

**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 3**23 February 2016**

Review. Chapter 8, Verses 8.5 to 8.16: Abandoning attachment to sentient beings. The disadvantages of attachment. Abandoning them by knowing the disadvantages. Summary.

REVIEW

In the previous lesson, we saw how important concentration is. In the absence of concentration, our mind becomes easily distracted. This opens up the mind to all kinds of discursive thoughts, which are obstacles to the cultivation of virtue. In particular, they hinder our achievement of liberation. As such, concentration is very important. Therefore, it is important to strive to cultivate it.

It is taught that in order to cultivate calm abiding, in particular, we have to rely on physical isolation and mental isolation.

- Physical isolation means isolating ourselves from the hustle and bustle of life and to lead a quiet life.
- Mental isolation means to isolate and guard our mind against the distraction of discursive thoughts.

In the last lesson, we asked ourselves:

- Why are people unable to give up a busy life?
- Why do people have such a liking for the hustle and bustle of life?
- Why are people unable to protect and isolate their minds from distractions and discursive thoughts?

In our analysis, the conclusion was that this is due to attachment and desire. Because of our attachment and desire, we are unable to give up our liking for the hustle and bustle of life. It is also very difficult to give up attachment and our discursive thoughts.

In our discussion, we saw how the root of attachment, its very origin and source, is essentially our self-grasping, the ignorance that holds on to the person and phenomena to be truly existent.

We also saw how the only antidote to this self-grasping is the realisation of emptiness, in particular, the special insight focussing on emptiness. This is the only antidote to self-grasping. We must understand that the only antidote to self-grasping, which is the root of all our problems, is the special insight focussing on emptiness.

- In order to develop the special insight focussing on emptiness, first one must actualize calm abiding.

- In order to actualize calm abiding, one has to depend on both physical and mental isolation.

So one must undertake the practice of calm abiding with enthusiasm and delight.

The enthusiasm and delight that want to rely on physical and mental isolation to actualize calm abiding come from seeing why it is essential to develop calm abiding. The main reason for actualizing calm abiding is to actualize the special insight focussing on emptiness one day as it can destroy our self-grasping, the root of all our problems.

Achieving calm abiding alone is not sufficient. Even if one has calm abiding, such a stable and clear concentration, but if one does not have the special insight focussing on emptiness, that concentration alone will not enable one to overcome one's self-grasping, the root of all one's problems. Therefore, the special insight focussing on emptiness is indispensable.

The attainment of calm abiding in itself is not a realization or quality that is unique to the Buddhist path. It is a realization that can be achieved by anyone, even by followers of other spiritual traditions. As such, there are people who have achieved calm abiding. On that basis, they are able to attain a higher rebirth in cyclic existence and be reborn in the form and the formless realms. Some are even born in the highest realm of samsara, the peak of cyclic existence. But nevertheless, these people have self-grasping and are still not able to abandon their afflictions, in particular, their ignorance. This is because they do not have this wisdom, the special insight focussing on emptiness.

One can realize emptiness prior to actualizing calm abiding. That is definitely possible. However, the realization of emptiness that occurs prior to the achievement of calm abiding is an understanding and realization of emptiness that is the wisdom arisen from reflection. The realization of emptiness prior to the achievement of calm abiding is not the wisdom arisen from meditation. In order for the mind realizing emptiness to be a wisdom arisen from meditation, first one must have achieved calm abiding. It is the mind realizing emptiness arisen from meditation that can act as an antidote to our self-grasping.

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We are either attached to people or sentient beings or objects like wealth, prosperity, power, reputation and respect. Attachment itself stops us from developing a liking for distancing ourselves from a busy life. It is this attachment that prevents us from depending on physical and mental isolation. Because of this attachment, our mind becomes very busy and there are many discursive and disturbing thoughts. As such, the root text proceeds to talk about the various faults of attachment.

### **ABANDONING ATTACHMENT TO SENTIENT BEINGS**

#### *The disadvantages of attachment*

First, there is the discussion about the faults of being attached to sentient beings.

Verse 8.5

Because of the attachment one impermanent being

Has for impermanent beings,  
He will not see his beloved ones  
For thousands of lives.

The first two lines of Verse 8.5 are very helpful when we have very strong desire or attachment for our loved ones, partners, friends and relatives. It is about looking at us as the example. We ourselves are impermanent in that we are changing from moment to moment. In fact, we are moving closer to death in each and every moment. There will come a time when we will have to die. Likewise, sentient beings are the same in that they are also disintegrating and changing from moment to moment. They will not be here forever. There will come a time when they will also die.

The people we are attached to are no different from us. We are all the same in being impermanent, moving closer and closer to death in every moment. There will come a time when we will definitely die. The argument here is: What is the point then of being so attached?

We can apply this also to deal with any anger we may have for a particular person. “Since I am going to die one day and he is going to die one day—we are all going to die one day—is there any point in being so angry with him?” It is possible to think like that.

In fact, if we think about how everybody is impermanent—starting with ourselves and the people we are either attached to or averse to, the people we compete with, the people we look down on and so forth—and that we are all going to die, then what is the point of being so emotionally involved, upset, angry, attached, jealous or looking down on people in a negative way?

In our daily lives, we develop all these negative emotions—anger, attachment, jealousy, egotism and negative competitiveness. When these emotions arise, we should experiment for ourselves. We strongly bring to mind our own impermanence and the impermanence of the other person. We should check whether our negative emotions subside or not. Such a reflection can be very helpful at times when there is a disagreement or people are upset with one another. Just by thinking about how things are impermanent—that we are impermanent and that the situation is impermanent—will help to make the mind more calm and relaxed.

We get very emotionally involved with people, our loved ones and the objects of our attachment. We invest so much effort in this intense attachment and desire. Because of having invested so much in our object of attachment, will that enable us to meet that person again for the thousands and thousands of lifetimes to come? The answer is no.

The irony is that due to our attachment for this person, our attachment will cause us to be separated from that person for thousands of lifetimes. Likewise, our attachment to and desire for that which is pleasant leads to us being separated from what is pleasant for many, many lifetimes.

This is what Shantideva is saying, “He will not see his beloved ones/ For thousands of lives.”

Verse 8.6 a, b  
 Not seeing them I will not be happy.  
 Also my mind will not be set in equipoise;

If we don't see the people or the things that we like, we are not happy. This is how it works with attachment. The mind becomes disturbed and unsettled. This is a great obstacle to developing concentration, the single-pointedness of mind.

Verse 8.6 c, d  
 Even if I see them there will be no satisfaction,  
 Whereby, as before, I will be tormented by craving.

Even if we do see the object of our attachment, it will not be any different from our past experience. When we see the object, our emotional involvement could be even stronger as there is more attachment and craving. Then that brings about more pain.

Verse 8.7  
 Through being attached to sentient beings,  
 I will be completely obscured from the perfect reality.  
 My mind of disillusion will also be destroyed.  
 In the end I will be tormented by sorrow.

Due to our attachment to sentient beings, we will be “completely obscured from the perfect reality.” Our attachment for a particular person completely obscures our mind from seeing the ultimate nature or reality of that person. When our attachment to a particular person is manifest, the way we view that person is completely coloured by our attachment. There are different minds operating at the same time as we focus on that person but attachment is working in the background, influencing whatever thoughts we have towards that person. How we see that person is what attachment is telling us to see. We will not be able to see the actual reality of that person.

We may have some experience of the suffering nature of samsara. Through our reflection, we may have come to an understanding of how samsara is in the nature of suffering and so forth. So we actually see suffering as it is. But even if we are able to produce some disenchantment towards cyclic existence, when attachment arises, it overwhelms whatever disenchantment we may have developed. Slowly over time, due to the force of our attachment, that disenchantment and disillusionment towards cyclic existence will dissipate and fade away.

In fact, we may even come to a point in time whereby we do not develop any disenchantment towards cyclic existence anymore. It is completely gone. In the end, we will be “tormented by sorrow,” living our life with attachment. As there will come a time when we have to die, at the time of death, if we were to end our life with very strong attachment and desire because that is what we are most familiar with, this will bring about a lot of unhappiness and sorrow.

Verse 8.8 a, b  
 By only thinking of them,  
 This life will pass without any meaning.

By thinking only of whoever we are attached to, there will be no opportunity or mental space for living a meaningful life by doing things that will truly be useful and beneficial in the long run and to be able to engage in virtue. As there is no mental space for such activities, our whole life will be focussed on our objects of attachment. This is how our lives are completely rendered meaningless if we were to live like that day after day.

These are some of the faults or the loss that we will make by following attachment. We have to think about and recognise that these faults are faults for ourselves. Only then can we slowly come to work with our attachment.

*Abandoning them by knowing the disadvantages*

Verse 8.8 c, d

Friends and relatives lacking permanence  
Will even destroy the everlasting Dharma.

Verse 8.9

If I behave in the same way as those equal in fortune to the childish  
I will certainly proceed to lower realms.  
If I am led there to those unequal in fortune,  
What is the use of entrusting myself to the childish?

Because of our attachment to people and objects, we are completely unable to do anything to achieve permanent lasting happiness for ourselves. Because of our strong attachment, we are unable to actualize the method and the causes that will enable us to achieve permanent everlasting freedom from suffering.

“If I behave in the same way as those equal in fortune as the childish”: The word “childish” here can mean different things.

- You can talk about “the childish” as opposed to the elderly. This is one way of looking at it.
  - There is also a definition of “the childish” that is in relation to those who have realized emptiness directly, the superiors.
  - Then there is another understanding of “the childish” as opposed to the wise. There are those who are not wise but are foolish. In that sense, they are also childish.
- So there are these different ways of understanding the term, “the childish.”

Let’s talk about the wise. The wise are those who are skilled, expert in and knowledgeable about what one should abandon and what one should cultivate. In relation to the wise, the childish are not skilled and not knowledgeable about what is to be abandoned and what is to be cultivated.

It is quoted in the *Lamrim Chenmo* that the negativities of the wise are light and the negativities of the foolish are heavy. For the wise, even heavy negativities become light whereas for the foolish, even small negativities become big.

In relation to what we have discussed, the negativities accumulated by a wise person can be made very light because he is skilled and knowledgeable in purifying those negativities and obscurations through the practice of applying the four powers. Because

he is skilled in that, he is able to make all his powerful negativities very weak.

As the foolish and childish person is not skilled and knowledgeable in purifying his negativities, not knowing what to abandon and what to cultivate, his negativities may start off small, but because he does not know how to purify them, those negativities multiply over time and become very big.

“If I behave in the same way as those equal in fortune to the childish”: If our actions of body, speech and mind are similar to such foolish people, then of course we will proceed to the lower realms.

“If I am led there by those unequal in fortune”: The point here is that by associating with the childish, it will only cause our actions of body, speech and mind not to be equal to the fortune of the superiors.

Verse 8.10

One moment they are friends  
And in a while they become enemies.  
Since they become angry even at the sources of joy,  
It is difficult to please ordinary people.

Verse 8.11

They are angry when something of benefit is said  
And they also turn me away from benefit.  
If I do not listen to what they say,  
Becoming angry, they will proceed to lower realms.

These two verses are referring to the childish. Associating with the childish means we associate with those who are not knowledgeable and skilled in what is to be abandoned and what is to be adopted. If we associate with such friends, we ourselves are childish people.

We may speak nicely and in a politically correct way to them. They are friends then. But all it takes is saying something slightly incorrect or unsuitable, then they become our enemies.

When childish people are given advice sincerely and with a good intention about things that are beneficial for them—“Maybe you should not do this because it is not beneficial and is harmful for you”—they become upset.

Even though we have met the Dharma and we have a perfect human rebirth, when we see others having these same conditions, we may become jealous. In the same way, when we associate with childish people, those who are not knowledgeable about what is to be abandoned and what is to be cultivated, at times they will get jealous when we have some wealth or seem to be enjoying a good life. They may even be jealous that we have met the Dharma or is practising the Dharma. As such, the text says, “It is difficult to please ordinary people.”

There are times when we have the sincere intention to help someone by giving him

suggestions, “Maybe you shouldn’t do this. You should do that instead.” But often the childish people will get upset and tell you off, “Why are you telling me this? I don’t have time!”

We may be trying to practise the Dharma purely and sincerely, but in the process we get involved with childish people who are not knowledgeable about what is to be abandoned and what is to be cultivated. This may give us a lot of problems in the sense of turning us away from virtue such as disrupting or obstructing our practice of the Dharma.

Then there are people who like to give such advice, “Don’t practise the Dharma. Why practise so hard? It is a waste of time. Why do you want to do these practices?” Of course we are not going to listen to them and we will continue with our practice. Then they may start to get upset with us for not listening to them. The text says, “If I do not listen to what they say, / Becoming angry, they will proceed to lower realms.”

#### Verse 8.12

They are envious of superiors, competitive with equals,  
And proud towards inferiors. They are conceited when praised,  
And if anything unpleasant is said they get angry;  
When is any benefit obtained from the childish?

#### Verse 8.13

Through associating with the childish,  
Non-virtue will certainly ensue,  
Such as praising myself and belittling others  
And discussing the joys of cyclic existence.

Verse 8.12 is saying that when we associate with childish or ordinary people, this is bound to happen. It is normal that ordinary people are jealous or envious of people who are doing better than themselves and those who are superior to them. Ordinary people like to compete in a negative sense with their peers. They are also very proud and look down on their inferiors. They become conceited when they are praised a little. The usual reaction of ordinary people is that they get upset easily even when something that is only slightly unpleasant is said to them. Therefore, Verse 8.12 is asking us, “What is the benefit of associating with the childish?”

Verse 8.13 is asking, “If we lead the ordinary life we do now, we associate with the childish and we rely on them as friends, then what will happen to our life?” Such a life will only involve non-virtue. Why? Because leading such an ordinary life always involves talking about others. When we talk about others, it is either something good or bad. If we are talking about something good, that means we are praising ourselves and when we are talking about something bad, it is talking about how bad others are.

“Discussing the joys of cyclic existence”: When childish people get together, they will discuss how they should defeat their common enemy. Or they will talk about how they should help their allies, i.e., those who are their objects of attachment. They also talk about business, how to earn more money and how to increase their power and reputation. This is what happens when a childish person relies on another childish

person or when a childish person associates with other childish people.

The next verse summarizes what will happen if the childish relies on another childish person.

Verse 8.14 a, b

Others and I relying [upon each other] in this way  
Will bring about nothing but ruin.

We are foolish and childish. If we associate with other childish people by making friends with them, relying on them and see them as our refuge and support, since everyone is the same in not knowing what to abandon and what to cultivate, then the result will be a messy life of unhappiness, negativities and non-virtue. If one's life is just one of non-virtue, then the end result will be destruction.

So the way to lead our lives without attachment is to distance ourselves from such childish people.

Verse 8.14 c, d

They will not enact my purpose  
And I too will not enact their purpose.

Verse 8.15

I should flee far away from childish people.  
When they are encountered, I should please them joyfully.  
I should behave well, merely ordinarily,  
Without becoming greatly familiar

Verse 8.16

In the same way a bee takes honey from a flower,  
I should take merely the purpose of Dharma  
And remain unfamiliar  
As though I have never seen all of them before.

If we ourselves are already childish, obviously we cannot fulfil the purposes of another childish person, be it the happiness of the person in this life or the happiness of that person in his future lives. Likewise, just as other childish people cannot make us happy in this life, they also cannot do anything helpful for the happiness of our future lives. That being the case, we need to think seriously about relying on physical isolation.

When a childish person associates with another childish person, the result usually ends in engaging in non-virtue. Nothing really beneficial comes out of it. They don't help our practice of virtue. Rather they obstruct it so there is no benefit. When everyone gets together, the chances are that they are talking about somebody else or something meaningless. Ideally, we should be talking about something that is meaningful or beneficial such as the Dharma but that usually doesn't happen.

If we were to depend on physical isolation and not associate closely with the childish or ordinary people, naturally with less distractions, non-virtue will decrease. Also, it is so



much easier to live a meaningful life and direct our body, speech and mind towards virtue and something beneficial.

In the compilation of spiritual songs by Jetsun Milarepa, he said, “I live in isolation in a cave and when I am sick, there is nobody to ask me whether I am sick. When I die, there will be nobody who will make a fuss about that either. As such, the wishes of this yogi is fulfilled.”

These instructions of Milarepa are cherished and taken to heart by people who see the futility of being attached to this life’s happiness. They see the faults and all the problems that come from associating with childish people. They also see all the problems that come from attachment. People who cherish this advice are the ones who really want to develop single-pointed concentration with the aim of cultivating the wisdom that will enable them to achieve everlasting happiness.

There may be a situation when one is in physical isolation, living in a hermitage and one encounters other people. How should one deal with this encounter?

When we meet with people, we should not run away. We should please them by being cordial and respectful, but we should not associate with them for too long because there is the danger of becoming attached to them once we become too familiar.

When we are in a hermitage, we are supposed to practise the Dharma. In case someone enters our cave, we are not supposed to be upset and we are not supposed to be attached as well. We have to deal with the situation without becoming attached.

When one is living in physical isolation, there will be times when one needs to leave the hermitage and go to the town where people live in order to stock up on the supplies that will sustain one’s body for the practice.

Then one needs to act like a bee. When a bee lands on a flower, it will do what it is supposed to do, i.e., suck up the nectar and leave the flower after the job is done. The bee does not hang around, examining the shape or the colour of the flower. It will simply leave once its job is done.

Likewise, when one leaves the hermitage for the town, one should get what one needs to sustain one’s body for the practice. One needs to be mindful, not staying too long unnecessarily but return to the hermitage quickly. This is what the meditators who are living in isolation in hermitages do. They go to town and get what they need without getting attached to the place, the situation or the people they see. They do whatever they need to do and then return quickly to their hermitages.

Up to this point, this is the section dealing with abandoning attachment to the inner objects, sentient beings. Next is dealing with the attachment to external objects such as praise, material gain and so forth.

## **SUMMARY**

Because of our attachment to people, we are not able to live alone. We must live around

other people amidst the hustle and bustle of life. Therefore, in order to counteract this kind of attachment, first we have to think about the faults of our attachment.

We have to think and see for ourselves the faults of hanging around and mixing with people. We have to see for ourselves the benefits if we were to live alone, relying on physical isolation. All the advice and instructions for practice are essential for those who say they want to practise real and pure Dharma. They are indispensable.

In particular, if we really want to focus on the practice and develop concentration, then it is indispensable to live in isolation. When one is in retreat, due to the power of the quiet environment with few people around, naturally our discursive thoughts and distractions will subside. Also, it makes it easier to live a simple life with contentment. Then one's practice of ethical discipline becomes much purer. When all these conditions are gathered together, then the meditation practice will become a real practice and will bear fruit.

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Question: Why are sentient beings considered inner objects of attachment whereas gain and honour are considered outer objects of attachment?

Answer: Generally speaking, if that object is conjoined with the consciousness, then it is labelled, "inner" and if it is not conjoined with the consciousness, then it is "outer."

Question: The person who is receiving the teachings in this chapter will be someone looking at cultivating calm abiding. However, when it comes to friends, for example, when we are in a Dharma centre, how should we then regard each other, because we are the childish ones? Certainly when we get closer to one another, we can, in the name of the Dharma, gossip. At the same time, we are saying that we have to develop bodhicitta and regard one another as sangha. In short, how do we regard one another as Dharma friends who should be close to one another and at the same time, we need to keep a distance? How do we strike a balance?

Answer: We are not childish people. We are experts in knowing what to abandon and what to cultivate! What is the problem?

Question: How about people who are very new to the centre?

Khen Rinpoche: They can come and ask me.

Question: This is a real situation. If we were to follow the text, by definition, our parents and our spouse are the childish ones. We are in this situation as a layperson. For sure, I am not leaving for a cave tomorrow. In the meantime, what is the best way to behave with our parents and spouse?

Answer: In the context here, this advice is given to someone who wants to reduce his attachment, who wants to reduce distractions and who wants to actualize concentration.

Realistically speaking, if you are living a lay life as a householder with a family, then

abandoning attachment is difficult. That is the truth. Still we have to do something. So what is important as a householder having all these relationships is to put up with them with patience. As much as possible, do things with love and compassion, and as much as possible, work at reducing attachment.

All of us have some understanding of the Dharma and have studied about love, compassion and patience. So we should try to develop some kind of love, compassion and patience. If we have a good heart while in samsara, we can have some kind of peace also. So we just have to try.

As we have seen earlier, it is very important and very beneficial for the mind to think about death and impermanence every day all the time. It doesn't matter whether we want to practise the Dharma or we are not a practitioner of Dharma. If we think about impermanence, that this is how life is, that things can change for the worse, when we die, it makes our life a bit easier, less of a mental roller coaster. Also, we will be less upset when things don't go our way. So it is important to think about death and impermanence every day.

Whatever situations or problems we may meet in life, whether positive or negative, it is good to keep in mind that things are not static. They will always change. This applies not just to bad things. It applies to good things as well. Whatever the situation, it is always good to keep in mind death and impermanence, especially when we are meeting with challenges and difficulties in life. Things will change. It really makes things easier on the mind and gives the mind more peace. The mind is less uptight and more relaxed. Thinking about death and impermanence is not difficult. It is not challenging at all. It is not a difficult concept.

Ven Gyurme: Are you asking what are the chances of success of achieving calm abiding for a layperson?

Answer: For a layperson to achieve calm abiding is difficult. But there are exceptions. It all depends on the individual. If you are somebody who is already living a simple and contented life with little distractions and if you have the great support of merit and a good practice of the purification of negativities and obscurations, then it is possible.

One of the essential and most important causes for success in developing calm abiding is having very pure ethical discipline. If you have pure ethical discipline, it means you are already restraining your body and speech from all kinds of distractions and activities that can give rise to attachment. Because of this, it is easier to work with the mind as your mind is already somewhat pacified, or at the very least, you have distanced yourself from many non-virtues and discursive thoughts. This makes it relatively easier to work with the mind.

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