

**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 44****14 August 2014****CHAPTER SEVEN: VERSES 7. 31–7. 39**

Increasing the strength of joyous effort—the antidote (V. 7.16 – V. 7. 30)

- A. Increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort
1. Brief presentation (V. 7.31 – 7.32)
  2. Extensive explanation (V. 7.33 – 7.39)

We have identified what exactly joyous effort (or joyous perseverance) is. We have also looked at the discordant classes of joyous effort, which are essentially the three types of lazinesses and some of their antidotes. We have finished with that.

Next is increasing the power of joyous effort that is the antidote to laziness.

**INCREASING THE STRENGTH OF JOYOUS EFFORT —THE ANTIDOTE***A. Increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort*

1. *Brief presentation by means of identifying the four powers*

First there is a brief presentation on the four powers, which are the favourable conditions for increasing joyous effort.

## Verse 7.31

The army for the sake of accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings  
Are interest<sup>1</sup>, steadfastness, joy, and relinquishment.  
Interest is developed through fear of suffering  
And contemplating its benefits.

## Verse 7.32

Thus I shall abandon its discordant classes  
And make effort in order to increase joyous effort  
Through the powers of interest, pride, joy, and relinquishment,  
Diligence and mastery.

The favourable conditions for generating joyous effort are said to be the four powers:

1. The power of aspiration (or the power of esteem)
2. The power of steadfastness (or the power of stability)
3. The power of joy
4. The power of relinquishment (or the power of suspension)

<sup>1</sup> Ven. Gyurme interpreted “interest” as “aspiration.”

The power of aspiration literally is the power of belief but in this context it is referring to aspiration. In this context, aspiration refers to the yearning for practice, the yearning for the Dharma. Such yearning for the practice and yearning for the Dharma is produced through developing the faith of conviction in karma and its effects.

The power of steadfastness: The teachings advise us that prior to undertaking any practice, we should carry out a thorough investigation as to see why we are doing it, whether we can actually do it and whether we can bring it to completion. The point is to develop a stable aspiration for the practice. We need to be steadfast.

The power of joy literally refers to the joy and the liking for whatever practice you have decided to carry out. So when you are engaging in the practice, you do it with very strong yearning and without any wish to stop doing it. The example is given of children playing games. When children are playing games, they never want to stop. They just want to continue on and on. Likewise when it comes to applying joyous effort, whatever we are practising, we should do it with a sense of joy and without any wish to stop the practice.

The power of relinquishment: As I have said before, in the process of applying joyous effort in engaging in practice or virtue, we do get exhausted and tired at times. So it is important to take a rest with the view of carrying on after we have rested. After we have rested, we continue with whatever we had set out to do.

“Thus I shall abandon its discordant classes”: The discordant classes of joyous effort are lazinesses of which there are three types.

1. There are people who can and know that they can actually engage in virtue but nevertheless they do not do so. That is the laziness of procrastination (or the laziness that relishes the taste of idleness).
2. There are some who want to engage in virtue but they feel that they are unable to do so. They feel hopeless and discouraged for whatever reason. So that is a form of laziness that is the laziness of discouragement (or the laziness that is disheartened about virtue).
3. The last laziness is the laziness of being attached to inferior or ignoble activities (or the laziness that clings to unwholesome activities).

In order to develop joyous effort, we need to abandon these discordant classes and we need to rely on the four powers that are the favourable conditions for the generation and the increase of joyous effort.

In the process of engaging in whatever practice or virtue, that practice must be done with mindfulness and introspection. There comes the time when one achieves the concentration that makes one’s body and mind serviceable for virtue—that is, one achieves meditative serenity or calm-abiding and the pliancy of the body and mind—one will be able to engage effortlessly in the practice of virtue or Dharma day and night. This is because one’s body and mind have already been made serviceable.

Right from the very beginning of any practice or cultivation of any virtue, you need to be thoroughly convinced of the benefits of that practice that you are going to engage

in. This is faith, i.e., a conviction or an ascertainment with the understanding that the practice or virtue is beneficial.

For example, if someone hopes to actualise concentration, right from the beginning before engaging in the practices that will help him to achieve that concentration, he must first understand thoroughly what concentration is. He must have confidence and belief in the benefits of concentration, that when he achieves it one day, these are the benefits that he really wants. He needs that conviction and the confidence right from the beginning.

With regard to whatever virtue that you want to cultivate and whatever practice that you want to do, if you have that faith of conviction right from the beginning—you are able to see what is in it for you when you actualise that practice—that will form the basis for your yearning. That faith, understanding and confidence in the benefit of the practice will drive your aspiration and yearning for that practice.

With the strong heartfelt yearning to achieve whatever goal you have set for yourself, only then do you start with the practice. It is only then that you will apply joyous effort in the practice that will lead you to your goal. With the faith of conviction that leads to strong yearning, this, in turn, leads to the start of actually applying joyous effort.

With the continuous application of such joyous effort directed to achieving the single-pointedness of mind whereby the practitioner aims to achieve the concentration that makes his body and mind serviceable, he will be able to achieve that single-pointed concentration. From then onwards, because that practitioner's body and mind are made serviceable, he is never tired of engaging in virtue and practice. Then his progress will sky rocket. Such practitioners will never find it difficult to engage in virtue day and night. They do not experience tiredness.

Within that single-pointed concentration, the practitioner then goes on to cultivate wisdom, in particular the wisdom that perceives the ultimate nature of reality, the wisdom realizing selflessness, which is the antidote that will enable him to cut the very root of all problems, the root of samsara. These are the essential points.

Let us look at the discussion of aspiration in the context of the mind and awareness, as covered in one of the earlier modules where we looked at the workings of the consciousness. Within the study of the mental factors, there are 51 mental factors, which are then divided into groups of different mental factors. There is a group of mental factors that is called the five object-ascertaining mental factors.

The first of the five object-ascertaining mental factors is the mental factor of aspiration, essentially a mind that is yearning for a chosen object, whatever the object may be. If we are differentiating between aspiration and belief, then we do not take aspiration and belief to be the same mental factor.

In the context of studying the mental factors, in the group of the object-ascertaining mental factors, the mental factor after aspiration is belief. What is belief? Belief is essentially an ascertainment of the object in question, a valid cognition. That means it

is a valid establishment from one's own side, i.e., one's mind has gained certainty with regard to that object, "It is really like this and is not like that." That is why it is called belief.

With respect to the chosen object, you have understood it correctly. It is not just a superficial understanding but a thorough understanding of the chosen object that you have thoroughly ascertained through a valid mind. That is belief.

What comes after belief? After you have aspiration and belief, then there is the mental factor of mindfulness. What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is not forgetting the things that you have belief in and not forgetting what you have ascertained through valid cognition.

After you have ascertained the chosen object through belief, you are not supposed to forget it. You have to keep it in mind. That is the purpose of mindfulness. Its function is not forgetting. Based on not forgetting what you have ascertained earlier through a valid mind, when that mindfulness becomes strong, you will be able to focus your mind single-pointedly on that object. Therefore after mindfulness comes the mental factor of concentration.

Now out of the five object-ascertaining mental factors, you already have four— aspiration, belief, mindfulness and concentration. The fifth object-ascertaining mental factor is wisdom that is essentially a mind that is able to distinguish or differentiate phenomena. There are many types of wisdom but the wisdom that is very important is the wisdom that directly perceives the ultimate nature of reality—the wisdom that directly perceives selflessness.

So these are the five object-ascertaining mental factors. It is not sufficient just to be able to list them out. You have to understand them as they are the workings of your own mind. You have to understand how one leads to the other, starting with aspiration, then belief, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

Verses 7.31 and 7.32 are the brief presentation of the four powers.

## *2. Extensive explanation*

### *A. The power of aspiration (or the power of esteem)*

Next is the extended explanation of these powers. First there is the explanation on the power of aspiration.

Essentially Verses 7.33 and 7.34 are telling us how it is actually incorrect for us not to have any aspiration to overcome our faults.

### *A. The power of aspiration (or the power of esteem)*

#### *1. The esteemed object*

##### *A. Discarding wrongdoing*

Verse 7.33

I shall destroy

The boundless misdeeds of others and myself.

At that time each of these misdeeds

Will be exhausted in an ocean of eons.

Verse 7.34

But if within myself I do not perceive  
Even a fraction of the endeavor for exhausting these misdeeds,  
Then I have become an abode for boundless suffering;  
Why does my heart not burst?

The context here is of someone who has taken the pledge to achieve the state of full enlightenment in order to accomplish the benefit of all sentient beings. One has taken the bodhisattva vows and one has pledged to eliminate the flaws and misdeeds of all sentient beings. That includes eliminating one's own faults and misdeeds.

The task of eliminating the afflictions of others and ourselves—starting with our own afflictions—is a long term task for there are many afflictive emotions. There is a saying that there are 84,000 afflictions. It is said that even eliminating one affliction will require many eons of effort.

While that is the case, the reality is that we do not even possess a fraction of the joyous effort that is needed to overcome the affliction. Putting aside the thought of having to eliminate our afflictions over a very long period of time—we are talking about eons here—we don't even possess a fraction of the joyous effort that is needed to do that. As such, because of our inability to overcome our afflictive emotions, then it is certain that we are in for boundless problems and suffering in the future. That is the reality. That is our situation. If we think about this, the verse asks us, "Why does my heart not burst?" It is said that if we really think about this and if we really understand that reality, it is mentioned in the teachings that we will probably find it even difficult to breathe.

We have to understand that these two verses here are meant for our own consumption in that we should use them to look at our own mind, as a way to evaluate ourselves. It is about disciplining ourselves and putting down ourselves in an appropriate way. Essentially it is to persuade ourselves, to move our heart enough to start to do something about this situation.

But not only do we not have aspiration to overcome our faults, we don't even have any aspiration to acquire good qualities.

The next two verses talk about that. Again it is a way of evaluating ourselves, a way of moving and persuading ourselves to develop the interest and aspiration to acquire the good qualities.

### *B. Adopting qualities*

Verse 7.35<sup>2</sup>

I shall accomplish many

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<sup>2</sup> Alternative interpretation by Ven. Gyurme: "I will accomplish numerous/ Good qualities for myself and others. / To cultivate each good quality/ Requires an ocean of eons."

Excellent qualities for others and myself.  
And I will acquaint myself  
With each of these qualities through an ocean of eons

Verse 7.36  
But I have never developed acquaintance  
With even a fraction of these excellences,  
How strange it is to make without purpose  
This birth I have somehow found

The context here is someone who has taken the pledge to achieve the state of full enlightenment in order to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings. This means that this person has taken a pledge to achieve every single quality of enlightenment.

The enlightenment or omniscience that we are talking about here is a state of existence that possesses limitless qualities. Just to achieve one good quality requires the collection of merit for many eons, without even talking about the rest of the limitless qualities. Putting aside having to achieve the collection of merit required for actualising *all* these numberless qualities, we have not even cultivated a fraction of the joyous effort needed to accumulate the collection of merit needed to achieve even just *one* good quality of enlightenment. We have not even accomplished a fraction of the cause of even one good quality of enlightenment.

“How strange” or how appalling it is to have wasted so far the human life of freedoms and endowments that we have obtained. Instead of using it, we have only procrastinated accumulating those causes for enlightenment. The verse is saying “how strange” or how appalling this is.

In Nagarjuna’s *Precious Garland*, there is a description of the merit that is needed to achieve enlightenment.

For example, how much merit do you need to accumulate in order to achieve even just one hair-pore of the Buddha? With regard to the pores of the exalted body of the Buddha, how much merit is needed to achieve one pore of the Buddha’s exalted body? The merit required is *all* the immeasurable merit of *all* sentient beings up to the level of the hearers and solitary realiser arhats combined and then multiplied by 10.

*Khen Rinpoche: It says here how precious one pore of the Buddha is.*

So that is the merit that is required to actualise one pore of the Buddha’s exalted body.

The Buddha’s exalted body has numberless pores. The merit that is required to actualise all the immeasurable pores of the Buddha’s exalted body multiplied by 100 times is the merit that is required to actualise one of the 80 exemplifications (or minor signs) of the Buddha’s exalted body. The major marks and the minor signs technically are the signs and exemplifications.

There are 80 exemplifications (or minor signs) such as the Buddha's copper-coloured nails, red lips, black hair and so forth. These are just some of the exemplifications of the Buddha's exalted body. So now you know how much merit is needed to actualise each of those exemplifications.

Then there are the major signs such as the image of a dharmachakra on the palms and soles of the feet of the Buddha. These are the illustrations of some of the major signs of the Buddha's exalted body. What merit is required to actualise one of those major signs? The merit that is required to actualise *one* of those major signs is all the merit that is required to actualise *all* the exemplifications multiplied by 100 times.

The Buddha also has this particular feature called the treasure hair, i.e., the hair curl that is slightly above the bridge of the nose. How much merit is required to actualise this particular feature? The merit that is acquired to actualise the treasure hair is the merit that is required to actualise all the 32 major signs multiplied by 1000 times.

Then there is the Buddha's crown protrusion. The merit that is required to actualise the Buddha's crown protrusion is the merit that is required to actualise the treasure hair multiplied by 100,000 times.

*Khen Rinpoche: We still haven't finished.*

The merit that is required to actualise the crown protrusion of the Buddha multiplied by 100 times is the merit that would bring about the actualisation of the Buddha's exalted speech.

The explanation stops there. It does not continue to mention the merit required to actualise the exalted mind of the Buddha.

Let's say—I can't say for sure—that the merit required to actualise the Buddha's exalted mind is the merit that is required to actualise the Buddha's speech multiplied by 100 times. That is actually still a lot of merit.

*Khen Rinpoche: What do you think? You are discouraged? Mui Cheng (name of student) said she is discouraged.*

(Student's response is not audible).

*Khen Rinpoche: You are at the level of laziness.*

The next two verses are kind of putting us down by highlighting to us that we do not generate the aspiration to practise the Dharma correctly and because of that, we do not persuade ourselves to practise it with the application of joyous effort.

*C. Examining the list of things to do and not to do*

Verse 7.37

I have not made offerings to the Bhagavan,  
I have not given the pleasure of great festivals,  
I have not performed actions for the teachings,

I have not fulfilled the wishes of the poor,

Verse 7.38

I have not granted fearlessness to the frightened  
And I have not given happiness to the wretched.  
All I have given rise to are  
The agonies in the mother's womb and suffering.

Sometimes it is possible that people may feel that they have done a fair bit, thinking: "I am not the person who has been mentioned so far. I have done a fair bit of practice." While that is true, that kind of thinking can sometimes stop the person from increasing her joyous effort. At such a time, one needs to remember these two verses.

Verse 7.37 is meant for personal reflection. It starts off with the example, saying, "I have not made offerings to the Bhagavan." We have not actually sat down and made a proper mental offering to the Buddha. Have we ever made proper offerings through mental visualisation? Have we even done this properly once? When it comes to actually performing the offerings, have we procured and set up good offerings? Have we made generous offerings? Do we honour the sangha community with extensive offerings?

With regard to the scriptural Dharma, which consists of the three scriptural collections, have we ever listened well to the teachings on them? Even if you are someone who thinks that you know a fair bit of the Buddha's teachings, do you actually know them very well or not? Have we ever actually learnt the scriptural Dharma properly? Even if you have learnt it, do you actually know it well? Then when it comes to putting those teachings into practice, do we even have the practice of the three higher trainings? Do we have a good practice or do we have any experience? Again these are points for personal reflection. Probably the answer is: No! We have not done any of these things well if at all.

Have we fulfilled the wishes of the poor? There are so many people who are in need of help. Have we done anything for them? Putting aside having helped all of them, we have not even offered anything to these people.

Have we ever granted help or fearlessness to those who are frightened and to those whose lives are in danger? Have we saved the lives of others? For example, when we walk down the road and see some sentient beings or insects in danger—people often ignore such situations—it is almost as if we didn't even see anything at all although we did see it. We continue to walk on and continue to do whatever we were doing.

This is meant for personal reflection. It may appear that you are doing some practice and you may think that you are doing quite well. But when you actually sit down and examine your practice honestly, there is almost no practice that you can point to as having been done well. As such, your life has been wasted. It would seem that your coming into existence is nothing more than for the purpose of causing pain and suffering to your mother.

You must understand that you should use all the advice given so far to generate enthusiasm and the strong aspiration to do better. You should not take the advice as a means to feel discouraged or to put yourself down. That is not the point.

*Khen Rinpoche: Is the advice beneficial or harmful? You feel more discouraged?*

## 2. The effect

### A. *It is unreasonable to abandon esteem for the Dharma*

It is not appropriate to give up one's aspiration for the dharma.

Verse 7.39

If in the past and even now  
Such deprivation are arising  
Because of my lack of interest in the Dharma,<sup>3</sup>  
Who would reject this interest in the Dharma?

Verse 7.39 is talking about how it is wrong to give up our aspiration for the Dharma. In all our past lives, because of this lack of yearning or aspiration for the Dharma, we hadn't actualised it. Similarly in this life, because of our lack of real yearning for the Dharma, we have not really practised it. As such, in our past lives all the way till now, we have only experienced the problems and suffering of samsara. It is mentioned in the teachings that we are like dogs looking at grass. Just as a dog is not interested in grass so even though we have met the Dharma, we have no yearning for it. We don't really want it.

*Khen Rinpoche: Yes? No? Do you have yearning for the Dharma?*

We have to be honest with ourselves and examine how we feel. Are we like the dog looking at grass? How much of the Dharma do we really want? Do we want the Dharma or not? Do we yearn for it or not? That is the question that we all have to ask ourselves.

What is the essential point that this verse is driving at? For someone who has the intelligence and the ability to discriminate well and at the same time looking for real long-term everlasting happiness, that person will never give up the Dharma.

What is the reason for being inappropriate for us giving up our aspiration for the Dharma? The reason is that the Buddha, the Subduer, himself has said that aspiration is the root of every class of virtue.

I mentioned earlier that before you actually want to engage in anything—in this context, virtue, Dharma or the cause of happiness—first you have to be thoroughly convinced of the benefits. You must be thoroughly convinced with respect to the goal you are aiming at and that conviction must be heartfelt. Thorough conviction is faith.

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<sup>3</sup> Ven Gyurme: It should be, "aspiration in the Dharma," as "interest in the Dharma" sounds too weak.

Based on this faith of conviction, you then yearn for that object, i.e. whatever you have faith in. It is only when you have this yearning that the practice begins because your yearning will start you off. Therefore it is said that aspiration, which is yearning, is the root of every class of virtue.

- If you have a very strong aspiration or yearning for the Dharma, then you will become a strong and good practitioner.
- If your yearning for the Dharma is average, then you will end up as an average practitioner.
- If your yearning for the Dharma is below average or mediocre, you will end up as a mediocre practitioner.

You must want the Dharma from your heart. That is what we call yearning or aspiration. That kind of yearning for the Dharma is not something that just drops from the sky, i.e., most people are not born wanting the Dharma from their own side. That is not the case for most people.

But without yearning, you are not going to have joyous perseverance. You are not going to have any virtue. The question now is: How do you produce this yearning? How do you make yourself want the Dharma?

You have to start with education, learning about the teachings, thinking about them and critically analysing them. That is how you start. What is the cause of aspiration or this heartfelt yearning for the Dharma? How do you produce it? What is its root? Its root is the constant meditation on the fruitional effects of karma.

The way to produce yearning for the Dharma is to reflect and understand well the presentation of cause and effect and in particular, karma and its consequences. In particular, it is about understanding and finding the conviction that certain actions would definitely produce certain results and other actions would produce other kinds of results. The root of yearning for the Dharma lies in that faith of conviction.

Acquiring this faith of conviction in karma and its consequences is therefore indispensable. Everything boils down to that. Whether one is able to practise and practise well or not, it all boils down to how much conviction one has in karma and its effects. In order to develop that, one has to really understand the workings of karma and its consequences such as the general characteristics of karma—karma is definite, karma is certain, karma increases, one will not meet with the results of karma that one did not do and the result of the karma that one has done would not perish on its own accord.

Gyalsab Je said, “If one has not ascertained and developed conviction in the karma and its consequences, then one has not found the realisation of the Dharma that will please the buddhas.”

We have heard these teachings many times. We have heard them before and we are still hearing them. But that hardly does anything for us. So that is not enough. We have to sit down and meditate, i.e., critically analyse the teachings until we gain a conviction in them. We should ask ourselves, “How much faith in karma do I really have? Do I have any faith at all? How strong is that faith?”

It is said there are people who claim they have realised emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, yet at the same time when you look at how they behave, they act and talk as if karma does not exist; that is one of the signs that that person does not have such a realisation. He has completely understood the teachings wrongly and has no realisation whatsoever of emptiness.

Actually the situation should be this: If you are talking about somebody who has a really good understanding of the ultimate nature of reality—the emptiness of inherent existence—the stronger his understanding of emptiness, the stronger his appreciation of cause and effect will be.

The meaning of emptiness is the meaning of dependent arising, in particular, subtle dependent arising. Before you can hope to understand subtle dependent arising, first you must understand the coarser level of dependent arising without which there is no way you can understand subtle dependent arising. Those people who claim that they have some understanding of emptiness and have realised it but at the same time do not give any consideration at all to karma and its consequences, then you should understand that that person has a completely wrong understanding of emptiness.

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*Question:* This is relates to Verse 7.34 to 7.36, which are supposed to encourage us to generate joyous effort by showing us the faults of the practices we had done. How do we keep a proper balance between not putting ourselves down so much that we give up and at the same time not to be discouraged? How do we manage this at the emotional level? At the mental level, they are easy to understand.

*Khen Rinpoche:* When you hear these three verses, you feel some emotion? You really feel that?

It happens to some people that when they think about death and impermanence, they become discouraged. That has never been the point or purpose behind meditating on death and impermanence. In fact, if you meditate on death and impermanence, it gives you strength and determination to think, “I must do something right now. I can do something about it and I must start right now.” That should be the message that people should get when they look at death and impermanence.

When you look at those Verses 7.34, 7.35 and 7.36, you get a message of discouragement or a message of hope?

The purpose and the end result of reflecting on our own death and impermanence are to give us strength and determination. It is a completely different matter if we don't know how to think about it or if we think about it in a wrong way. If you think about it correctly, the result you get is that it gives you real strength and determination.

The meditation on death and impermanence is not directed at everybody. This advice is directed at and is meant for people who are sincerely interested about their long-

term future. This advice is directed at people who are looking beyond this life. It is directed at people who are seriously thinking about what is going to happen to them in their future lives. It is also directed at people who are looking for something better, a higher level or order of happiness.

As in all Buddhist practices, this meditation on death and impermanence does not stand on its own. It is part of the components of an overarching practice. Everything is linked together. You must be able to situate each practice within the entire practice. It is not a stand-alone thing. As such, there is the advice that one has to balance one's reflection on death and impermanence with the reflection on the human life of freedoms and endowments. People who get it wrong will be depressed or discouraged because they think too much of death and impermanence. Then they have to balance that reflection with the reflection on this human life of freedoms and endowments. This is mentioned in the lam-rim.

You have to apply that understanding to this situation as well. You cannot take these three verses out of context. You have to situate them within the whole context. I don't think that just superficially looking at these three verses you will get discouraged or depressed. I don't think that will really happen.

But if you really think about it, in the earlier part of the chapter, there is a discussion on how fortunate we are to have this human life of freedoms and endowments, if we work at it, then there is no reason why we cannot be enlightened and so forth. You have to combine everything together and not look at these verses as a stand-alone piece of advice.

It is the same with this: We are advised to work non-stop and continuously with joyous effort like a flow of river. When people take that advice out of context, then people will say, "Practise non-stop? I will surely die." This is thinking out of context.

If they know the whole picture, they would know that there is the power of relinquishment. So when you need to rest, you rest at the appropriate time. If you understand the whole context, then that should not be any problem. There will be no worries at all.

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