

Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds, 2014*

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Lesson 48

4 September 2014

CHAPTER SEVEN: VERSES 7.60 – 7.66

Increasing the strength of joyous effort—the antidote

- A. Increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort
 - 2. Extensive explanation
 - B. The power of stability
 - 3. Being proud of the afflictions (V. 7. 60 – 7. 62)
 - C. The power of joy (V. 7.63 – V.7.66)

The 12 links of dependent origination is an explanation of how one circles in samsara, in cyclic existence. As such, if it is any one of the 12 links of dependent origination, then it is necessarily included within samsara. Anything that is not included in samsara will not be part of the 12 links of dependent origination which is an explanation of how one circles in samsara.

Having said that, can we be absolutely sure about this? Can we say with decisive confidence, “Yes, this is the case!”? Somebody may ask you this simple question: “In the continuum of a superior, how many of the 12 links of dependent origination are there?” What are you going to say?

Khen Rinpoche: Are you able to answer that? You can say any number. How many?

Some say 10, some say 11. OK. You think about it. We will answer this next time. You need to think about this question. Next time, give your answer, “It has this link. But this other link, it does not have.” Then you have to give me the reason for your answer. Don’t have because of this. Have because of this. There must be reasons.

The arhats, the foe destroyers, do not have *any* of the 12 links of dependent origination because they are liberated from samsara. Because any of the 12 links must *necessarily* be included within samsara or it is necessarily in samsara, as such, in the continuum of a foe destroyer, there are none of the 12 links of dependent origination as he has already been liberated from cyclic existence.

Then if you were asked the question, “In the case of a superior, how many of the 12 links of dependent origination are there in his continuum?,” in the first place, are there any links there or not? If not, what are the reasons for saying no? If there are, then how many? One or more? What are your reasons for saying this?



In the discussion on the power of stability, there is the cultivation of the three types of pride:

1. the pride about action (or karma)
2. the pride about ability (or being proud of one's capacity)
3. The pride about the afflictions (or being proud of the afflictions)
 - The pride of action is a mind that doesn't expect any help or involvement from others, that doesn't rely on others when it comes to accomplishing a particular practice or virtue. It is a mind thinking, "I shall do this alone."
 - The pride about one's capacity is the confidence, thinking, "I can do this," "this" referring to either vanquishing the afflictions or accomplishing the welfare of others.
 - The pride about afflictions is a very strong determination and courage and is a mind that is determined not to let the afflictions take hold in one's mind and to never give in to the afflictions. It is a mind that thinks, "I will vanquish you. I will destroy you."

This is how you should understand these three types of pride.

Of the three types of pride, now we are at the third one, being proud of the afflictions.

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

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

2. Extensive explanation

B. The power of stability

2. Having undertaken joyous effort, stabilizing its engagement

B. Explaining each individually

3. Being proud of the afflictions

A. One should develop the strength of the antidotes to the afflictions

Verse 7.60

When amidst a class of afflictions,
I shall be persistent with them in a thousand ways;
Like a lion among foxes and the like,
I will not be injured by the host of afflictions.

The outline here says that one should generate the strength of the antidotes against the afflictions. It is said that in situations where there are many objects of attachment or anger around—such as in the case of a man meeting with women or in the case of a woman meeting with men or when meeting with objects such as harm-doers and so forth—then one must really focus and discipline the mind. In those situations, one must generate the force of the antidotes and not let the afflictions take hold in one's mind.

It is said that the lion being a very strong animal can never be harmed or disturbed by other animals such as foxes and so forth. Likewise you should act in such a way that whatever situations or circumstances you may find yourself in, you should not let the afflictions take hold of you.

There are so many methods or antidotes that are prescribed for dealing with the afflictions. There are so much advice pertaining to how you should react when you meet with objects of desire or objects of hatred and anger. There are even techniques for transforming adverse external circumstances into favourable conditions for furthering the path in one's mind.

It is said that at the very least, especially for beginners, one should physically distance oneself from those situations. That is why there are such practices as going into isolation, in particular for those who really want to develop meditative stabilisation and some level of concentration.

When you go into physical isolation, at least you are isolating yourself from many of the external conditions or circumstances that may provoke the arising of the afflictions in your mind. When you take yourself out of those situations, the chances or opportunities for you to come under the influence of your afflictions are lessened. Of course it is not the case that when you go into isolation, you are totally free from all the afflictions, but the chances or opportunities for following after the afflictions are very much reduced.

The reality is that you have to go into isolation to cut yourself off from all these external circumstances or situations that may provoke the afflictions arising. But going into isolation is not just for that purpose alone. With much fewer opportunities to get upset, attached and so forth, one then applies the antidotes to gain stability and to subdue the mind. Until one has gained such stability and one's mind is somewhat subdued, only then will one's working for others or accomplishing the welfare of others become truly beneficial. Such activities will also be done properly and correctly.

If one is able to go into isolation, do retreat in order to subdue the mind, become stable and then work to benefit others, only then will others benefit. One will also benefit. Otherwise in the name of benefiting others—you say you do this and that and the other wanting to benefit others—but nothing much comes out of your efforts. In the name of helping others, when you do not have the experience or achieve any realisations, in that process, you only disturb others and your own mind gets disturbed.

Khen Rinpoche: I think I mentioned this before. There was one Geshe who went to a centre in New Zealand. He mentioned his difficulties when he was there. People complained and were not happy. Whatever he said, people just talked back. He gave so much advice but in the end, people kept on complaining about this and that.

He told me, "These people are driving me crazy!" I forgot what he said exactly. Then I said to him, "You are there to help these crazy people." He said, "That was the idea. It is my job to help these people but somehow they are making me crazy." I forgot what he said exactly but it was like that for him.

It is always emphasised how important it is to cultivate the remedies or antidotes to the afflictions in order to deal with them. If not, when one is under the control or influence of the afflictions, benefiting others is difficult. It is said that we should not

allow ourselves to fall under even the slightest influence of the afflictions.

B. One should act so as not to fall under their power even in the slightest

Verse 7.61

Just as men will guard their eyes
In the occurrence of great danger,
Likewise I shall not come under the power of the afflictions,
Even when danger occurs.

It is said that when we human beings meet with a situation where there is the danger of being harmed physically, instinctively we will protect ourselves. We especially cherish our sight, our ability to see. As such, we take great care not to let our eyes be harmed. Likewise we should also take care not to let ourselves fall under the control of our afflictions.

In some commentaries, an alternative analogy is given: “Just like how the eyes cannot see taste.” Literally it means the eyes cannot experience taste.

The point is that regardless of what the external situation is—no matter what kind of unpleasant experience we may be going through, whatever discomfort, suffering or pain we have to endure—we should not let the mind come under the control of the afflictions. Rather we should always focus our mind on virtue, the antidote to the afflictions, instead of letting our mind fixate on whatever experience we may be going through such as discomfort, pain or suffering.

The eye sense power is needed to produce the eye consciousness. But because of depending on the eye sense power, the eye consciousness can only perceive visual form. The eye sense consciousness cannot perceive other things through smell, taste, sound and so forth. Just as the eye consciousness can only perceive visual form and not anything else such as taste and so forth, likewise if you apply the meaning of that analogy, whatever circumstances you may be in, whatever experience of pain, suffering or discomfort you may be encountering at that time, focus the mind only on virtue, i.e., the class of antidotes and not the afflictions.

This analogy is mentioned in some Indian texts as echoed in the first two lines, “Just as men will guard their eyes/ In the occurrence of great danger.”

Next the outline says that one should develop the extraordinary or special intention to generate a stable antidote to the afflictions.

C. One should develop a special intention to stabilize the antidotes

Verse 7.62

It would be better for me to be burned,
To be killed, or to have my head cut off,
Rather than bowing down
To the enemy of afflictions.
Likewise in all situations
I should do nothing other than what is fit.

The outline says to generate a special intention. What is this special intention? Here the text says that it is easy and no great matter to lose one's life but letting ourselves come under the control of the afflictions is not so simple because it has consequences. Here there is this advice that from the very onset we should project the intention never to succumb to the afflictions.

Likewise in the *Vinaya Sutra*, the Buddha advised the gelongs, the fully ordained monks, "To lose one's life is easy and is not such a big deal but to die with degenerated ethical disciplines is a big deal and is not so simple." Why is this so? Because to lose your life simply means that your life has to come to an end. But to die with corrupted ethics means you will have to experience the fruitional effects of suffering for many hundreds of thousands of eons.

The import of the statement made by the Buddha in the *Vinaya Sutra* is similar to what Verse 7.62 is saying, i.e., to lose one's life is not such a big deal but to come under the control of or to succumb to our afflictions is a much more serious matter.

"Likewise all situations/ I should do nothing other than what is fit" means that one should only cultivate virtuous intentions or virtuous karma and never cultivate non-virtue at all.

With that we finished with the power of stability. Next is the power of joy.

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

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

2. Extensive explanation

C. The power of joy

1. Making effort in virtue without considering the fully ripened effect

Verse 7.63

Just like those who desire the pleasurable result of play,

This [bodhisattva] adheres

To whatever task he may do.

He is not satiated by it; it makes him happy.

The outline says that one should strive in virtue without expectation of the result.

When people play games, they may just play for the fun of it and they are not necessarily looking for reward or with the expectation of getting something in return. There are many games that people play for the sheer joy of playing them.

Likewise when the bodhisattvas work for sentient beings or when the bodhisattvas engage in the bodhisattva's deeds such as the six perfections, they do it happily with great enjoyment. When the bodhisattvas engage in the practice of the perfections and the bodhisattva's deeds of benefitting others, they are happy. They thoroughly enjoy it. They never think that it is enough. They just want to do more. Just like when people play games, they enjoy it so much and they just don't want to stop.

What kind of lesson can we draw for ourselves from this? I guess the lesson is this: whatever virtue we are engaging in, whatever things we are doing in order to help others, forget about the results of how people will react and whether people will have benefited or not. The point is just to enjoy the very fact that we are engaging in virtue and to enjoy the very fact that we are doing something to benefit others, regardless of whether they have benefited or not.

Isn't this what happens to us? While we may be doing something that will actually benefit others, at the back of our mind, we are actually looking for some acknowledgement, whether the recipient of our good deed actually acknowledges it, thanks or smiles at us. When those things do not happen, we are disturbed.

If we give something to a beggar who is blind, I think that most of the time we would not expect anything in return. We do not expect the blind beggar to see us and say "Thank you." We just give happily with no expectation. This is very obvious from our own experience. We can tell that there is a huge difference between our engagement in virtue or doing something to benefit others without any expectation and when we do something to benefit others with great hopes and expectations. Emotionally there is a big difference.

2. Accomplishing virtue by mentally engaging the effect

Verse 7.64

Although people work in order to be happy,
It is uncertain whether or not they will be happy;
But how can those whose work itself is happiness
Find happiness without doing the work?

Verse 7.65

If I am not satiated by desirable objects,
Which are like honey smeared upon a razor's edge,
Then why am I satiated by merit
Which is ripening and pacification in happiness?

This outline says we should accomplish virtue by keeping the result in mind.

In this world, everyone works so hard for the sake of something, for instance, money. We work so hard at our jobs or in doing business. At the end of the day, we are looking for something, perhaps money. Everybody is looking for happiness. That is what drives people at their work, "I want to strive in my career for myself. I am going to do business. When I do well in my job or in my business, when I have a lot of money that would bring me happiness." So that is the goal. But many a time, despite the best of intentions and no matter how hard we try, somehow we don't achieve our aim.

The point here is that everybody works with the hope that they will get something in return, for instance, money. Everybody works so hard in all kinds of ways in order to achieve this bliss, pleasure and happiness. Having said that, no matter what one does, still there is no absolute guarantee that one will achieve those goals.

When the bodhisattvas work for sentient beings, they are so happy to do so. They practise the bodhisattvas' deeds such as generosity, guard their ethics and so forth. They work very hard in doing so and whatever they do is guaranteed to bring about happiness. As such, what is the point and what is the use of following after non-virtue?

The point is that all of us look for happiness. But why are we trying so hard doing things that are not guaranteed to bring us happiness? Why are we not doing those things that are guaranteed to bring us happiness? Putting our effort into activities that do not guarantee happiness and success is like tasting honey that is "smeared upon a razor's edge." That is what we do—trying something tasty that is on the edge of a sharp knife. When we taste honey in this way, yes, we do get some pleasure but the harm is greater than the pleasure we may experience. That is why some people end up cutting their tongue.

For us, when we meet with attractive sense objects such as beautiful forms, pleasant sounds, nice smells, delicious tastes and attractive tactile objects, for a short moment, we do experience some pleasure. This is what we call worldly pleasure, samsaric pleasure or contaminated pleasure. Immediately we feel good. We cling on to and become emotionally attached to that pleasurable experience, not wanting to let it go. Not only can we not let go, we want to repeat those experiences over and over again. We cannot stop ourselves and we cannot satisfy ourselves. As we are not fully satisfied, we want more of such objects. That is how we react and behave, instinctively and emotionally.

It is the nature of such pleasures that they do not last. Those pleasurable experiences don't last forever nor do they increase indefinitely. Basically the law of diminishing returns applies here. Over time, those experiences become less and less satisfying. When that feeling sets in, then we get bored.

Our mind then turns its attention to some other object to give us pleasure. Again we have the same pleasurable experience. It lasts for a while but it doesn't increase forever. Then we get bored again and we move on to another object. That is what we called worldly happiness, samsaric happiness or contaminated happiness.

Despite the fact that the nature of all the pleasure we experience are contaminated—it doesn't last and it also cannot increase indefinitely—when we get bored, we turn our attention to something else. We are never ever satisfied. In the end, those experiences in fact transform into dissatisfaction and suffering. That is the nature of all the pleasure that we experience.

Despite this, we still want it and we still work for it continuously, day in and day out. We only aim for this. So if that is the case, if we are striving continuously just to get this kind of pleasure, then why do we not strive in the same way with regard to virtuous activities, in the causes and the practices that will definitely bring about happiness, good rebirth, liberation, and enlightenment in the long run? In a similar way, why are we not engaging continuously in the bodhisattvas' practices and accumulating the collection of merit and wisdom?

3. The way to apply oneself with the power of joy

Verse 7.66

Thus in order to complete this task,
I shall engage in it
Just as an elephant tormented at midday
Enters into a lake.

Next is the way of relating this to the power of joy.

Here the context is the practices of the bodhisattvas; how they act when they engage in virtue and when they benefit sentient beings. They are just like elephants that happily and enthusiastically charge into a pond or lake on a very hot day. It is said that is similar to the kind of attitude the bodhisattvas have when they engage in virtue to benefit sentient beings.

The point is that whatever virtue or practice we engage in, if we know the essential point of why we are doing it and what is in it for us, i.e., we are convinced and we have that understanding of its benefits, then when we do the practice, we will be so happy doing it. Because we are happy in doing the practice, we will then be able to complete the practice.

This applies to everything that we do in life. Whatever we do, we can only complete the task if we are happy. If we are happy doing it, then whatever the task may be, we will probably finish it. That is why it is very important to do things with a very happy mind.

Verse 7.63 comes under the outline, “Making effort in virtue without considering the fully ripened effect.” The next two verses, Verse 7.64 and 7.65 come under the outline, “Accomplishing virtue by mentally engaging the effect.” Is there an internal contradiction there? You think about that.

We will probably finish Chapter Seven on Tuesday.

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We are going to do tsog offering today because it is tsog day. It also happens to be the third anniversary of the passing of Khensur Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup. I guess many people here have some connection with him. You can use the opportunity to pray for his reincarnation to be found quickly.

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