

**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 45****19 August 2014****CHAPTER SEVEN: VERSES 7. 40–7. 51**

Increasing the strength of joyous effort—the antidote

- A. Increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort
  - 2. Extensive explanation
    - A. The power of esteem (V. 7.40 c, d – V.46 a, b)
    - B. The power of stability (V. 46 c, d – V. 7.51)

**INCREASING THE STRENGTH OF JOYOUS EFFORT —THE ANTIDOTE (cont'd)**

We had started with the outline on increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort (or joyous perseverance) or increasing the favorable conditions for the generation of joyous effort. Under that outline, the four powers are discussed. They are:

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)

Of the four, we have started on the power of aspiration.

What is joyous effort? Joyous effort is the enthusiasm for virtue. There are four powers related to developing joyous effort. The first is the power of aspiration. In this context, the power of aspiration refers to the yearning for Dharma practice and the yearning for virtue. In order to be able to cultivate any practice or virtue, one must have this yearning wanting such practice or virtue.

If that is the case, then how does one develop this yearning or aspiration? As mentioned in the root text, the root of such aspiration is constant meditation on the fruitional effects of karma (V. 7.40 c, d). This means that if we want to develop a yearning for the teachings and Dharma practice, we have to reflect on and come to an understanding of the presentation of karma and its effects. In particular, we have to reflect on the effects of our actions. We need to think of the various effects of a single karma in terms of its fruitional effect, causally concordant effect and environmental effect.

In essence, the text is saying that to be able to practise the Dharma, you need to have a very strong yearning and aspiration for it and you must want to practice the Dharma from your own side. That in turn is dependent on your faith of conviction in karma. Your interest for the practice will be commensurate with your faith of

conviction in karma. Therefore it is mentioned in the stages of the path literature that the root of all happiness is this faith of conviction in karma and its effects.

Expanding on this discussion of karma and its effects are the next few verses, which deal with reflecting on the effects of virtue, the effects of non-virtue and the effects of mixed karma.

*A. Increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort*

*2. Extensive explanation*

*A. The power of esteem*

*3. The cause for esteem*

*B. Extensive explanation*

*1. Reflecting on mixed karma and its effects*

Verse 7.41

Suffering, mental unhappiness,  
The various kinds of fear,  
As well as separation from what is desired  
Will arise from negative deeds.

Verse 7.42

By performing virtues intended in the mind,  
Wherever I go, due to those merits,  
There I shall be honoured with  
The excellences that are their results.

Verse 7.43

Although one who commits misdeeds wishes for happiness,  
Wherever he goes,  
There those misdeeds  
Will completely destroy him with the weapons of suffering.

We experience many kinds of problems and suffering. On the bodily level, we experience sicknesses or the discomforts of heat and cold. Likewise we also suffer mental unhappiness. So in life, we experience suffering, mental unhappiness, various kinds of fears as well as separation from what we desire and coming into contact with the things that we do not desire. This is how samsara is.

Basically Verse 7.41 is saying that all undesirable experiences and results do not come into being without a cause. They do not arise without any causes and conditions. Rather these are said to be the fruitional effects of the non-virtue that we have accumulated. This verse is actually the presentation of cause and effect, karma.

We have the aspiration or yearning for virtue that comes from our faith of conviction in karma and its effects. Based on that yearning for the practice, the Dharma and virtue, if we accumulate the virtue that is the cause of happiness, then wherever we go, due to the power of the merit or virtue that we have accumulated, we will experience the fruitional effects of those virtues, i.e., happiness.

If we only accumulate non-virtue and at the same time, we want success and happiness, will we achieve the result, happiness? The answer is no! Even if we want only success and happiness, if we commit misdeeds or accumulate non-virtue, those misdeeds will accompany us wherever we go. When those non-virtues ripen, they will bring about only suffering.

The outline that goes with these three verses is reflecting on mixed karma and its effects. When we talk about mixed karma, we are not talking about white karma (or virtue) and black karma (or non-virtue). In the presentation of karma, there is a classification of karma into:

- projecting karma that propels or throws one into a future rebirth
- completing karma that literally completes that life

For example, being born in a higher realm is a good rebirth that is the result of virtuous projecting karma. Let's say in that life, one has good health, a long life, wealth, prosperity and all kinds of happinesses. That life is completed with virtuous completing karma.

Let's take rebirth as a sentient being in the lower realms as an example. A rebirth in the lower realms is the result of non-virtuous projecting karma and that life is filled with suffering. In that sense, that life is completed also with non-virtuous completing karma.

Even with a good rebirth that is the result of virtuous projecting karma, in that life, a person may experience a short life, many sicknesses, poverty and destitution. His life is like that and it ends with all those problems and sufferings. Although that person has a good rebirth that is the result of virtuous projecting karma, his life is completed with non-virtuous completing karma.

Let's take the example of a dog that is kept by a rich family. The rebirth of that dog is the result of non-virtuous projecting karma. But generally a dog that is kept by a well-to-do family will live in a big house and have people looking after it. It gets what it wants, all kinds of food and so forth. Although rebirth as a dog is the result of non-virtuous projecting karma, its life is filled with all these enjoyments. As such, this is an example of a life that is completed by virtuous completing karma.

There are different classifications of the hells. There is what we called the occasional hells. Rebirth in an occasional hell is the result of non-virtuous projecting karma. But in some of these occasional hells, it is said that at different times of the day—for example, during the entire night—the beings that are born there experience a lot of happiness, pleasure and all kinds of enjoyments. That is the result of virtuous completing karma. Then when daytime comes and the sun rises, whatever happiness and pleasures they experienced at night cease and are replaced by unimaginable pain and suffering. That is the result of non-virtuous completing karma. In the case of these beings who are born in such occasional hells, their lives are completed by *both* virtuous and non-virtuous completing karmas.

It was mentioned in the teachings that there was a butcher who slaughtered animals during the day. As a result of having that kind of livelihood, he was not able to

abandon killing during the day but he was able to abandon killing during the night. So he took on the vow not to kill at night. He was born in one of these occasional hells. As the result of being a butcher who slaughtered animals in the day, he experienced unimaginable suffering and pain in the day but when night came, his experience completely changed. Whenever it was nighttime, he would experience unimaginable pleasures, comforts and enjoyments, which are the results of having taken the vow of not killing at night.

There is also an account of a woman who was only able to avoid sexual misconduct in the day but was not able to avoid sexual misconduct at night. So during daytime, she kept the vow of not engaging in sexual misconduct but she was not able to do so at night. As a result, after she was reborn, her experience was opposite to that of the butcher in that during the day, she experienced happiness and comfort. Then when night came, because of having engaged in sexual misconduct at night in the past, she experienced problems and sufferings at night.

What is the moral of these accounts? The moral is that we should try as much as possible to abandon non-virtue and to keep to whatever vows and trainings we have taken on. Even if we cannot do this for a long time, we should try to adhere to such vows and training for whatever period of time that we are able to manage. We should not underestimate the ripening result of keeping vows for even a short period of time. We should think about this and not look down on the importance of keeping our vows. We should not have this idea: “What is the point of taking on these vows as I cannot keep them anyway,” and so forth.

There are some people who are born as humans as the result of virtuous projecting karma. In the earlier part of their lives, things go well and they have a lot of success and enjoyments. That is the result of virtuous completing karma. But in the later part of their lives, their lives suddenly change. They have no success and they meet with a lot of problems and sufferings. Their lives end like that. Of course, that is the result of non-virtuous completing karma. This is an example of a life that is completed by *both* virtuous and non-virtuous completing karmas.

The lesson from these accounts is that whatever happiness or suffering you may experience in a good rebirth, say, as a human being, you have to understand that it is the result of virtuous completing karma. Whatever problems you experience are the result of non-virtuous completing karma. Likewise when we see how animal and beings in the lower realms experience life, whatever suffering they experience is the result of their non-virtuous completing karma. Whatever happiness they experience is the result of their virtuous completing karma. We have to understand this and develop certainty and conviction that this is so.

In the section on karma in the stages of the path literature, one of the general characteristics of karma is that karma is definite. This means that:

- if we accumulate virtue, that virtue is certain to bring about happiness, i.e., the result of virtue can only be happiness.
- non-virtue is certain to bring about suffering, i.e., the result of non-virtue can only be suffering.

*2. Reflecting on solely white karma and its effects*

Verse 7.44

As a result of virtue, I will become a spiritual child of the Sugatas  
dwelling in the hearts of vast, fragrant, and cool lotuses,  
The food of the Victors' pleasant speech will cause my splendour to  
grow,  
My supreme body will emerge from a lotus that will unfold due to the  
light of the Munis and  
I will abide in the presence of the Victors.

If one is able accumulate virtue well, one can be reborn in the pure land of the buddhas such as the pure land of Amitabha Buddha called Sukhavati. This pure land is very vast, expansive and beautiful. It is said that when one is reborn in a lotus in Sukhavati, one grows up listening to and hearing the speech of the buddhas, which sustains one's growth in the pure land. So hearing the buddhas' speech will cause one's "splendor to grow." I guess this is what the verse is talking about.

When a normal human being is conceived in the womb, the development of the baby is sustained by the nutrients from the mother's body. Likewise when one is reborn in a lotus in Sukhavati, one will develop physically and grow within the lotus. One's sustenance is the buddhas' speech, which is like the nutrients that the baby gets from its mother in the womb.

There will come a time when the light from the exalted bodies of the buddhas causes the lotus to fully bloom. It is said that one's supreme body will then emerge from the lotus, adorned with characteristics such as the different marks and signs. After one emerges from the lotus—in this case, we are talking about Sukhavati, the pure land of Amitabha Buddha—one comes before the presence of Amitabha Buddha. One's life is then lived hearing teachings from Amitabha Buddha. All these experiences are the results of white or wholesome karma.

*3. Reflecting on black karma and its effects*

Verse 7.45

As a result of many non-virtues, I will be very wretched due to all my  
skin without exception being ripped off by the henchmen of Yama,  
Molten copper melted by tremendous heat will be poured into my  
body,  
Pierced by flaming swords and daggers, my flesh will be cut into  
hundreds of pieces,  
And I shall plummet upon the fiercely blazing iron ground.

These are said to be the experiences of those who accumulate non-virtue.

*4. Conclusion*

Verse 7.46 ab

Therefore, I should be interested in virtue  
And with great respect acquaint myself with it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ven. Gyurme interpreted these two lines as: "Therefore, I should practise to have belief in virtue, /

This is the concluding summary to the discussion on karma.

Prior to this was the discussion on the need to have a yearning for virtue, practice and the Dharma. The root of that yearning is having the faith of conviction in karma. As such, there is some explanation on the results of virtue and the results of non-virtue. The conclusion here is that as the result of those reflections, one should have the yearning to abandon non-virtue and the yearning to cultivate virtue.

With that, I think we have finished the first power, the power of esteem or the power of aspiration. Next must be the power of stability or the power of steadfastness.

Whenever you are going to engage in practice or virtue, first, you should investigate right from the beginning whether that practice or virtue is appropriate and whether you have the ability to do it. After such investigation, then from the time you engage in that chosen activity, you should see things through and make sure that you complete that task or practice. This is what is meant by the power of stability or steadfastness.

*B. The power of stability*

*1. Stable perseverance*

*A. Examining it well and undertaking it*

Verse 7.46 c, d

Having undertaken through the procedure of Vajradhvaja,<sup>2</sup>  
I should cultivate pride.

Verse 7.47

At the beginning having examined the endowments,  
I should either undertake it or not undertake it.  
It is best not to undertake it,  
But once I have undertaken it I should not withdraw.

When the sun rises, the sun from its own side can illuminate everything on this planet. But there are certain locations—due to the terrain or factors such as underground caves and so on—that the sunlight cannot reach. But that is not the fault of the sun as the sun from its own side can illuminate everything. If factors such as uneven terrain and so forth do not exist, then the light of the sun will be able to shine everywhere.

It is said that the real bodhisattvas who work day and night for sentient beings have the capacity to do so. From their own side, they are not biased, i.e. thinking of working for some and not for others. From their own side, they want to work for *all* sentient beings. But if some sentient beings have wrong views, then they will not benefit from the work of those bodhisattvas. That is not the fault of the bodhisattvas as they have the wish and the capacity to benefit them. If the sentient beings are not ready to be benefited, that is not the fault of the bodhisattvas. The problem lies with

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And with great respect meditate on it.”

<sup>2</sup> Vajradhvaja means vajra victory banner.

the sentient beings. If the sentient beings in question are mature, with their minds suitable to be ripened, then the bodhisattvas will be able to help them.

This is advice for cultivating pride but not pride in the negative sense. Rather it is a can-do attitude, “I can do this myself.” It is for generating courage. Based on the example of the bodhisattvas who give their bodies away, the bodhisattvas are able to work for others regardless of how sentient beings are. From their own side, they only want to work for others.

That is the example we can look up to during those times when—even if we want to do something positive to help others—we feel that we are unable to do so in relation to some people. We think, “How is this possible? It is impossible for me to do this for the benefit of this group of people (or this specific person).” We feel disheartened. When we feel that way then we should remember how the bodhisattvas behave. The point here is to generate courage with a can-do attitude: “From my own side, I can engage in that practice and that virtue.” As it says in the verse, “I should cultivate pride.”

We are advised to think carefully before we decide to undertake a particular task. In general, this is how it should be but here we are discussing this in the context of starting a practice or engaging in a particular virtue. So regardless of the virtue or practice in question, in the beginning before doing it, we should think about and analyse it carefully, checking whether we can do it or not. After careful consideration, if we think we should do it and we can do it, we should make a promise to ourselves to do the task at hand.

Here the teachings say that if we find that we are unable to do the practice or virtue for whatever reason after careful consideration, then for the time being, it is better to decide not to do it. As it says here, “It is best not to undertake it.”

On the other hand, upon careful consideration, if we feel that it is something that we should do and we are able to do it, then we should generate the determination to engage in it. Once we have generated that determination and pledge to do it, we must make sure we follow through by completing that task without turning back. The text says, “But once I have undertaken it, I should not withdraw.”

*Khen Rinpoche: So don't withdraw. Don't withdraw from the Basic Program.*

What is the problem if we were to give up halfway? We may decide to do something but we surrender or give up halfway. What is wrong with that?

*B. The disadvantages of discarding it after one has undertaken it*

Verse 7.48

I will familiarize with that in other rebirths  
And negativities and suffering will increase.  
Also others and the time of the result  
Will be inferior and will not be accomplished

It doesn't matter what we do. It could be studying, doing a particular practice or doing a retreat. Whatever practice or virtue it may be, after we have started it and if halfway we were to just give up, not seeing it through and completing the task, then it will set up a very bad habit of not finishing or completing tasks. That bad habit doesn't end in this life. Because of this bad habit, we will experience the causally concordant behavioral effect in future lives. This means that again in future lives, we will also not be able to complete whatever we have set out to do due to this bad habit that was formed in this life.

If we do not complete whatever task we have set out to do, we form this very bad habit of not completing things. Then as a result, it will affect us in this life and in future lives. If we were to do things like that—whatever things we do, we start but we never finish, then we start on something else and never finish that and we repeat this pattern over and over again—then whatever we do will have no power. There will be no strength to our practice and virtue.

Next is the explanation of the three types of pride, which are:

1. the pride of karma or the pride of action
2. being proud of one's capacity or the pride about ability
3. being proud of the afflictions or the pride about afflictions

*2. Having undertaken joyous perseverance, stabilizing its engagement*

*A. Brief presentation*

Verse 7.49 a, b

Apply pride to the three:

Actions, afflictions, and ability.

*B. Explaining each individually*

*1. Pride of karma*

*A. Identifying the pride of karma*

Verse 7.49 c, d

Thinking, "I alone shall do it,"

Is the pride of action.

This pride of action (or the pride of karma) is the courage that thinks, "I can do this by myself alone." This is similar to the whole-hearted resolve that is part of the seven-fold cause and effect instructions that starts from:

1. recognising all sentient beings as one's mother
2. remembering their kindness
3. generating the wish to repay their kindness
4. generating love
5. generating compassion
6. generating the whole-hearted resolve
7. generating bodhicitta

This whole-hearted resolve is generated in the context of thinking, "I will achieve omniscience or full enlightenment myself in order to liberate all sentient beings." On the basis of that comes the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta.



The pride of action is similar, i.e., it is the attitude that thinks “I myself alone will achieve this.”

*B. The reasons why one acts in that way*

Verse 7.50

Afflicted, powerless beings in this world  
Are unable to accomplish their own welfare.  
Migrating beings are not able like me,  
Therefore I shall do this.

Usually when we come across unruly sentient beings, we think, “How is it possible for me to liberate that sentient being (or sentient beings)?” That is the usual attitude.

But here in the context of someone who is a practitioner of the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, striving to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings, she would take on the responsibility on herself to do this for others. When such a practitioner looks at sentient beings, she understands that these sentient beings cannot even achieve their own happiness. How then is it possible for them to work for others? Here the practitioner of the mind of enlightenment generates the determination, confidence and the positive pride, thinking, “They cannot do it but I can do it. I will do it for them.”

*C. Being proud of assuming the burden of others of inferior karma*

Verse 7.51

If others are doing inferior work,  
Why do I sit around?  
I do not perform it out of pride;  
It would be best for me to have no pride.

Here one can consider “inferior work” to mean anything that is not Dharma. Anything that doesn’t become Dharma is inferior work. Starting with the affairs of this life, one is completely preoccupied with them and one is only interested in and attached to the happiness of this life. As a result, one works so hard to defeat the enemies and to sustain one’s circle of friends and relatives. As such, one spends one’s whole life doing that. These are example of inferior work.

From one’s own side, one does not lead life like that. One does not follow or keep company with people who engage in such activities. Rather one’s emphasis is on training one’s mind, the basis of bodhicitta. One’s goal is to be able to practise the six perfections.

Here if you were to interpret “inferior work” to literally mean moving things around—such as people carrying goods, shifting things and so forth—when we see people burdened with such work, suffering and needing help, then instead of just sitting around and looking on, we should do something provided that our help does not become a cause for negative karma. For instance, one may have done what one can to help but at the same time, one feels very conceited and proud in a negative way, boasting, “I did this and that for him. I did this big job ....” Then as the text points out, this is wrong.

Here the advice is: “I do not perform it out of pride;/ It would be best for me to have no pride,” so as to be able to engage in the bodhisattva practices of benefiting others. All these are done for others and without any conceit.

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*Question:* In the process of striving in virtue, from beginning to end, we have the various types of joyous perseverance as well as the four powers. How does one relate them to each other? How does one integrate them in this whole process of striving in virtue? For example, how does one integrate these two: the armour-like joyous perseverance with the power of aspiration, for example?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Maybe I will explain this in the next lesson.

We will look at this next time. From your side, you have to know what the four types of joyous perseverance and the four powers are. Basically it is a question about the relationship between these two sets. I am not exactly sure whether there is any correlation so it is something that you have to analyse.

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#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SUNDAY, 24 AUGUST, 2014

1. What are the three types of laziness and their respective antidotes?
2. It is said that the hardships that achieving enlightenment entail do not constitute even a fraction of the sufferings in the lower realms? Why is that so?
3. What are the reasons that the bodhisattva superiors do not experience physical and mental suffering when they are giving away their bodies? Is it really possible for anyone to achieve such a feat? Why?
4. What is the best way of bringing about a yearning for the Dharma?

#### NOTE:

There will be no classes on Thursday, 21 August and the coming Tuesday, 26 August.

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