

**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 47**2 September 2014**

Question and Answer session.

Student 1: A bodhisattva superior who has realised emptiness directly has overcome the intellectually acquired obscurations. But in his mind, there are still the innate obscurations. Is that mind that is afflicted with innate obscurations true suffering? Does such a mind have the pervasive suffering?¹

(Khen Rinpoche clarifies what the student is asking).

Khen Rinpoche: You are asking whether the mind of the superior bodhisattva is true suffering? If you are asking that, then that is a big question. I don't know what you are trying to ask.

Student 1: The superior bodhisattva is still in samsara because his mind is still afflicted with the innate afflictive obscurations. Does such a mind still have pervasive suffering?

Khen Rinpoche: I don't know what you are trying to ask.

Student 2: We are trying to figure out where the boundary of pervasive suffering lies. To me it seems that it is only from the eighth ground onwards that sentient beings would not have pervasive suffering. But she (Student 1) is saying that once a person attains the path of seeing, there is no more pervasive suffering. So we are wondering where the boundary of pervasive suffering is?

Khen Rinpoche: You are asking where the boundary of true suffering is?

Student 2: Is true suffering the same as compounded pervasive suffering? That is also another question.

Khen Rinpoche: Yes, you can say that. That is your question?

Student 2: Where is the boundary? When does one overcome this pervasive suffering?

Khen Rinpoche: Somebody give the answer. The senior students. Where is the boundary?

¹ Pervasive suffering used here in this discussion refers to compounded pervasive suffering.

Student 3: I guess that once a bodhisattva has reached the stage when he no longer returns to samsara like a non-returner, I think that is the end of his pervasive suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: *The non-returner bodhisattva? What did you say? Non-returner what?*

Student 3: There is a stage for arhats when they are non-returners and once-returners. I don't know whether there is such a stage for bodhisattvas.

Khen Rinpoche: *You are saying that you cannot differentiate between the arhat once-return and arhat non-returner?*

Student 3: That is my mistake. A non-returner means he doesn't come back to samsara anymore. This is his last life. I think that is the end of pervasive suffering for the non-returner arhat. But I don't know about bodhisattvas though. At what stage is the end of pervasive suffering for them?

Khen Rinpoche: *Why do you think non-returners has no more true suffering?*

Student 3: Having to return means that you acquire the aggregates of suffering. So if you are a non-returner that is the boundary after which you no longer have pervasive suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: *Correct! What is the meaning or definition of true suffering?*

At the same time, you must all listen. When I am asking you, how I ask the question, you have to listen because I'm asking you in different ways.

Now you have to explain to me what is true suffering? You already accept that when you have achieved the state of non-returner, there is no more true suffering. Before that, he has (true suffering) because he takes rebirth. So what is true suffering?² You still don't know?

Student 3: It seems to imply that it has more to do with the mind than the body. Are you saying that true suffering has to do more with the mind than the body?

Khen Rinpoche: *You just give me (the answer to) what is true suffering? You give me some kind of idea. Of course not many people understand what Student 3 is saying about the non-returners.*

For those who do understand, is what Student 3 has said correct or not? When you have achieved the state of a non-returner stage, you no longer have true suffering. Do you

² True suffering refers to the contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates. These aggregates are by nature impermanent and arose from karma and afflictions. Therefore they are in the nature of suffering. As long as we continue to acquire and are not free from the contaminated physical and mental aggregates, we will continue to experience suffering. (Second Basic Program, Module 1, Lesson 49, p. 1).

agree with that? (I want to hear from the) senior ones. Maybe the new ones won't know the answer.

Are all the seniors meditating? (Laughter).

Student 4: I don't really have much of a response because first of all I don't think that there is such a thing as a non-returner bodhisattva. I think non-returners only applies to hearers and solitary realisers.

If you are asking whether the body of a buddha is true suffering, is the mind of a buddha true suffering, I cannot answer these questions. I can only think that true suffering relates to the appropriation of physical and mental aggregates. Usually we think of that as the nature of true suffering. I may be wrong. Having the appropriated physical and mental aggregates, I'm not sure whether that is true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: Just go with Student 3's idea, what he has said. Is that correct or not? Just answer that. If you say you don't agree, then give me your reason. If you agree, then also give your reason. Just go direct to that question. Otherwise it will take a long time.

Student 1: I disagree because I think the aggregates of the non-returner is still true suffering. This is because the cause of that body is inherited in that very lifetime from his human father and mother. Therefore the body is still true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: You mean a human body must be true suffering?

Student 1: Yes?

Khen Rinpoche: Are you saying that the human body that comes from the father and mother must be true suffering? That is your idea?

Student 1: What is the definition of human?

Khen Rinpoche: Now I'm asking (the questions) and you have to answer. Is the human body necessarily true suffering?

Student 1: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: Is Buddha Shakyamuni's body true suffering?

Student 1: No.

Khen Rinpoche: Isn't his body a human body?

Student 1: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: Then you go and sit down!

(Addressing another student) Student 3 said that a non-returner doesn't have true suffering. Do you accept that or not? Just answer, yes or no.

Student 5: No, I don't agree. Being a non-returner means that he is not going to come back for another rebirth but the current body that he has is still a human body with its appropriated contaminated aggregates unlike the case of the Buddha.

Khen Rinpoche: *Why is his body true suffering? Now you give your reason.*

Student 5: His body is true suffering because it is still the result of karma and afflictions. When he came out from his mother's womb, he was not a non-returner yet.

Khen Rinpoche: *When this person becomes an arhat, is his body still true suffering?*

Student 5: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: *So an arhat has not abandoned true suffering?*

Student 5: If I follow my line of argument, I would have to say no.

Khen Rinpoche: *The arhat is not free from true suffering?*

Student 5: No.

Khen Rinpoche: *The arhat still has suffering?*

Student 5: I would have to say no. An arhat is liberated and is free of his afflictions. But is he free from his suffering and coming back for another uncontrolled rebirth? I'm not sure. I have not thought it through.

Khen Rinpoche: *You are not sure whether an arhat still takes rebirth? I'm surprised.*

What she has said, some parts are correct, some parts are not correct.

Next student, just answer that.

At the same time everybody must listen. This is how you discuss a topic over a long period of time. Sometimes we discuss, ask one question, someone answers and after that, you have nothing to say. Finished. But it doesn't end there. If you ask in different ways, there are more questions. Then you have a longer discussion.

Student 6: When the non-returner steps on a nail, he experiences pain.

Khen Rinpoche: *So the non-returner has true suffering. His body is true suffering because ...*

Student 6: Due to his contaminated appropriated physical aggregates. When he steps on a nail, he experiences pain.

Khen Rinpoche: *So the arhat also has true suffering?*

Student 6: Yes. His body is a contaminated physical body. Once he abandons that at the end of his life, this being his last life, when he enters into nirvana, then there won't be any (true suffering).

Khen Rinpoche: *When you achieve arhatship, you reach the peace of nirvana. Nirvana means being free from true suffering and the cause of suffering. You entered the path and achieved the peace of nirvana.*

You know the four noble truths? They are true origins, true sufferings, true paths and true cessations. So when you achieve nirvana, doesn't that mean that you have abandoned true suffering and the cause of the suffering? So doesn't that mean that an arhat has abandoned true suffering and the cause of the suffering? An arhat won't have (true suffering and the cause of suffering) would he? So that means an arhat does not have true suffering.

Student 6: But there were accounts of arhats experiencing headaches and when he stepped on a nail, he experienced pain.

Khen Rinpoche: *So (to you) that means that an arhat has not abandoned true suffering. Is that what you are saying?*

Student 6: I have difficulty reconciling these two: what has just been said and the accounts of him having headaches and so forth.

Khen Rinpoche: *I understand what you are saying but what is your answer? Has the arhat abandoned true suffering or has he not abandoned true suffering?*

Student 6: By that account, you have to say that he has abandoned true suffering but ...

Khen Rinpoche: *Now the question is what is your answer? Has an arhat abandoned true suffering?*

Student 6: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: *That means an arhat doesn't have true suffering?*

Student 6: He has abandoned true suffering but ...

Khen Rinpoche: *He has abandoned true suffering so that means he doesn't have true suffering.*

Student 6: What about the imprints?

Khen Rinpoche: *You don't ask me questions. I'm asking you.*

Student 6: He has abandoned true suffering but he has not abandon the imprints.

Khen Rinpoche: *So he has abandoned true suffering. He doesn't have true suffering.*

Student 6: But he has imprints. There is no true suffering but he still has imprints of true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: You must go one (point at a time). An arhat doesn't have true suffering.

Student 6: Yes, he doesn't have true suffering but he has imprints.

Khen Rinpoche: An arhat doesn't have true suffering. Aren't you saying that because he has abandoned true suffering? So an arhat doesn't have true suffering.

Student 6: This part is difficult to reconcile.

Khen Rinpoche: Abandoned means "don't have".

Student 6: He has abandoned that mind but I'm not sure about the body because the body is still the result of contaminated actions. At the time when his mind reached the stage of foe-destroyer, his body, due to imprints, still has to experience (suffering). Now it is difficult to reconcile whether he has abandoned true suffering but his body itself is still a result of true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: What is the conclusion then? What are you going to say if somebody asks you, "Has an arhat abandoned true suffering or not?"

Student 6: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: You have to say "yes." That means an arhat doesn't have true suffering.

Student 6: No. Not necessarily so.

Khen Rinpoche: Haven't you already accepted that an arhat doesn't have true suffering? He has abandoned true suffering. The second question is this, "Does he have true suffering." You agree to that?

Student 6: No, he has.

Khen Rinpoche: That means he has not abandoned (true suffering).

Student 6: He has abandoned true suffering but he still has the experience of true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: If that is the case, how can you say he has abandoned (true suffering)? What do you mean by abandon?

Student 6: Because true suffering is defined as both contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates. For the physical part, it is very difficult to reconcile. That one I'm not sure.

Bodhisattvas on the first ground do not experience both physical and mental suffering. For the physical part, due to having abandoned all negativities. I am not

sure about the arhats because we have not had lessons on the twenty sanghas.

Khen Rinpoche: What?

Student 6: We have not had lessons on the arhats in detail.

Khen Rinpoche: Next student, do you agree with what Student 3 has said, that a non-returner doesn't have true suffering because he doesn't take rebirth again in samsara?

Student 7: No, I disagree. He still has ignorance.

Khen Rinpoche: So once you have ignorance that means you necessarily have true suffering? Are you saying that?

Student 7: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: So that means the arya bodhisattvas also have true suffering?

Student 7: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: I think we just completed one of the lessons where it was mentioned that even if you cut his body, there is no mental and no physical pain.³

After achieving the path of seeing, that body totally changes. It becomes a mental body.

Maitreya has mentioned in one of his texts that when you have achieved the path of seeing, you no longer have true suffering. You also do not experience aging and death. All these do not exist once you become an arya bodhisattva.

When the path of seeing is achieved, the bodhisattvas don't age, die or fall sick. Even if their bodies are cut up, there is no pain. It is clear then that the arya bodhisattva doesn't have true suffering. But according to you, his body is true suffering because he has ignorance.

Student 7: I wasn't thinking about his body per se. I was thinking of him having ignorance, therefore he still has true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: Why is the body of the non-returner true suffering?

Student 7: If you are talking about the body itself, then ...

Khen Rinpoche: Isn't it the case that you cannot say that he has ignorance? So your reason is not correct.

Student 7: If you are talking about the body, then it is a different thing. Just now I was

³ If their bodies are happy due to their merits/ And their minds are happy due to their skill/ Then, even if they remain in cyclic existence for the sake of others,/ Why would the Compassionate Ones be disheartened. (Verse 7.28)

thinking in terms of him having true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: Because he has true suffering what is your reason?

Student 7: If we are just talking about whether he has true suffering or not, then I would say that as he still has ignorance, therefore he still has true suffering. The reason is because ignorance is a contaminated phenomena and a contaminated phenomenon is miserable in nature. Therefore if he still has ignorance, he will still experience misery. He still has true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: Same thing: Do the arya bodhisattvas have ignorance?

Student 7: That's why I said arya bodhisattvas still have true suffering. He may not suffer physical or mental pain but he still has true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: What kind of suffering does he have?

Student 7: Because he still has contaminated phenomena so he will still have true suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: But his body is totally changed after he has reached the path of seeing.

Student 7: But his mind still has ignorance. Among the five aggregates, one of them is ignorance. There is the mental factor of ignorance so he is not totally free from contaminated phenomena.

Khen Rinpoche: But he don't experience anything.

Student 7: Yes. That is feeling, that is experiencing but in terms of the phenomena being contaminated phenomena, isn't it the case that there will still be true suffering? Because he still has the mental factor of ignorance in his continuum.

Khen Rinpoche: Then what Maitreya Buddha said is incorrect?

This is what I remembered before I was 30 years old. We have to memorise (the text)..

Student 7: I'm just presenting another view. That's all. Everyone says that they have suffering.

How do you explain that in view of the fact he still has ignorance? Ignorance is a contaminated phenomenon and as such, it is a cause of suffering. How do we explain that? I've no qualms about it being scriptural authority.

Khen Rinpoche: In the first place, positing the boundary of contaminated and non-contaminated phenomena in itself is already complicated because it depends on which tenet system we are referring to.

Student 7: How do you explain that he still has this contaminated phenomenon and yet does not have true suffering?

Khen Rinpoche: I don't know. I think I may have mentioned this in the previous Basic Program but not during these classes. This time round, I'm not sure.

The contaminated appropriated aggregates that arise from karma and afflictions are posited as true suffering. As to what defines contaminated phenomenon, different tenets have their own assertions. In general, we could say that any phenomenon that arises from karma and afflictions is a contaminated phenomenon.

You could say that the physical body in the continuum of Hinayana superiors—in particular, the stream-enterers, once-returners and non-returners—are necessarily true suffering.

With regard to the physical aggregates of foe-destroyers, there are instances where they are true suffering but there are also instances when they are not true suffering. For example, if a person becomes an arhat without discarding the previous physical aggregates he had when he was a non-returner, his physical aggregates would be an instance of true suffering since he hasn't discarded them yet. According to the Hinayana tenets, such individuals have achieved the nirvana with remainder. Once they have achieved the nirvana without remainder, then the physical aggregates in his continuum will not be true suffering.

The difference between the nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder is made on the basis of whether that individual possesses the contaminated physical aggregates or not. Of course, this is the assertion of the Autonomy Middle Way School. The Prasangikas have a different take on this.

As all of you have already studied tenets, how do the Prasangikas posit nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder?

Student 1: According to the Prasangikas, an arhat with remainder is when he is out of meditative equipoise directly realising emptiness. An arhat without remainder is when he is in direct meditative equipoise realising emptiness.

Khen Rinpoche: When he is in meditative equipoise focusing on emptiness, what is it that is not remaining? When he emerges from his meditative equipoise, what is it that is remaining? You have to explain, "with remainder" and "without remainder." The meaning has to go with the words.

Student 1: He has the remainder of seeing the appearance of true existence. While in meditative equipoise, he does not have such an appearance.

Khen Rinpoche: A short answer is enough. Very good. You say too much, then it is not so good. It is because he remains with the appearance (of true existence). That is enough.

In essence, this is what the Prasangikas assert: That when an arhat in meditative equipoise directly perceives emptiness, there is no appearance of true existence. But when she is out of meditative equipoise, then the appearance of true existence arises. This is what remains.

It is clear that the body in the continuum of those who have achieved nirvana with remainder is true suffering while the body in the continuum of those who have achieved nirvana without remainder is not true suffering.

It is also clearly mentioned in the texts that for ordinary beings who are reborn in the pure land, such as Amitabha's pure land, although their bodies are the bodies in the continua of ordinary beings, nevertheless they are not true suffering.

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Likewise there are also arhats abiding in the pure land. Their physical aggregates in their continua are not true suffering. It is said that there is no suffering in Sukhavati, Amitabha Buddha's pure land.

As mentioned earlier in Verse 7.27 a, b

... their bodies are happy due to their merits
And their minds are happy due to their skill

These two lines of Verse 7.27 a, b are stated in the context of the bodhisattva superiors.

For those who have achieved nirvana with remainder, since they have true suffering, we can't say that they have abandoned it. That is why there are accounts of such individuals who experience headaches and pain.

Khen Rinpoche: As mentioned earlier, arhats also have headaches.

Arhats have achieved liberation, the freedom from samsara. As such, you have to say that arhats have abandoned samsara. Because they are arhats, you have to say they have liberated themselves from cyclic existence.

The question now is: Is true suffering synonymous with samsara? Obviously you cannot say that this is the case.

The pervasion works like this: "If there is samsara, it is necessarily true suffering. But if it is true suffering, it is not necessarily samsara." This may be quite difficult to understand. How does this work? Therefore you have to use some illustrations.

For example, the physical aggregates in the continuum of an arhat, in particular, an arhat who has achieved nirvana with remainder. That is true suffering.

Then another question arises, "What is samsara? Where is its boundary? What is the definition?"

A foe-destroyer is an arhat. Has an arhat completely abandoned all the twelve links of dependent arising? We say that arhats have already freed themselves from samsara or cyclic existence. Do you agree? Can you confidently say that arhats are liberated from samsara?

Khen Rinpoche: You still have doubts that an arhat is freed from samsara? There should

be no doubt.

As such, isn't it the case that they are no longer have any of the twelve links?

If you say yes, then in their continua, they will not have the projected results and the actualised results. The arhats don't have the six sources? No aging? No dying? No feeling?

Student 3: They are experiencing the results of the last cycle of the twelve links.

Khen Rinpoche: So does this not mean that the arhat is still experiencing the twelve links? Won't that mean that he still has the twelve links if you were to say that the last results have not been completed because he is still experiencing the last cycle of the twelve links?

Student 3: The arhat is experiencing the results of the last cycle.

Khen Rinpoche: That means he still has (the twelve links). He hasn't completed them.

Student 3: Last projected cycle.

Khen Rinpoche: So he still has them?

Student 3: After that, he doesn't (have them).

Khen Rinpoche: After what?

Student 3: After that, he will not suffer another cycle of the twelve links.

Khen Rinpoche: Before being arhat, then after being arhat?

Student 3: After being an arhat, he will not have them.

Khen Rinpoche: Of course, I agreed with that. During the (time he is an) arhat, have?

Student 3: Yes, he experiences the last twelve links.

Khen Rinpoche: So during the time he is an arhat, he is not freed from the twelve links?

Student 3: That is why he is with remainder.

Khen Rinpoche: What are you talking about?

Student 3: That is why he has the nirvana with remainder.

Khen Rinpoche: Now are you saying that arhats remain in samsara?

Student 3: You said that arhats have true suffering but they are out of samsara.

Khen Rinpoche: Yes.

Student 3: So there is true suffering because they are suffering. They have their old bodies that came from before and that goes on to aging and suffering but they are not subject to a new cycle of rebirth. So they are out of the twelve links. They have their old bodies from the previous rebirth so that is suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: So the arhat is not really free of the twelve links?

Student 3: I mean they are somewhere in between. I think you know what I mean.

Khen Rinpoche: I don't know what you mean.

Student 3: I have a question. When we see Shakyamuni Buddha and our own guru, Lama Zopa Rinpoche who we see as a buddha who suffers, is it because they have true suffering but they are not in samsara?

Khen Rinpoche: You are now in the second round of the Basic Program!

Student 3: Please don't take back my certificate! (Laughter).

Khen Rinpoche: With long khata and mandala and three prostrations, return it tomorrow! (Laughter). You don't have to return back but you take a second round. Joking ...

We have looked at this quite a fair bit when we were studying tenets. It depends on the perspective of the tenets that you are taking.

According to the Hinayana tenets, essentially the physical body of the buddha is true suffering because it is in the same continuum as the body he had when he was on the path of preparation. According to the Hinayana tenets, one progresses from the path of preparation up to the path of no-more-learning in one sitting. That is how the Buddha became enlightened. As such because his body is in the same continuum as that old body, it is posited as true suffering. From the perspective of these lower tenets, enlightenment or buddhahood is posited mainly from the perspective of the Buddha's mind.

But the Mahayana tenets' explanation of the Buddha is much more profound. In short, the Buddha doesn't have true suffering. The Buddha's physical body is not true suffering. The Buddha's body is buddha.

In the Mahayana tenets, there is the presentation of the four bodies, namely:

1. the nature truth body
2. the wisdom truth body
3. the enjoyment body
4. the emanation body

This assertion of the four bodies is not found in Hinayana tenets

As to the question whether your virtuous friends have true suffering or not, earlier in

this text, there is the discussion of how when the bodhisattva superiors give away their body, even if they were to be cut into pieces, they do not experience any physical and mental pain or suffering (Verse 7.27). Instead it is said that they experience incredible joy.

If in reality your virtuous friend is a buddha, if you perceive suffering, then that is just an appearance. In reality there is no suffering. According to the Mahayana tenets, the buddhas don't die. Nevertheless they show the appearance of passing away into parinirvana just as Shakyamuni Buddha did showing the aspect of passing away. In Shakyamuni Buddha's life story, he went through many hardships in his practice and then he achieved enlightenment under the bodhi tree and so forth. According to the Mahayana tenets, these are just a display of his deeds. In fact, he had already achieved enlightenment a long time ago. During the fortunate eon of this world, among the thousand buddhas that will come, he was the fourth one. So he has already achieved enlightenment a long time ago. All these activities mentioned above were just a display.

Shakyamuni Buddha did not newly achieve enlightenment. Likewise the future Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, the fifth of the thousand buddhas, has already achieved enlightenment too. But when he descends on this earth, he will also show the aspects of being born, growing up and practising austerities. Then he will show the aspect of achieving enlightenment and the aspect of passing away as well. All these will be mere displays, i.e., simply showing the aspects of these activities.

If your virtuous friends or your gurus in reality are buddhas and if you see them suffering, then those are just appearances and not real suffering. But if your virtuous friend in reality is an ordinary being and not a buddha, when you see him suffering, then he is suffering. As has been said before, whatever appears to us is not certain and is not definite. So whatever appears to you is not necessarily the truth.

The seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso said, "All the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are fabrications of one's conceptual thought. They are not truly existent."

As such, do not cling to phenomena as being truly existent but rather, look at everything as being empty.

As to whether someone—be it your guru or anyone you see—is really suffering or not, it depends. One way is to look at it from the perspectives of the different tenets. You also have to understand that there are cases where the bodhisattva superiors don't experience physical suffering because they have abandoned all negativities.

The point here is that whatever appears is not certain. Just because we see somebody suffering, it does not mean he is suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: I am answering your question. You understand now? You can keep your certificate.

Are you all falling asleep? You must wake up. During discussion, your mind must be awake. What they are talking about? You shouldn't think, "It doesn't matter as it does

not concern me.” Don’t shut down your brain! You should be active, “Why did he say this? Why did he say that?” You must ask yourself these questions.

As said in Maitreya’s *Uttaratantra*, the *Mahayana Sublime Continuum*, there is no aging and sickness for bodhisattvas superiors. They also don’t die. As such bodhisattva superiors don’t have suffering. They don’t have physical suffering and they don’t have mental suffering.

This is complicated and you have to think about it. It is said that when one becomes a bodhisattva superior, one acquires the body that is in the nature of mind, a mental body.

The question is this: the bodhisattva was on the path of preparation prior to that. He had an ordinary body. During the transition when he crossed over to the path of seeing, does his old body have to die? Does it need to be discarded or does it simply change in nature?

If you say that he now has this mental body, what is the substantial cause of this mental body, the body that is in the nature of the mind?

When he became a bodhisattva superior, he acquired the mental body that will last him right up to his last moment as a sentient being, his last moment of being a non-buddha.

This mental body is said to arise from the level of the predisposition of ignorance together with uncontaminated karma. This body will exist all the way up to the end of the mental continuum of being a sentient being.

When this individual becomes a buddha, then what happens to his body is a completely different story. When he achieves enlightenment, his form body is something else. From the perspective of Mahayana tantra, what is the substantial cause of the form body of a buddha? According to the perspective of Mahayana tantra, just prior to achieving enlightenment, the body in the continuum of a sentient being cannot be the substantial cause of a buddha’s form body. Why? Because the mental body of that bodhisattva arose from the level of the predisposition of ignorance. As such, it cannot be posited as the substantial cause for the form body of a buddha.

Thus, from the perspective of tantra, the sutric explanation for achieving the form body of a buddha is inadequate. Therefore when one analyses tantra in detail, particularly highest yoga tantra, the conclusion there is that the substantial cause of buddhahood, including a buddha’s form body, has to be the extremely subtle wind and mind. Such an explanation is found only in highest yoga tantra.

When one’s investigates deeply, what exactly is the substantial cause of enlightenment? There must be something within each individual and the buddha lineage (or buddha nature) is referred to here. There must be something within each individual that an individual already possesses that continues up to enlightenment. It cannot be fabricated. Applying deep analysis, what is that? Combine this analysis

with the question: What exactly is the substantial cause of enlightenment, the substantial causes of a buddha's mind and a buddha's body?

Considering all these things together, one then looks at the explanation given in tantra. That really highlights the extraordinary characteristics and features of tantra. If one thinks about it, definitely one gains trust and conviction in the validity of the Mahayana tantra.

If we start from how the Hinayana tenets explain enlightenment, they are only able to talk about enlightenment from the perspective of the mind of the Buddha but they don't know how to explain why Buddha has suffering. They say Buddha has true suffering and that the Buddha's body is not buddha.

Then we go on to Mahayana sutra. There is an explanation of the four bodies. Mahayana sutra does talk about the causes for and certain things that will transform into the body of a buddha. Although there is an explanation, if you were to analyse their explanation more deeply—as to whether it is adequate or not, as to what exactly is the substantial cause of a buddha's form body and so forth—you will find their explanation also inadequate.

This is where the Mahayana tantric explanations come in. Then everything fits very nicely.

Even if we were look to look at just reincarnation—what moves on from life to life—of course there are explanations in both Hinayana and Mahayana sutra. But the tantric explanation is qualitatively very different.

All Buddhists talk about something that moves from life to life but what exactly moves from life to life? The body doesn't move but the mind moves.

Then when you examine this in detail, you ask, do all consciousnesses—the sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness—move on to the next life?

Within the category of mental consciousnesses, there are so many different kinds of mental consciousnesses—contaminated, uncontaminated, subtle, gross and so forth. Although there are explanations in sutra but when you looked at the tantric explanations of the extremely subtle winds and mind and how they move from life to life, then you can really see the profundity of tantra.

The point is that tantra is something that is extremely precious and very profound. We will get to look at tantra in a little bit more detail in one of the modules. It is very profound, contrary to what most people think. People think, "Oh, Vajrayana or tantra is about doing rituals, reciting mantras, reciting sadhanas and so forth." It is not that at all. That is not the real deal, not the essence. The tantric teachings, starting from its explanation of reality, what is our body and mind, their different levels, what exactly moves from life to life, what exactly moves on to enlightenment, what is the substantial cause of enlightenment—these are all the finer points found in tantra. As such, it is very important to study and to understand what tantra really is. That is extremely important.

Of course, in the first place you need to have a very strong yearning to understand tantra. That is very important.

If in the future, we can make a connection with, study, learn and come to understand a little bit about tantra, then we place very positive imprints in our mind.

Student 6: Is the substantial cause for a bodhisattva superior necessarily the level of predisposition of ignorance? If that is the case, how does one posit the mental body of the bodhisattva on the first ground? As he enters the path of seeing, from an ordinary path, is his body the body of an ordinary being?

Also if we cannot find the substantial cause for the mental body, does it mean that there is no mental body, that it does not exist in the pure land?

Khen Rinpoche: (The mental body) is an existent. It exists. It is not an assertion. So there are mental bodies.

Bodhisattva superiors have mental bodies. From the sutra perspective, the mental body arises from the level of the predisposition of ignorance. The next question is: What exactly is the level of the predisposition of ignorance or these subtle obscurations to omniscience?

Student 6: If there are levels of predisposition of ignorance, they will come under the category of non-associated compositional factors. If that is the case, how can this be a substantial cause for the mind? Also what is the substantial cause for form, the body?

Khen Rinpoche: Form cannot act as a substantial cause for consciousness. Consciousness cannot act as a substantial cause for form. But we would have to say that a non-associated compositional factor can act as the substantial cause for form and consciousness.

For example, someone from the formless realm is taking rebirth in the form realm. How are you going to posit the substantial causes here?

As for form itself, it cannot act as a substantial cause for consciousness. That is clear. Consciousness cannot act as a substantial cause for form. That is also clear. This was mentioned by Dharmakirti in his *Commentary of Valid Cognition*.

You can see that, just by using the example of samsara, there are so many unanswered questions and so many qualms. We always think samsara is easy but what exactly is samsara? What is its boundary? What is its definition? Then we get stuck.

Khen Rinpoche: *I myself also don't know what exactly samsara is!*

Student 1: I am more confused now. Please do not faint.

Khen Rinpoche: *If you are confused, I will not faint.*

Student 1: As the Student 2 asked earlier: What is the boundary of pervasive suffering? Does it pervade true suffering or does it pervade samsara? Because we have established that the boundaries of true suffering and samsara are different. Then pervasive suffering pervades true suffering or samsara ...

Khen Rinpoche: *What is your question now? You are asking about the boundaries?*

Student 1: Boundaries. Pervasive suffering will follow samsara or follow true suffering?

Khen Rinpoche: I already told you earlier that samsara is necessarily true suffering but true suffering is not necessarily samsara. So what is the boundary of true suffering? The boundary is from being an ordinary being up to being an arhat.

Student 1: Ok. An arhat without remainder or with remainder?

Khen Rinpoche: *Alamak!⁴ I already explained how to differentiate between remainder and no remainder.*

I already explained earlier that if you don't have the contaminated aggregates, you don't have anything remaining. So if you have a remainder, what is remaining?

Student 1: The projected effects of the twelve links. For the higher school this is the ...

Khen Rinpoche: *The twelve links is a different question. Twelve links is a different question from me.*

An arhat who has achieved nirvana with remainder has true suffering. Anyway the boundary of true suffering is from being an ordinary sentient being up to becoming an arhat.

Khen Rinpoche: *I have answered your question, What is the boundary? That is the boundary.*

Student 1: In your explanation about the mental body, if the mental body doesn't die, how do you explain this statement in the Lam Rim Chen Mo which says a superior that has overcome the ignorance of the twelve links still takes rebirth due to their karma previously accumulated if their mental body doesn't die. If the bodhisattva superior is still taking rebirth, then we will have the case of someone who has no true suffering but is still in samsara.

It seems to me that true suffering has a bigger pervasion than samsara.

What is the entity of the bodhisattva superior that takes rebirth if he has a mental body that doesn't die?

Khen Rinpoche: Hearers and solitary realisers do take rebirth in samsara. They do not

⁴ Local colloquialism for an exclamation.

accumulate fresh projecting karma but they take rebirth in samsara due to previously accumulated karma.

Bodhisattva superiors do not take rebirth due to karma and afflictions. Bodhisattva superiors do not die due to karma and afflictions.

The bodhisattvas superior do not experience death arising from karma and afflictions but they undergo the inconceivable transference of death.

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