

**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 4**25 February 2016**

Review. Chapter 8, Verses 8.17 – 8.21: Abandoning attachment to gain and honour: Verse 8.17: The disadvantages of pride. Verses 8.18 & 8.19: The disadvantages of attachment. Verses 8.19 & 8.20: Objects of desire are not reliable. Verse 8.21: There is neither benefit nor harm in praise and belittling. Verses 8.22 – 8.24: The disadvantages of bustle. Verse 8.25 – 8.35: The benefits of relying on isolation. Verse 8.25: Companions. Verses 8.26 – 8.27: Place. Verse 8.28: Livelihood. Verses 8.29 – 8.30: Impermanent nature of the body. Verses 8.31 – 8.33: Attachment to those dear to you is unreasonable. Verse 8.34 – 8.35: Non-distraction.

REVIEW

Lord Atisha said in his *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, “If one does not rely on the prerequisites for developing calm abiding, then even if one works very hard at developing calm abiding for thousands of years, one will not be able to develop it.”

In the context of Chapter Eight here, we are talking about developing single-pointed concentration. In order to have developed calm abiding successfully, one must gather all the favourable conditions before one stands a chance of actualizing calm abiding.

The prerequisites or the favourable conditions for the cultivation of calm abiding are as follows:

- One must practise in an agreeable place.
- One must have very few desires.
- One must have contentment.
- One must not live a busy life, i.e., one should not engage in doing too many things.
- One needs to have pure ethical discipline.
- One needs to distance oneself mentally from all kinds of discursive thoughts such as thoughts of desire and attachment.

All these prerequisites are absolutely necessary. They are like the working capital for developing calm abiding without which one does not even stand a chance of doing so.

On top of that, one must have faith in concentration, a strong yearning to actualize it and one must be skilled in the methods of generating calm abiding in one’s mind. Therefore, one must know the meditation techniques that will enable one to develop calm abiding. When all of these various factors come together, with the exertion of joyous effort, it is said that it is possible to achieve calm abiding within six months.

Khen Rinpoche: Anybody wants to go? Six months!

The whole point of relying on physical isolation is to practise and train the mind. In this case, it is to meditate on and to actualize calm abiding. Before one can actually do that, one must know how to go about doing it. This is why the practice have to be preceded by studying. One needs to learn and to receive teachings on this subject so as to be sure about the methods.

Je Rinpoche Lama Tsongkhapa said in the lam-rim that the whole point of studying or learning the Dharma is to put it into practice. Whatever understanding we gain from learning, then in accordance with our own capacity, we practise at our own level.

There are many obstacles or unfavourable conditions for the development of calm abiding. One of them is our attachment. Because of attachment, our life is so busy. We are attached to different things, one of which is other people. Since that is an obstacle for the cultivation of calm abiding, there is a discussion of the faults of attachment and how to deal with them.

As we saw in the last lesson, because of our attachment to people, we destroy whatever hope we may have of achieving liberation for ourselves. Because of attachment and desire, we are unable to practise the holy Dharma.

We saw how there is no benefit in associating with other people. Instead, there is harm as people destroy or hurt one another. As such, the advice is that we should rely on physical isolation and stay away from these objects of attachment.

During one's solitude, one may have to leave one's place of practice for some valid reasons like procuring necessities and so forth. Then one may meet other people. There is also advice on how to deal with this situation. The essence of the advice is as follows:

- One does not get overly familiar with others.
- One does not get attached to the people who one comes into contact with in the process of getting one's necessities.
- One does not get upset when somebody pokes his head into one's cave!

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The next section discusses the way to abandon attachment to external objects. It talks about the faults of the different afflictions and the faults of the objects of attachment.

## **ABANDONING ATTACHMENT TO GAIN AND HONOUR**

### *The disadvantages of pride*

Verse 8.17

"I have many possessions as well as honor,  
And many people like me,"  
Nurturing conceit in this way  
I shall be made terrified after death.

First, there is a discussion about the faults of pride. If we are attached to material wealth, possessions, power, faith, our supporters, benefactors, students and so forth and

furthermore, we are discontented wanting more and more of these things, it will be the cause for us to go to the lower realms in our next life.

It is stated clearly in the vinaya, the code of discipline for ordained people, that generally speaking, if ordained people were to happily accept offerings from the faithful, yet at the same time remain lazy and use the offerings for their own enjoyment, these offerings will become debts that have to be repaid in the future.

If one becomes conceited because of having all these enjoyments, praise and respect, and attachment is involved, one will only go to the lower realms.

This is the short discussion on the faults of pride. Next is a discussion on the faults of attachment.

*The disadvantages of attachment*

Verse 8.18

So, thoroughly confused mind,  
By the combination of whatever attachments  
To this and that, multiplying into thousands,  
Suffering will ensue and arise.

Verse 8.19 a, b

Hence, the wise should not be attached;  
Fear is produced from attachment.

This “thoroughly confused mind” is not referring to the mind of somebody else. It is referring to us. Because of not knowing karma, we allow ourselves to get involved with attachment. We are attached to all kinds of things, yet we don’t do anything about it. Instead, we allow our attachment to grow stronger and to multiply. The end result will be suffering.

Hence, the wise, i.e., those who are knowledgeable about what is to be cultivated and what is to be abandoned, do not follow after attachment. They don’t give in to attachment because of their fear of the lower realms.

*Objects of desire are not reliable*

Next is a discussion on the faults of our objects of attachment that we rely on and trust. Such objects are not reliable.

Verse 8.19 c, d

Firmly understand well  
That it is the nature of these things to be discarded!

Verse 8.20

Although I may have many possessions,  
Be famous and well spoken of,  
I do not know where  
The collection of possessions and renown will go.

Whether we are talking about our possessions or fame, they are not reliable. They won't last forever because there will come a day when we will have to die. At the time of death, we cannot carry them along with us and they are of no benefit to us then. We must convince ourselves that this is the case.

No matter how many loved ones and supporters one may have, no matter how large one's entourage may be or how much money one has, at the time of death, all these have to be left behind. One has to make the final journey alone.

The outline for the topic of death and impermanence in the lam-rim — where it states at the time of death, nothing is of any benefit except the Dharma — consists of three points:

1. At the time of death, our wealth and possessions will not benefit us.
2. Our friends or loved ones are of no benefit whatsoever.
3. Even our body is of no benefit to us, as we have to leave it behind.

The only thing that will benefit us at the time of death is the practice of virtue and the Dharma practice that we have done. Since this is the case, the conclusion at the end of our reflection and meditation should be, "I will only practise the Dharma."

If we were to think about this advice and put it into practice, it will be helpful in reducing our attachment to and desire for money, wealth, possessions, power and so forth.

*There is neither benefit nor harm in praise and belittling*

Next is an explanation of how praise and criticism do not really benefit or harm us. So there is no need to be overly distracted and excited when we are praised and at the same time, there is no need to feel upset when we are criticized.

Verse 8.21

If there is someone who derides me,  
What is there for me to be happy about in being praised?  
And if there is another who praises me,  
What is there for me to be unhappy about in being derided?

This verse is saying that there is no point in being so excited or attached to praise, because praise and criticism are complete opposites and one harms the other.

Here we are talking about praise. What hurts praise, or is the enemy of praise? It is criticism. There may be somebody who praises us but then there will always be somebody who is criticizing us.

Likewise, the second half of this verse is saying that there is also no need to be so affected by criticism. Although people may criticize us, there will always be people who praise us and like us.

So this is the advice on how we should react to praise and criticism, i.e., we should not get so upset when we are criticized and we should also not be so attached when we are praised.

Next is the explanation of the faults of distraction and leading a very busy life.

### **THE DISADVANTAGES OF BUSTLE**

Here, for this particular section of the commentary, Gyalsap Je states in the outline that it is difficult to associate with the childish. Therefore, we should not be attached to their distractions.

#### Verse 8.22

If even the Victor is unable to please  
The beings of various inclinations,  
Then what need to mention about a negative person such as I?  
Therefore, I should give up worldly thought.

#### Verse 8.23

They deride sentient beings who have no possessions  
And say bad things about those who do;  
How will they who are by nature difficult to get along with  
Produce happiness?

In this context, the childish refer to ordinary worldly beings that are so diverse as everyone has his or her own preferences, inclinations and wishes. Even the fully enlightened one who is free of all faults and possesses all qualities cannot please everyone. If the fully enlightened Buddha cannot please all sentient beings, then needless to say, we, inferior ordinary beings who do not even know the thoughts and wishes of sentient beings, will not be able to make everyone happy.

Forget about knowing the thoughts of sentient beings. We don't even know the thoughts of the people that we have associated closely with for a long time. We don't know what our close friends and loved ones are really thinking. Since we don't even know that, then there is no way for us to know the wishes of all sentient beings. Since we don't know the wishes of all sentient beings, then there is no way we can make everyone happy.

The conclusion is that if we are motivated by the eight worldly concerns, then there is no need to associate with people. Rather in this context, we should rely on physical isolation.

Overwhelmed by the eight worldly concerns, when we see people who are poor and doing badly, we say that they were misers in the past. They didn't practise and therefore have bad karma. When we see rich people, we cannot bear it. Out of jealousy, we say that these rich people are up to no good and we wonder where all their money came from. So we say bad things about those people who have money and also about those people who do not have money! This is what happens when people with the eight worldly concerns associate with one another. There is no way we can ever really be happy inside when we have to mix and interact closely with such people.

#### Verse 8.24

It has been said by the tathagatas,  
"Never befriend the childish,"

Because without their welfare,  
These childish ones will not be happy.

*Khen Rinpoche: What are they saying in this verse? What is this verse talking about?*

People who have the strong eight worldly dharmas, worldly or childish people and those who focus on their own happiness alone without bothering about what happens to others—these people are extremely difficult to get along with and there is no way we can make them happy.

### **THE BENEFITS OF RELYING ON ISOLATION**

Next is an explanation of the benefits of relying on solitude in physical isolation. Here it talks about the kind of company that we will keep, the difference that the place makes and the kind of livelihood that we will adopt and so forth. Up to this point, we have been discussing why we should not associate with worldly or childish people. Therefore, we should actually act on the advice by going into isolation and living in solitude.

#### *Companions*

Verse 8.25  
When shall I come to dwell with these delights  
Of deer, birds, and trees in the forests  
That say nothing unpleasant  
When associated with?

This is the description of the kind of company that we will keep when we live in physical isolation. Here we assume that these deer, singing birds, beautiful trees and flowers are wildlife. The point is that these things will not talk to us. So no matter how much time we spend in their presence, they will never say unpleasant things to us or criticize us. They will not give us any problems. Therefore, their company is said to be delightful.

If we rely on physical isolation, the company that we have are the beautiful trees, flowers, wildlife and birds. No matter how long we live among them, they will never cause us any problems. Naturally our mind will be happy, as there is nothing to be unhappy about. This is what we can look forward to in physical isolation. If we envisage this kind of company and we yearn for it, we should make prayers that this may come to pass one day.

This is what we can experience in terms of the company we will keep. Since they will not talk to us and will not disturb us, our non-virtues will naturally decrease and our virtues will naturally increase. This is an example of the advantage of living in isolation. With this in mind, we then aspire to be able to live this kind of life and we make prayers towards this end.

We can make a comparison. We all have the experience of mixing with worldly people in life. Sooner or later, whomever we are associating with will cause us problems. They will cause us to get attached to them, get upset with them or to be distracted by them.

When we live another way of life by living in physical isolation, we do not have to mix

around with such people. We can see the difference it makes to the mind. One brings about attachment, anger and desire. The other lessens all these thoughts.

By seeing the advantages of living in physical isolation, one should aspire to it. It is helpful to develop the wish, “One day, may I also be able to live in isolation,” to inspire ourselves.

### *Place*

Next is the discussion of the environment, the actual place that we live in while in isolation.

#### Verse 8.26

I shall dwell in caves,  
In empty shrines or at the feet of trees.  
When shall I not look back  
And be without attachment?

#### Verse 8.27

When shall I come to dwell  
In places not held to as “mine,”  
Which are by nature spacious  
And where I may behave freely without attachment?

“When shall I not look back/ And be without attachment?” When can we give up this ordinary life under the influence of desire and attachment? That depends on physical isolation such as by living in mountain hermitages. Here, the text says, “I shall dwell in caves/ In empty shrines or at the feet of trees.”

Won't it be nice if we can live in “places not held to as ‘mine’” without the notion of ownership “which are by nature spacious.” So make a prayer of aspiration to be able to live like that.

In reality, just imagine that one can actually come to live in a place that has clean air, a lovely view, beautiful trees and flowing rivers or streams. Nobody is going to say, “Where are you going?” Nobody is going to cause any obstructions. If we can live in such a place, although we did not pay for it, if we were to start regarding it as “mine,” that will defeat the purpose. But since we didn't buy or pay for it, maybe it is less likely that we will think of the place as “mine.”

If we are really serious about our practice and are committed to actualizing calm abiding, this is the kind of environment that we need to live in. Thus there is a need to make aspirational prayers to have such conditions. It all looks very nice but doing it is a different matter. The important thing here is that if we think about it often, then slowly over time, we will develop the desire to live in this way. Only then will we act on it.

Are such places accessible or available? Yes, there are many places like this. But the question is whether we want to go there or not. The places are there but we don't want to go. Do we need to buy them? We don't have to own them, as they are accessible and free. But we don't want to go. The question that we should ask ourselves is this, “Why

are we still stuck here?"

*Khen Rinpoche: Why are we still stuck here? That is the question. Someone mentioned to me before that he wanted to make money first. I asked, "Why?" He said that if he has a lot of money, then he will go for retreat. His goal is to make money first and then go for retreat. So I told him, "If you want to make money first, you will never go on retreat."*

*It is true. When you make money, it is almost impossible to go on retreat. Many people have the idea, "I want to make money. I want to save money. When I have enough money, then I can go on retreat." But when you have the money, you never make it. Anyway, he was an old member and he has passed away now. But this is what he told me last time.*

*A point on livelihood*

Next is the discussion of how we are to sustain ourselves in isolation, i.e., our manner of livelihood.

Verse 8.28

When shall I come to live without fear  
Having slight things such as a begging bowl,  
Wearing clothes not wanted by all  
And not even hiding this body?

In physical isolation, even one's begging bowl should not be an expensive one but just a simple ordinary bowl such as one made of clay.

"Wearing clothes not wanted by all" means not wearing expensive clothes during a retreat but wearing something simple such as tattered clothes not wanted by others or clothes that are made from patching different used garments together.

Not only should we use things that are not expensive, but even the number of belongings we have should be kept to a minimum. If we were to live such a simple life, there is really no need to fear thieves or robbers because there is nothing for them to steal from us. If the begging bowl is a cheap one and one is wearing dirty, old and tattered clothes, they wouldn't be interested at all. In that sense, we have no worries.

If one lives a simple and contented life in isolation where one has just a few things to sustain life, enough to eat and with few possessions, then there is no reason to be fearful. If one owns just a few simple things, one is ready to go anywhere. There is no plan or worries when one walks alone. As one has nothing, nobody is interested to rob or to steal from one, as they cannot gain anything.

Look at the beggars. They move around without any fear. In the first place, they have nothing whereas rich people have fears and worries because wherever they go, they carry a lot of things with them. When they are travelling alone, they are worried of losing things or being robbed.

*Impermanent nature of the body*

Verse 8.29

Having gone to the charnel grounds,



When shall I deduce  
That this body of mine and the skeletons of others  
Bear the property of disintegration?

Verse 8.30

This very body of mine will also become so.  
Because of its odor, not even the foxes  
Will come close to this body of mine;  
There will come a time when such will happen.

This is a reflection on the impermanent nature of our body. If we go to the cemetery and look at the bodies that are laid out there, they are the remains of the dead. Actually there is no difference between what we see in the cemetery and our own body. The only difference is that we haven't died yet. That is the only difference.

What we see in the coffin in the cemetery is what our body will become in the future. The same thing will happen. Not only will it happen but definitely it will happen. If we can understand the impermanent nature of our body, it will be useful for reducing whatever clinging or attachment we have for our body.

Verse 8.29 is a reflection on the impermanent nature of our body.

Verse 8.30 is a reflection on the unclean nature of our body, how by nature it is filthy.

When we die, we become a corpse. If nothing is done with our corpse and it is just left there, the body will start to rot. When the body rots, it starts to smell and it will become infested with maggots. There will come a time when it becomes so disgusting and smelly that even those wild animals that usually feed on flesh will not be interested in our body. That is the nature of our body.

The only reason that our body has not started to rot and smell in this way is because our consciousness or mind still inhabits the body. Come the day when our consciousness leaves the body, then the body we leave behind will rot and smell in the way that we just described.

Because of the impermanent and the unclean nature of the body, therefore it is not appropriate to be attached to or to cling to the body.

*Attachment to those dear to you is unreasonable*

Next is the discussion on why it is inappropriate to cling on to our loved ones or the objects of attachment, our friends.

Verse 8.31

Although this body arose as a unit,  
The bones and flesh with which it was born  
Will break up and separate.  
What need is there to mention other friends?

We were conceived in our mother's womb and gradually there was flesh, bones and so

forth. So we came into this life with this body. This body has accompanied us from the beginning of this life. But there will come a time when we have to part from this physical body. If at the time of death, we have to part from this body of flesh and bones, the very thing that we were born with in this life, then needless to say, we will also have to part from our friends, relatives, loved ones and this whole world when we die. This is what this verse is saying.

The conclusion is that there is really no need to be attached to and cling on to friends, relatives and loved ones.

All the points that we have discussed so far are observations of reality. They are not made up. But although this is reality, we need to be aware of this reality by opening our eyes to it and thinking about it more deeply.

Verse 8.32

At birth I was born alone,  
And at death too I shall die alone;  
If the suffering doom cannot be taken on by others,  
Of what use are hindering friends?

When we are born into any life, we are always born alone. When we die, we have to make that journey alone too. When we are born, there is the suffering of birth. That suffering is experienced by us along. Nobody can experience it for us. When we die, there is also some kind of suffering. That suffering too is experienced by us alone. On top of that, we can add the suffering that we have to experience because of having engaged in negative karma and non-virtue for the sake of our friends and loved ones, motivated by our attachment to them.

We created negative karma for our friends, relatives and loved ones motivated by our attachment. But when the time comes to foot the bill, the bill comes to us alone. Our friends or loved ones will not experience the suffering for us. We alone have to experience the suffering that is the result of the negative actions we did for their sake. If that is the case, then what is the use of these friends, relatives and loved ones? By reflecting on these points, we then try to abandon our attachment for friends, relatives and loved ones.

Verse 8.33

In the same way as those who have embarked on the road  
Own a place of stay,  
Likewise those who have embarked on the path of existence  
Own an abode of birth.

In our travels, when night falls, we have to find a place such as a hotel or guesthouse to rest for the night. The next morning, when the sun rises, we have to leave the hotel or guesthouse and continue with our journey. Likewise, our life is like that. The body we have is like a hotel. Due to our karma and afflictions, we have obtained this particular rebirth and have this kind of body. When the time comes to move on to the next life, this body is left behind.

At the hotel, we may meet with many people but when the morning comes, everybody goes their own way. Likewise, the people who end up being our friends, loved ones or relatives in this life are like the travellers we meet on the road for a short period of time. When we go on to our next life, we are not going to bring our parents or spouses along. We are not going to die together, go on to the next life together and be together all the way to enlightenment.

Therefore, the wise ones see how it is completely appropriate to rely on the solitude of physical isolation.

#### *Non-distraction*

Verse 8.34

Until the time comes for it  
To be supported by four pall-bearers, from that,  
While the world is completely stricken,  
Till then I shall retire to the forest.

Once we are born, definitely we have to die. What happens when we die? Our relatives and friends will huddle around and wail and cry. If that is the case, isn't it better to go to the forest and live alone in solitude?

Verse 8.35

Befriending no one and begrudging no one,  
This body will dwell alone in solitude.  
If I am already counted as dead even before,  
Even when I die there will be no mourners.

There is a quotation from the great yogi Milarepa's *Collection of Songs*:

By staying in this mountain hermitage, even if I, called Milarepa, fall ill,  
No one will ask after my welfare, "How are you?"  
If I die in this mountain hermitage, there will be no one to cry and wail for me.  
If I, Milarepa, die in this mountain hermitage, the wishes of the yogi will be fulfilled.

Jetsun Milarepa said that if we can live in isolation, we can die without any disturbance, without any people crying and without any worries. That will be good.

We have seen for ourselves how people die. They are so worried because they are not able to let go and are so attached to their money, friends, relatives and so forth. When they are dying, due to attachment, people around them will be crying. The mind of the dying person will be disturbed and that doesn't make for a good death.

The next verse says that when we live in physical isolation, our practice of virtue will not decline. Rather it will only increase. We will continue with that verse when we come back for class.

What we have discussed so far here in this Chapter Eight may not be intellectually challenging. What the text says is quite obvious and very easy to understand. It is not

difficult to understand at all and it is not difficult to think about or reflect on these points. But we have to reflect on these points and see the truth of them for ourselves.

We should think about them deeply. We all have such life experiences. What are the problems we create for ourselves when we live a busy life? What are the problems we all experience day-to-day when we are attached to objects or loved ones?

Won't it be wonderful if we can generate the wish to live in isolation? Even if we can't rely on physical isolation yet, all these points here are helpful in enabling us to live a simpler life.

When we live a simpler life with contentment, even though we may not be in physical isolation, at least our life will become more peaceful and happier. Of course, we have to meditate and see for ourselves whether these points help to subdue our attachment, anger, ego and jealousy.

As I have mentioned before in one of the earlier classes, the recognition of impermanence is very important in our daily life.

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