

**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 49****9 September 2014****CHAPTER SEVEN: VERSES 7.67 –7. 76**

Increasing the strength of joyous effort—the antidote

- A. Increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort
 - 2. Extensive explanation
 - D. The power of suspension (V. 7.67)
 - B. Devoting oneself to the practice of the conduct by mindfulness and introspection (V. 7.68 – V. 7.74)
 - C. Accomplishing the conduct is within your power (V. 7.75 – V. 7.76)
- The chapter's name

Khen Rinpoche: Last time you all did the homework assignment. I chose one to be read out in class. She (student) will read and you will just listen.

(A student reads the chosen assignment).

Khen Rinpoche: She read it very quickly so we didn't get the time to think about it. Anyway I am not sure whether everybody did (the homework) but most people did. There is no marking for your homework. What you did is already good enough. So don't look for marks. Just now, she read very quickly so we didn't really get into that. Anyway there are just too many to read and we don't have time. Later when you take back (the homework), read what you have written.

Anyway it is good that you did the homework.

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

For the power of suspension (or relinquishment) there are:

- 1. Periodic suspension (or temporary relinquishment)
  - 2. Total suspension (or complete relinquishment)
- A. *Increasing the strength of the conditions conducive to joyous effort*
    - 2. *Extensive explanation*
      - D. *The power of suspension*
        - 1. *Periodic suspension*
- Verse 7.67 a, b
- When my strength is related to degeneration,

I should leave whatever I am doing in order to return to it.

In the process of engaging in a particular virtue, sometimes one gets tired and exhausted physically or mentally. Also at times, one's physical health or strength may deteriorate. At those times, one should take a break in order to restore one's vitality or one's health if one is sick. That period of time when one is resting in order to restore one's physical and mental energies is called periodic suspension. Therefore periodic suspension is to prepare oneself to be able to engage again in that particular virtue after one has rested.

## *2. Total suspension*

Verse 7.67 c, d

If something is finished well, I should put it aside  
With the wish for more and more later.

When it comes to engaging in virtue, there are so many different types of virtue that one can engage in. Whatever it may be, once one has completed that practice well, then one stops doing it. One's mind should then focus on the next virtue that one is going to engage in.

Here total suspension means relinquishing the earlier virtue that one has already completed well. One puts that aside and move on to another virtue. Since one has already completed the earlier virtue, for the purpose of engaging in another virtue that is more exalted than the one that one has just completed, in that sense, it is called a total suspension of the virtue that one has completed.

There is then a discussion on the need to rely on conscientiousness, mindfulness and vigilance.

## *B. Devoting oneself to the practice of the conduct by means of mindfulness and introspection*

### *1. Devoting oneself to conscientiousness*

Verse 7.68

Just as a seasoned soldier engages  
In a fencing battle with the enemy,  
So shall I avoid the weapons of the afflictions  
And attack the enemies that are the afflictions.

Due to their training and habituation of seasoned fighters, they are always prepared to defend themselves against being attacked by their opponents during battle. They have various ways and means to prevent themselves from being hit by their opponents. They also have ways and means at their disposal to strike at their opponents. These are the characteristics of a seasoned fighter. Likewise we should be conscientious and careful not to be harmed by the weapon of our own afflictions. At the same time, we should also seek to vanquish and attack our afflictions, the enemy.

### *2. Devoting oneself to mindfulness and introspection*

Verse 7.69

If someone dropped his sword during a battle,

He would quickly pick it up out of fear.  
Likewise if I lose the weapon of mindfulness,  
Afraid of hell, I should quickly retrieve it.

When people go to war and fight with swords, for whatever reason, they may drop their sword on the ground. Out of fear of being killed in the next moment, immediately they will retrieve their sword. Likewise our mind may become distracted and we lose our mindfulness of the virtuous object. At that time, remembering how we would end up in the lower realms such as the hells due to our accumulation of non-virtue while under the control of our afflictions, motivated by that fear, we should immediately hook our mental attention with mindfulness and vigilance to the virtuous object and firmly place our mind on it.

Next is not giving an opportunity for the faults of degenerating one's mindfulness and introspection to arise.

*3. Not distinguishing a time of wrongdoing for mindfulness and introspection*

Verse 7.70

Just as poison spreads throughout the body  
In dependence upon the blood,  
Likewise if it finds an opportunity  
Misdeeds will permeate my mind.

Verse 7.71

Just as a man carrying a jar full of mustard oil  
In the presence of someone wielding a sword  
Who is being threatened that he will be killed if he spills it will be frightened,  
Likewise, those who have the modes of conduct should be attentive.

The example here is of somebody who is being poisoned. When the poison enters a person's bloodstream, it will soon permeate the entire body. As a result, the person may die. Likewise if we let our mind be distracted by any kind of object, afflictions will arise and start to take hold of us. Then gradually the afflictions become stronger and stronger to the point that they will take away our chances of a higher rebirth. The mind here refers to both our sense consciousnesses and our thought consciousness.

When poison enters the bloodstream, initially it affects only a small area of the body but over time, it starts to permeate the entire body. When that happens, then one's life is in great danger as one may even lose one's life.

Some poisons act gradually. Our afflictions are like that. Once an affliction arises in the mind, it may seem small at that time. However if we don't do anything about it, it gradually takes hold in our mind and becomes very strong. That is when very strong non-virtue is accumulated that will result in us going to the lower realms. Therefore the verses here are talking about the problems that come with letting our mindfulness and introspection degenerate.

The next few verses talk about the methods to tighten one's mindfulness.

Imagine if you are forced to carry a jar filled with water or oil on your head and walk along a very slippery road. Somebody is watching you. If you were to spill even a drop of that water or oil, you will be killed. Fearful of that, you will be very mindful as you walk carrying that jar of water or oil.

*Khen Rinpoche: The jar that is full of water or oil is not covered and its big mouth is open. You can imagine that.*

So whoever is put in that situation would definitely walk with the greatest care. If one claims to be a practitioner of Dharma, has adopted vows and precepts and already taken on the promise to train in the bodhisattvas' deeds, i.e., the bodhisattva vows, then motivated by the fear of having to go to the lower realms, such as the hell realms and motivated by the fear of having to continually circle in the three realms of cyclic existence, then one has to be mindful and conscientious about the behaviour of one's body, speech and mind in every single moment. In reality, that is how it should be.

Therefore through remembering one's fear of suffering in the lower realms such as the hell realms and one's fear of cyclic existence, this would drive one to be conscientious and mindful so as to not let one's afflictions take hold of one.

4. *One should overcome wrongdoing as soon as it arises*

Verse 7.72

Therefore, just as I would hastily stand up  
If a snake came into my lap,  
Likewise if any sleep or indolence occur  
I shall quickly turn them back.

If, for whatever reason, your head catches fire, you are not going to wait. Instead you will try to put out the fire immediately by whatever means available. If you are someone who is afraid of snakes and for whatever reason a snake lands on your lap, without any delay, you will stand up immediately. You will be so frightened.

*Khen Rinpoche: When I was young and I was in Kopan monastery, the door of our room couldn't close completely. The wall also had a lot of holes. Sometimes a real snake would come into the room and sleep under the blankets. When we go to bed and lift up our blankets, the snake would be there. We would be very frightened.*

*When I was studying in south India, there was a monk who was so scared of snakes. Before class, we would gather outside. Everybody knew that he was scared of snakes. One day, another monk who was in the same class found some snakeskin. Normally a snake sheds its skin every year. I don't know how it changes its skin. I guess the snake throws away its skin so the skin is dead. So this monk brought the snakeskin and held it behind him (the monk who was afraid of snakes) and put the snakeskin on his neck. He was so frightened. He got so angry and went after that monk.*

*For me, I'm so scared of frogs. I mean I'm not scared that they will bite me but somehow, I find them very unpleasant. In the monastery, when we debated, there were so many frogs at the debate ground and sometimes they would jump on one's lap. When they did*

*that, I would stand up.*

The example here is not saying that when you are about to fall asleep, you should suddenly just jump out of bed and not sleep. That is not the point. The point is that there is a right time for sleeping.

Here we are talking about a person who is practising virtue. In the case of a person who is practising virtue, the entire day can be divided into the meditation session and the post-meditative session. The meditation session is when one is engaging in the formal session. Any time outside of that would be the post-meditative session. Therefore the whole day consists of that.

So when it comes to engaging in virtue, we can divide the day into the morning, afternoon and nighttime. There is a time for rest because sleep is necessary to restore the elements of one's body. Then the rest of the time should be used for something productive and beneficial in the form of engaging in virtue. So besides the proper time for sleeping, the time remaining is meant for practice, which is almost the entire day.

During the time that is meant for practice, there may be times when one may feel lazy and feel like sleeping when it is not the time for sleep and one doesn't feel like engaging in virtue when it is the time to do so. So at those times, one should immediately snap out of that situation and remind oneself to wake up when one has the desire to sleep.

However being able to do this is not an easy feat. Why? Because you have to be someone who can feel a sense of loss for not having used your time productively and meaningfully by engaging in virtue. You also have to be someone who is constantly aware of your potential to be reborn in the lower realms in your next life. You have to have that fear. Until you are someone who is able to have a feeling for these things, then being able to react in such a way is probably not possible.

So whenever you feel lazy or sleepy during the times when you are not supposed to sleep or you don't feel like engaging in the practice of virtue, then you have to remember the suffering of the lower realms, the suffering that you will experience in the future and you also have to bring to mind the faults of being in samsara. With those thoughts, you can then turn your mind towards virtue. You make a very strong resolution not to be lazy or to fall asleep unnecessarily.

Here is an account of how a great translator, Lotsawa Rinchen Sangpo, practised in one of his particularly long retreat of seven years. During the retreat, he established a boundary by setting up boundary markers to delineate the boundary that he will not transgress, i.e., not to cross over. He made three concentric circles of three layers of boundaries.

He generated the outermost boundary marker that delineated the outermost boundary with dakas, dakinis and Dharma protectors. He made offerings to them and entreated them, "May you punish me if any afflictions were to arise in the course of my retreat."

He generated the intermediate boundary marker with Dharma protectors and entreated them, “May you annihilate me if I were to allow even a single moment of selfish thought to arise in the course of my retreat.”

He then generated the innermost boundary markers with dakas, dakinis and Dharma protectors, made tormas offerings to them and entreated them, “May you destroy me if any thought apprehending signs were to arise in the course of my retreat.”

On the basis of making these oaths and promises, he lived in retreat for seven years.

The point is that one has to make a resolution from the depths of one’s heart and to rely on mindfulness and introspection to engage in virtue and not let the mind come under the influence or control of the afflictions.

It is helpful to make such a resolution for a certain period of time, such as for a particular day. For example, you resolve, “Today I am not going to let my mind come under the control of afflictions. I am going to place my mind firmly on virtue.”

*Khen Rinpoche: You can make your promise like this: “If that happened, I am not going to eat for three days.” Or, “If I fall asleep during the class ...,” you can decide on your punishment. Just to give you some idea.*

So what should we do when we do commit misdeeds?

Verse 7.73

Each time a misdeed occurs

I should deride myself,

And then contemplate for a long time

“No matter what, I shall not let this happen in the future.”

Although we may have made such a resolution, at times when we fall short, misdeeds do arise and we make mistakes. So then how should we think? When that happens, we should deride ourselves, making a critical self-evaluation and remembering, “How I have endured so many problems and so much suffering due to not controlling my mind and allowing my mind to come under the control of my afflictions. If I were to continue like this, then things will be change. Again I will have to face the same problems and the same suffering.”

So here is the critical self-evaluation. Literally we are deriding ourselves by telling ourselves, “I should not have done that. That is really not good. I must not do that again.” We have to think about this for a long time and after getting used to that way of thinking, we then make the resolution, “I must not do this again.”

We also need to purify the negativities that were accumulated through committing misdeeds. So we have to strive at purifying our negativities as well. As said here, whenever any misdeed occurs, we should confess it immediately and purify it through applying the four opponent powers.

*5. One should make effort in reasonable activities*

Verse 7.74

“Likewise in all situations  
I shall acquaint myself with mindfulness.”  
With this cause I shall wish for  
Encounters or appropriate actions.

This is the advice to rely on mindfulness in order not to let any misdeed arise in the first place or in order to eliminate those that have already arisen.

With this kind of motivation as set out in Verse 7.74 at the back of one’s mind and by relying on conscientiousness, mindfulness and introspection, then one goes about doing whatever is appropriate such as engaging in practice, be it a retreat, recitations, prostrations, circumambulations and so forth. The point is that with the intention to rely on mindfulness and introspection and with the aim of not letting faults arise or eliminating those faults that have already arisen, one then engages in activities such as receiving instructions and teachings, relying on the Mahayana virtuous friends and so forth.

In this section, conscientiousness, mindfulness and introspection are always being emphasised. It is said that they are very important. One should sincerely and actively generate conscientiousness, mindfulness and introspection. On that basis, one then engages in whatever actions that are appropriate.

*C. Accomplishing the conduct is within your power**1. Through pliancy of body and mind, one should even arise in virtue*

Verse 7.75

In order to have strength for all  
I should recall before undertaking any action  
The advice on conscientiousness thus,  
And then rise with lightness.

*2. Applying the analogy to the meaning*

Verse 7.76

Just as the wind blowing back and forth  
Controls a piece of cotton,  
So shall I be mastered by enthusiasm,  
And in this way I will accomplish all.

Prior to engaging in virtue, we should prepare mentally to have the ability and capacity for doing so. In order to be able to engage in that virtue with strength and vigour, we have to remember all the instructions for cultivating conscientiousness.

There is so much advice on how to be conscientious. There are instructions pertaining to:

- how to be conscientious in abandoning non-virtue
- how to be conscientious in engaging in virtue
- how to be conscientious in abandoning or dealing with afflictions

We should be mindful of these instructions on generating conscientiousness.

For those who are able to be conscientious in abandoning non-virtue, cultivating virtue and in working with their afflictions, then with respect to whatever appropriate practice they may be engaged in, it is said that they will be able to do those practices very easily. That is the meaning when we say, “rise with lightness.” They are able to do their practice with ease because they do it enthusiastically and very happily. There is no impediment whatsoever to their practice.

Likewise if we have strong enthusiasm and joy for virtue, then we can bring our own body and speech under that positive influence. If we are enthusiastic about and happy doing something virtuous, it will not be difficult to employ our body and speech in that endeavour. Because mentally we are so happy engaging in that virtue, with this kind of enthusiasm and joy, we would be able to complete that virtue.

In Gyaltsab Je’s commentary, his final closing statement to this chapter is that we should strive in generating the joyous effort that can overcome laziness. In order to do that, we have to eliminate all the discordant classes, i.e., those things that hinder joyous effort. We also have to generate the favourable conditions, i.e., the four powers, for developing joyous effort.

Gyaltsab Je said that in order to cultivate joyous effort, you have to eliminate its opposing factors. What are those opposing factors? There are two:

1. not engaging in virtue while one is clearly aware that one has the ability to do so, i.e., knowing that one can do it but one doesn’t do it.
2. thinking, “I can’t do this. How can I ever do this?”

The first one—not engaging in virtue although one knows that one is capable of doing so—happens primarily due to procrastination because one thinks, “I still have time” or one is completely overwhelmed by attachment to unwholesome (or ignoble and bad) activities.

How are we going to deal with the laziness of procrastination? The antidote is to reflect on and contemplate the fact that we are not going to live forever and we will die soon. After death, we will fall into the lower realms. We also have to remember that attaining this rebirth with all the conditions for practice and the freedom to do so is very difficult to achieve again.

How are we going to deal with the laziness of attachment to unwholesome activities, i.e., attachment to the affairs of this life? The antidote is to reflect on how the precious Dharma is the origin of infinite happiness in this and in all future lives. That is one antidote. The other antidote is to reflect on how all these meaningless things that we do in life are just distractions. They harm us even in this life and they are also the origin or source of many problems in our future lives.

How are we going to deal with being disheartened about virtue, thinking, “I can’t do this”? In the first place, such a sense of despondency or discouragement comes in different kinds of thoughts:

- “I can’t attain all these infinite qualities of enlightenment or buddhahood.”



- “I can’t do all these difficult bodhisattva practices such as giving up my body and sacrificing this and that. They are too challenging and difficult. How is it possible for me to do them?”
- “How can I put up with all the difficulties of samsara? I have to deal with so many challenges in the process of becoming a buddha. In order to achieve all the qualities of the buddha, I still have to be in samsara with its challenges and difficulties. How can I bear something like that?”

We have gone over all these points already. So what is the antidote to the thought, “I cannot become a buddha” or “How is it possible for me to be a buddha?” The antidote is to understand that those who are already buddhas were not buddhas from the beginning. In the beginning, before they were buddhas, they didn’t have all the qualities. They had not abandoned all their faults. But they practised gradually and over time, through bearing hardships, they were able to become enlightened. So if we were to do likewise and are willing to bear hardships, we will also become a buddha.

As for the discouragement that comes from thinking, “I am unable to practise all those difficult bodhisattva deeds such as giving my head, arms and legs,” the antidote is that there is no need to worry at all because these practices are not meant for beginners like us. When we are beginners, these practices are difficult. Since we are beginners, we don’t have to worry about doing them. But when we are bodhisattva superiors, at that time when we do these practices, it will not be a problem for us at all. At that time, giving our body away will be as easy as giving away a plate of vegetable to someone. So why get depressed for no reason?

As for the third form of discouragement thinking, “I have to stay in samsara for such a long time while doing all these practices. That is too much. It is too difficult.” The answer to that is this: “It is not difficult at all because if you know how to do it, you will be filled with joy. Over time, even while in samsara, you will experience physical and mental joy in doing these practices. Once you do these practices with a happy mind, even while you are in samsara, you will not be bothered and it will not affect you. So again what is there to worry about?”

### **THE CHAPTER’S NAME**

The name of the chapter is *Teaching Joyous Effort*.

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Exam date and time: Sunday, 12 October, 2014 at 10am at ABC

I do understand that it will be difficult for most of you to read all seven chapters in its entirety as a preparation for the exam. I have thought about this.

I am going to give you a set of sample questions.

You prepare for the exam on the basis of this set of questions. 80% to 90% of the questions in the exam will be somewhat connected or related to these sample questions.

In the sample questions, there is a section that requires you to answer whether the statements given are true or false. How are you going to study based on these sample questions?

- The point is not to merely have a minor discussion on the true and false questions and being happy with that. That is wrong and is not the way to do it.
- You should think, “Why is it true? Why it is false?” You must be able to give reasons for that.
- On top of this, related to the statement, you should be able to come out with another example, for instance, by changing the subject of the statement. Then you think about it and arrive at an answer.

This is how you should prepare for the exam.

Do you understand the instructions?

For example, the first question is: Our body is an object of abandonment because it arises from the ignorance belonging to the twelve links of dependent origination.

It is not enough merely to ask someone whether this is true or false and leave it at that. If you think that this is sufficient for your preparation, you will not be able to pass the exam.

In this question, the subject of inquiry is “our body.” After you have answered true or false, with the reasons for your answer, you should then substitute the subject by thinking, for example, our mind is an object of abandonment because it arose from the ignorance belonging to the twelve links of dependent origination. Since the subject has changed, does the answer remain the same or not?

I am just giving an example on how to change the subject of the statement. I am not saying that in the actual exam question, the “mind” instead of the “body” will be the subject for the first question. I am just highlighting how you should think and learn.

What I wish from you is that you should know the purpose of having these sample questions. The point is for you to learn, think, analyse and then discuss. Of course, you still have to take the exam but it is not about passing or failing. This is about educating yourself. It is about learning.

Having said that, it is also not right to do away with the exam because if we don't have the exam, then most people will merely close the text and that's it. They are not going to look at the text again. So, there is no choice. We have to have the exams.

Khen Rinpoche: Do you get the idea?

When I say that 80% to 90% of the questions in the exam will revolve around these sample questions, I am *not* saying that you will get exactly the same statements that you find here, that I am just going to change the subject of the statement with the rest of the statement unchanged. Please keep in mind that this is not the case. If you misunderstand what I am saying here, then there is the danger that I may end up receiving a lot of complains after the exam!

It is entirely possible that perhaps there are maybe about 10% of the exam questions that are not connected to what you find in these sample questions.

Khen Rinpoche: It is a possibility but I am not sure. I have not decided on the questions so no idea yet.

So those who want to take the exam, you can take the questions and study them. The whole point is that you can study more.

I don't think there will be any more classes in September. In October, perhaps we will have another two more sessions. I have not fully decided what I will be talking about in those two sessions. For now, I am thinking to do a simple introduction to tantra. But I have not decided yet. As for now, that could be one of the topics.

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