

**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 28**27 May 2014**

Chapter Five: Verses 5.83 - 5.93. **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. **C.** Being knowledgeable about performing actions of the three doors. **C.** The way to train in the ethics of working for the benefit of sentient beings. 1. Devoting oneself to the welfare of others. 2. Conduct that gathers others without sullyng oneself with wrongdoing. 3. Looking after the minds of sentient beings and training in the conduct that is unsullied by wrongdoing.

Question: It is mentioned in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* that at the time of death, due to the attachment to a self, one has the thought, "I am going to cease to exist." Because of this attachment to a self, the craving for embodiment arises. Is this attachment to a self the same as the attachment that is the apprehension of true existence mentioned previously in class? Are these two attachments different or the same?

Answer: Of the three mental poisons, attachment and anger have their origins in ignorance, which is the basis or condition for the arising of attachment and anger. As to what this ignorance is, there are two interpretations. One is according to the logician Dharmakirti and one is according to Chandrakirti.

- According to Dharmakirti, ignorance is posited as mere unknowingness, i.e., merely not knowing.
- Chandrakirti posits ignorance as something more than that. On top of not knowing, it is the misapprehension of true existence.

In short, attachment arises due to the apprehension of true existence.

What I said earlier is not a definitive position. I was not saying that if it is attachment, it is necessarily ignorance and if it is ignorance, it is necessarily attachment.

I am just wondering, according to the Madhyamika interpretation, is there something that is both an attachment and ignorance, i.e., is there an ignorance that is attachment? This is something for you to think about:

- is there an ignorance that is in the entity of attachment?
- is there an attachment that is in the nature of ignorance?

Khen Rinpoche: Can you think about this? I talked about this before Vesak Day. You heard me? What do you think was the point of me saying that before Vesak Day? Did you get the point?

Khen Rinpoche (asking student): Why did I bring up this issue then?

Student: It is because from the viewpoint of the Hinayana, attachment of the desire realm is necessarily non-virtuous, but from the viewpoint of the Mahayana viewpoint, attachment of the desire realm is not necessarily non-virtuous. This is why this was mentioned. Because there is an attachment that is an apprehension of true existence. So to the Mahayana, the attachment of the desire realm is not necessarily non-virtuous.

Khen Rinpoche: Great!

This discussion was brought up when we were talking about the twelve links. The first of the twelve links is ignorance. No matter which great treatises we look at, it is stated decisively that ignorance is unspecified, i.e., it is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous. But the karma that is motivated by ignorance can either be virtuous or non-virtuous.

According to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakosa*, with the exception of ignorance, the view of the transitory collection and the view holding on to the extreme, i.e., with the exception of these three, all the other afflictions are non-virtuous.

The qualm raised earlier relates to how craving and grasping nourish the projecting karma that was accumulated. The projecting karma that was accumulated needs to be nourished or activated by craving and grasping. In the case of a virtuous projecting karma, if craving and grasping is non-virtuous, then it is rather odd to having a non-virtuous nourishing agent while the projecting karma that is being nourished is virtuous. This was the qualm.

As result of this qualm, when we look at this from the perspective of the higher tenets, the Mahayana tenets, I wonder whether attachment is necessarily non-virtuous. Having said that, I am not implying therefore there could be an attachment that is virtuous.

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### **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.*
    - C. *Being knowledgeable about performing actions of the three doors*
      - 3. *Connecting oneself solely with virtuous karma*
        - 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.

In the section on the six perfections in the stages of the path to enlightenment, it was stated that in terms of the order of the perfections, the latter are superior to the former, i.e., the latter perfections are more exalted and has more benefits than the former. So if we were to compare generosity and ethics, ethics is superior to and more exalted than generosity.

If we were to choose between these two, we will choose the more important, the higher or better one. We will not forsake the greater for the smaller or something that is less important. So generally speaking, if we were to choose between generosity and ethics, we will choose ethics, which is superior in terms of the order.

Generally it is like that but there can be exceptions in special situations. When one can do something that will greatly benefit others—as the purpose and welfare of others are more important than one’s own welfare—one will choose that option. So in situations where there is a greater purpose and more benefit to others in making extensive giving, then it is all right to remain indifferent to certain aspects of ethics that are practised for one’s own purpose.

Another example of an exception could be this: One is engaged in meditation, but there are people who have come a long way to receive teachings from oneself. They have a great interest in receiving instructions from one. Since there is the greater purpose of benefiting others, in such a situation, one should temporarily suspend one’s meditation and make the gift of Dharma to these people.

Generally speaking, when we compare generosity and the practice of concentration (or meditative stabilisation), the practice of concentration is superior and much more important than generosity. But in the case of someone who holds the bodhisattva vows and is being requested to teach by people who have great interest in the Dharma, by not teaching, there is the danger that this person will commit one of the bodhisattva downfalls of not giving the Dharma.

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 remaining indifferent to certain aspects of ethics when one is practicing generosity. This verse should be understood in the context of someone who has the ability to practise generosity but, at that moment, may not be able to practise the very subtle and finer details of the rules and regulations of ethics. So for this person, she can remain indifferent to those subtle aspects of ethics.

With this verse, we have finished the ethics of gathering virtuous dharmas. Next is the way to train in the ethics of working for the benefit of sentient beings, which is covered in four sections:

1. Devoting oneself to the welfare of others

2. Conduct that gathers others without sullyng (polluting) oneself with wrongdoing
3. Looking after the minds of sentient beings and training in the conduct that is unsullied by wrongdoing
4. The branch of method of excellent trainings

C. *The way to train in the ethics of working for the benefit of sentient beings*

1. *Devoting oneself to the welfare of others*

Verse 5.84

When these are well understood,

I should always strive for the welfare of others.

The Far-Seeing Compassionate Ones have allowed

Those that were forbidden.

When one has understood well and is abiding in the trainings of the former two ethics—the ethics of restraint and the ethics of gathering virtuous dharma—without any consideration for oneself or harbouring any self-cherishing thoughts or thoughts of self-interest, then on that basis, one moves on to the training in the ethics of working for the benefit of sentient beings.

When one needs to work for the benefit and welfare of others, there are a great variety of activities that one has to undertake. One may ask, “In the course of engaging in all these activities to benefit others, would there not be the danger of being stained by a bodhisattva downfall?” The answer to this concern is in verse 5.84.

The greatly compassionate one, the Buddha, who saw well into the future and showed us how to accomplish the highest long-term happiness, said that in order to accomplish such happiness, one should abandon holding on to small happinesses and happily take on suffering.

The Buddha strictly prohibited the hearers and solitary realisers who are working mainly for their own purposes and self-interest—essentially those of Hinayana dispositions who only seek their own liberation from cyclic existence—from committing the ten non-virtues. The Buddha did not give any exceptions in this instance.

But for those who are abiding in the Mahayana—who truly have no self-cherishing and no self-interest—the Buddha gave permission for such bodhisattvas to engage in the first seven non-virtues, i.e., three of the body and four of speech. When there was a purpose and benefit, this will be an exception and the bodhisattvas can engage in the first seven non-virtues. However, no exception is granted in relation to the three non-virtues of the mind: covetousness, malice and wrong view.

You have to understand that these exceptions were granted by the Buddha to the bodhisattvas.

*Khen Rinpoche: So it is not for us!*

The next section discusses how not to be stained by a bodhisattva downfall or fault when one is working for the welfare of others. The example given is of the difference between giving food and not giving food.

2. *Conduct that gathers others without sullyng (or polluting) oneself with wrongdoing*

A. *Gathering through material generosity*

1. *The difference between giving and not giving food and clothing*

Verse 5.85

I should divide my food amongst those who have fallen into error,  
Those without protection, and those abiding in modes of conduct,  
And eat merely what is suitable for myself.  
Except for the three robes I may give away all.

This is the advice that, when we have enough for ourselves, we should give away our food and clothing to:

- people around us
- people who come asking for it
- people who are abiding in ethics
- animals

One keeps an appropriate amount for one's own consumption and then gives the rest away. The amount of food for one's personal intake must be appropriate. When one gorges oneself with food, this will become an obstacle to engaging in virtue because the body becomes very heavy. At the other extreme, when one does not eat but gives everything away, that also becomes an obstacle for one to continue one's practice. Therefore one should take a moderate and appropriate amount of food.

In the case of ordained people, with the exception of the three sets of robes that they must keep and not give away, when they have other spare things such as clothing and so forth, when people ask for them, they should be given away. Giving away their robes also becomes an obstacle for continuing to live in the practice.

This discussion is in the context of benefiting or helping others. So when one has spare possessions such as food, clothing and so forth, the advice is to give it away.

2. *Not causing harm to the body for the sake of minor actions*

Verse 5.86

This body that is for practicing the sublime Dharma  
Should not be harmed for only slight benefit.  
If I behave in this way,  
The wishes of all beings will be quickly fulfilled.

The beginner bodhisattvas should protect their body with an appropriate amount of food and clothing without falling into the two extremes and not give it away for insignificant purposes. The purpose of doing this is so that:

- they can sustain themselves.
- they can practise the Dharma.

- they can accomplish the welfare of others.
- they can dedicate their actions to the welfare of others.

Gradually training in stages in this way, there will come a time when these bodhisattvas will be able to accomplish the temporal and ultimate goals of all sentient beings.

Aryadeva in his *Four Hundred Verses* stated,

Although one views the body as an enemy, one would still have to protect it. When one lives for a long time abiding in ethics, great merit will arise from that.

This is stating again that when one is taking care of the body, one needs to protect it without falling into the two extremes. While abiding in that way, one protects one's ethics and works for others.

### 3. *Explaining the time and need for practicing the giving of body*

Verse 5.87

Those whose attitude of compassion is impure

Should not give their body away.

No matter what, both in this and future lives,

They should give it as causes for fulfilling the great purpose.

“Those whose attitude of compassion is impure” refers to the bodhisattvas who have yet to achieve the first ground called Very Joyful. These bodhisattvas should not give away their body, limbs and so forth. Rather they should protect their body that is the basis for them to practise.

It is mentioned in the teachings that until one has achieved the first bodhisattva ground, one should not give away one's body. But once one has reached the first ground, then it is all right to give away one's body when there is a purpose to doing so. The reason is that when one gives away one's body before one has reached the first ground, the pain that one will experience from cutting certain parts of one's body may be a condition for one to generate regret, “I shouldn't have done this.”

But for the bodhisattvas who have achieved the first bodhisattva ground, there is no such danger. The bodhisattvas abiding on the first ground and onwards are able to give their body away without any regret. In fact they feel very joyful when doing so. Therefore it is all right for them to give their body away.

The next section talks about gathering sentient beings into one's fold and under one's influence by gathering them through the Dharma.

#### B. *Gathering through Dharma*

1. *Physical postures which are appropriate for a listener to assume when the Dharma is being explained*

## Verse 5.88

The Dharma should not be explained to those who lack respect,  
 To those who wrap cloth around their heads although they are not ill,  
 To those holding umbrellas, sticks, or weapons, and  
 To those with covered heads.

What kind of physical demeanour or posture should the listener not adopt when listening to the Dharma? To such people it is said that we should not teach the Dharma.

When listening to the teachings, in one's mind, one should have respect for the teacher and the Dharma. One should also show such respect externally and physically.

While listening to the teachings, when the listener does not have any mental respect for the teachings and the teacher and externally do not show a respectful posture and manner, then there is no benefit at all in conducting those teachings.

This verse relates to the listener. When one is a listener, one should listen with the appropriate physical and mental attitudes. Mentally one must have respect for the Dharma, the instructions themselves and the teacher. Externally and physically, one should also show a respectful posture and manner. Only then will the teachings that one hears be beneficial for the mind. Otherwise they will not be beneficial for the mind. This is the reason that there are such rules.

When the listener does not have respect for the teachings and, as a result, does not have faith in them, then there is the danger of that listener accumulating the non-virtuous karma that will throw him into the lower realms. For that reason, one should not teach such people.

Unless one is sick, one should not be listening to the teachings while wearing a cap, hat or head-covering or carrying an umbrella over one's head. Teachers should not teach such people as well as people who carry weapons to the teaching ground. This list is not exhaustive but these are seen as gestures of disrespect.

But just using an umbrella, covering one's head and so forth are not necessarily indicative of disrespect. One has to judge this according to the time, situation, environment and the people one is talking to.

Are there any cultural differences? It is fine when those actions are not a show of disrespect. But when the teacher assesses them to be disrespectful, then the teacher has to reconsider.

*Khen Rinpoche: I'm not sure about Chinese people but when Tibetans go to see a high lama for blessings, they always take off their hat. They take off their hat and bend forward like this. (Khen Rinpoche demonstrates). They don't go with their hats on to receive blessings.*

*You know why? Because the hat blocks the blessing so it is better take it off. Otherwise*

*the blessings do not go inside the head. (Laughter).*

*I am just joking! I mean it is a sign of respect. The highest thing they have on the head is the hat, so they must take it off and bow down. It is a sign of respect in the Tibetan culture. But for the Chinese, I'm not sure. They take off their hat?*

There are other rules such as not teaching people who are sitting on thrones or people who are seated at a higher level than the teacher and so forth. These are seen as disrespectful. However, in general, an exception can be made when the listener is sick or whenever it is deemed all right to go against some of these rules. Basically, the main point is not to adopt disrespectful postures.

It is also said in the teachings that one should listen with single-pointed faith and respect. One should not deride the instructor or show one's pride by criticising, making fun of the teacher and so forth. One should not listen to the teachings with such attitudes for it will not be beneficial.

The teachings forbid us from teaching those who are disrespectful and who act in such ways. Why? Because in these situations, it does not serve any benefit even we were to teach. Therefore we are not permitted to teach such people.

## 2. *Examining the features of the vessel's thoughts*

Verse 5.89

The vast and profound should not be taught to lesser beings  
Nor to a woman unaccompanied by a man.  
Out of respect for the Dharmas of lesser and supreme beings as  
equal,  
I should utilize all.

For those who are predisposed to the Hinayana such as the hearers and solitary realisers, it is not suitable to teach them some of the Mahayana teachings, such as the extensive explanations of the paths and grounds because such teachings will not be of great benefit to them.

It is stated in the Vinaya that an ordained person, for example an ordained monk, should not teach Dharma in an isolated place to a woman who is not accompanied by a member of the opposite sex, a man. Similarly in the case of a nun, she is not supposed to teach the Dharma in an isolated place to a man who is not accompanied by someone else.

It is also incorrect to consider that the Mahayana Dharma as superior to the Hinayana Dharma, i.e., holding the view that it is not good to talk about the Hinayana Dharma or to teach the Hinayana Dharma. This is wrong.

The reason for the existence of the Mahayana Dharma and the Hinayana Dharma is the differing capacities of the trainees. But one should understand and be able to explain that the Dharma itself, be it the Hinayana Dharma or the Mahayana Dharma, is the path for one to reach enlightenment. One should not view one Dharma as good and another Dharma as bad. All are paths that will help lead sentient beings to full



enlightenment.

When one holds the view that some Dharma such as the Hinayana Dharma is bad, inferior or unnecessary for achieving enlightenment and so forth, then one accumulates the very heavy negative karma of abandoning the Dharma.

We all know that food for a child and food for an adult are different. We cannot say one is better than the other. The food for the child and food for the adult have their own purposes as they accord with the needs of the person eating it. So it is important to understand how all the teachings of the Buddha, including the Hinayana teachings, will lead to full enlightenment. This is a very important point.

The Buddha mentioned in the sutras that the negative karma of abandoning the Dharma is heavier than (1) destroying all the holy objects in this world and (2) killing arhats equal in number to the sand grains in the Ganges River. Accumulating this heavy negative karma of abandoning the Dharma can easily happen.

One of the best ways to not accumulate such negative karma is to educate ourselves by learning the structure of the entire teachings of the Buddha—the Hinayana and the Mahayana, including tantra—and knowing them clearly.

The heavy negative karma of abandoning the Dharma is due to not knowing. For instance, when we are studying this text, there are many advice given here. When we think, “There are so many instructions here. They are not beneficial as they do not help me to achieve enlightenment,” this is similar to abandoning the Dharma.

*Khen Rinpoche: What do you think?*

Therefore we have to be extremely careful not to accumulate the heavy negative karma of abandoning the Dharma.

3. *One should not treat a person who esteems the extensive like one who feels an affinity towards the inferior*

Verse 5.90

I should not connect the Dharma of a lesser being  
To one who is a vessel for the vast Dharma.  
I should not forsake the conduct,  
Nor deceive by means of sutras or mantras.

When one teaches the Hinayana Dharma and connects a sharp-faculty person of the Mahayana lineage to the Hinayana path, then there is a danger that one will commit a downfall of the bodhisattva vows.

Another example is when we tell someone who is abiding in the Mahayana, “You just focus on emptiness. When you realise emptiness, then everything will be fine. You can forget about everything else. Don’t bother with the ethics of restraint. You don’t have to give up negativities.” If we were to say this, then it is also very inappropriate.

If we were to say, “Just focus on emptiness. You don’t have to train in the other extensive deeds of the bodhisattvas,” then there is the great danger that we will also be committing a downfall.

If we were to tell practitioners who have the capacity to train in the vast and profound aspects of the Mahayana and who are abiding correctly in their training in the Mahayana, “This is so complicated. You don’t have to do all these practices. Why are you doing so many things? You can just recite the *Diamond Cutter Sutra*. It is sufficient that you recite this mantra or this sutra. You don’t have to do all those practices.” Saying all this is also wrong. This is the meaning of, “Nor deceive by means of sutras or mantras,” because when we say such things, we are actually deceiving these practitioners.

If we really think about this, it is not an easy task to teach the Dharma. When we are teaching the Dharma, we should know what others are thinking, what they want, what their inclinations and dispositions are. It is difficult because we can’t tell.

*3. Looking after the minds of sentient beings and training in the conduct that is unsullied by wrongdoing*

*A. Extensive explanation*

*1. Abandoning the faulty physical conduct and lack of faith in others*

Verse 5.91

When I spit or throw away a tooth-stick,  
I should cover it up.  
Also it is deplorable to urinate and so forth  
In water or on land that is utilized.

Verse 5.92

When eating I should not fill my mouth,  
Eat noisily or with my mouth wide open.  
I should not sit with my legs outstretched  
Nor rub my hands together.

Verse 5.93

I should not sit on mounts, upon beds,  
Nor in the same room together with the women of others.  
Having observed and inquired about  
What causes non-faith in the world, I should abandon it.

Some of the activities mentioned here may not occur in Singapore. Generally, the idea is not to engage in behaviours or actions that will cause others to lose faith, to disturb their minds or make them feel uneasy.

Nowadays we have toothbrushes but during ancient times in India and even today, there are people who brush their teeth using branches from the neem tree. This is how they clean their mouth and teeth. There were no rubbish bins around in ancient India. When one was done cleaning, one would just throw the branch away. Also, people spat and blew their noses everywhere.

*Khen Rinpoche: In Singapore I saw some men doing this. They blow their nose by closing one of their nostrils and the snot would shoot out from the other nostril!*

One should not engage in such polluting activities in the presence of the guru, in temples or places that are environmentally clean. Of course, one should not urinate and defecate in public places, clean places or places like parks and so forth.

When eating, there are some people who have their mouth wide open even before the food reaches it. Also there are some people who make a lot of noise while eating.

*Khen Rinpoche: There are also people who put too much food in their mouth when they eat. Then they choke. These are not good manners when eating. Some people think that such behaviour is cool but it is not cool.*

Here is the advice not to eat with so much attachment. There is also the advice to regard food as medicine. When we take medicine, we do not go to the extreme of either not taking it at all or just taking very little nor do we go to the other extreme of taking too much. In order for the medicine to work, an appropriate amount should be taken. Likewise, when we regard food as medicine, our food intake should also be moderate, i.e., neither too much nor too little.

When eating, one should not eat with attachment or anger:

- When one eats with the primary motivation of looking good, for the body to be strong and to build muscles, this is eating with attachment.
- When one eats food so that one can be physically strong to defeat one's enemy in a fight, then probably this is eating with anger.

The point is that we should eat with the motivation to sustain this body that is necessary for practising the Dharma and working to benefit and for the welfare of others.

When sitting down, one may sit with the legs fully stretched out. This is unsightly.

I'm not sure what, "rub my hands together," mean.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you understand what this is? I don't know. Rubbing hands together. Maybe it has something to do with washing. Maybe washing like this is not correct (Khen Rinpoche demonstrates). I am not sure what this means. I don't know this one.*

In general, ordained people should not sit on mounts or beds or being in the same place together with women.

In short, these are advice for us to abandon those actions that are considered by people at large in society to be culturally offensive, unsightly behaviour or behaviour that will disturb the minds of others, causing them to lose faith.

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