly what we are doing and how to go about doing it. We have to gain the faith that comes from understanding the practice. We need to know all the essential points. Then we engage in the practice

wholeheartedly based on such understanding and practice consistently.

Our practice has to be based on a thorough understanding of reality and the nature of virtue—what is virtue, what makes virtue powerful, what kind of motivation we should have, how we should generate such a motivation and so forth. At the end of the practice, we should know how to dedicate the merit, what the dedication is for and so forth. The practice has to be done with an understanding of all these essential points from one's own side. We cannot practice by just copying what someone else is doing.

Furthermore when we engage in virtue, we have to do it from our own side without needing someone to prompt, encourage us or persuade us to do so. Engaging in virtue should not be like doing a job where you are waiting for a task to be assigned to you.

So before any practice, we have to know:

- what exactly we are going to do
- how we are going to go about doing it
- the essential points of the practice

We have to believe in and have faith in the practice. Then you will see exactly, "It is like that. It is good." Then naturally we will have enthusiasm and we will want to do the practice from our own side. We will not need anyone to tell us to do our practice.

We must engage in virtue wholeheartedly from your own side without needing someone to persuade us to do so. We cannot outsource our practice to someone else. For instance, we may say, "I am going to engage in prostrations" and then we get someone else to do prostrations for us or we get someone else to offer our water bowls on our behalf.

When we really cannot do the practice for whatever reason, this is a different matter. Otherwise we have to do the practice ourselves. This is the meaning of the last sentence of the verse, "I should not depend upon anyone else," i.e., we have to do it ourselves and not ask someone else to do it on our behalf.

C. Entering into higher and higher virtues and having examined whether there is a purpose, acting upon it

Verse 5.83

The perfections such as generosity
Are progressively more exalted,
But for a little I should not forsake something greater.
Principally I should consider the welfare of others.

This verse is extremely complicated. I will talk about this in the next lesson. There seem to be an internal contradiction between verses 5.42 and 5.83.

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.

Verse 5.42 talks about leaving the practice of ethics in equanimity when we are primarily focusing on generosity. There was this discussion.

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