

**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 5****22 March 2016**


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Chapter 8, Verses 8.35–8.37: The benefits of relying on isolation. Verse 8.35–8.37. Non-distractedness; The six recollections & the practice of refuge. Verses 8.38–8.64: Abandoning erroneous conceptions. Verse 8.38. Instructions on exerting effort in virtue; Verse 8.39. Reflecting on the disadvantages of desire; Verses 8.40–8.64: Reflecting on the unclean nature of the body and so forth. Verses 8.40–8.48: Reflecting on the disadvantages by considering what one finds in cemeteries; Verses 8.49–8.64: Reflecting on aspects of those who are still alive; Verses 8.49–8.57: Attachment is seen to be unreasonable once the lack of cleanliness becomes apparent; Verses 8.58–8.64: By ascertaining the characteristics of the sexual organs, attachment is seen to be unreasonable.

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In the earlier lessons, we had looked at the importance of abandoning a busy life. Next is an explanation of the benefits of relying on physical isolation or living in solitude.

**THE BENEFITS OF RELYING UPON ISOLATION***Non-distractedness*

## 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.

If we were to rely on physical isolation, we will physically distance ourselves from the objects of attachment and objects of aversion. As such, when we live in physical isolation, we would not have much contact with such objects and people, including our loved ones. As such, our loved ones would consider us to be dead. Then comes the day when we die, we will die alone and there will not be people crying and making noise around us.

## Verse 8.36

There will be no one around  
To harm me with their mourning,  
Thus there will be no one to distract me  
From my recollections of the Buddha and the like.

At the time of death, usually loved ones and relatives of the dying person are very sad. They will start to wail and cry, making a lot of noise which may disturb the dying person. So if we were to live alone and die alone, we will not be subject to such disturbance and harm.

Also, when we live alone and die alone, there will be no one to distract us from remembering the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha at the time of death. There will be no one to distract us from the practices that we are going to do. So it does make a difference when we are able to die alone in a peaceful way, without any disturbance from people around us. It will make a difference to the kind of rebirth we will get in our next life.

Living a busy modern life is already an obstacle to the practice of Dharma because when we live a busy life, it is really very difficult for us to do any real Dharma practice. If we die among many people, especially loved ones, relatives and so forth who will become sad and make a lot of noise around us, they will only harm us because they will disturb our practice and our state of mind.

On the other hand, if we were to live in physical isolation and at the time of death, there is no one around to disturb our mind, we will be able to focus on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and concentrate on whatever practice we are supposed to do at the time of death. In general, living in solitude helps a lot in our being able to do our practice well so needless to say, it will be helpful for us at the time of death.

As such, as much as possible, we should have few desires in our daily life and be easily contented. On top that, if we are able to abide in ethical discipline, this will make it easier for us to practise the Dharma. Especially it will help us to be able to have a good death by preparing ourselves properly at the time of death.

#### *The six recollections & the practice of refuge*

One often refers to the six recollections. These are:

1. recollecting the Buddha
2. recollecting the Dharma
3. recollecting the Sangha
4. recollecting generosity
5. recollecting ethical discipline
6. recollecting the deity (sometimes referred to as the recollection of the guru and the deity)

The recollection of ethical discipline means abandoning the class of discordant factors, i.e., abandoning engaging in those negative actions that we are not supposed to do.

The recollection of giving (or generosity) means bringing to mind the activities that we should engage in and then engaging in them.

But among the virtuous practices that are performed with the body, speech and mind, the practice that is done with the mind is the most important. With regard to the Three Jewels, recollecting the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha means to have a mind of clear faith towards the Three Jewels and also to engage in activities such as praising the Three Jewels. This recollection of the Three Jewels should not be done for just a short while, like a few days or only during some parts of the day. Literally, it means to bring to mind the Three Jewels all the time, i.e., giving them a prominent place in our mind. This is very important.

One of the precepts for taking refuge in the Three Jewels is to go for refuge to the Three Jewels three times in the day and three times in the night. This is a way to help us remember the Three Jewels and familiarize ourselves with going for refuge to them. This reinforces the habit so that one's mind is constantly influenced by the Three Jewels as they command a place of prominence in one's mind.

When we meet with difficulties in life, for example, when we are sick and especially at the time of death, because of our habituation of thinking about and recollecting the Three Jewels, we will not forget the Three Jewels. We will be able to remember the Three Jewels. So at the time of death, even when we are overwhelmed by pain and suffering, because of our habituation of recollecting the Three Jewels, that recollection will definitely reduce whatever suffering or worries we may have.

This practice of going for refuge to the Three Jewels is extremely important for all of us. This is something that we must pay attention to. We must be habituated to the idea of going for refuge. With this habituation, even at those times in our life when things get a bit rough, such as when we are sick and especially at the time of death, we will be able to recollect the Three Jewels. This is why there is the precept of going for refuge at least three times in the day and three times at night. The purpose is to build up this habit.

When we go for refuge, it should not be a mere verbal exercise. It should be performed from the very core of our being and from the depths of our heart on the basis of knowing what our objects of refuge are and having very strong devotion towards them. Refuge is surrendering and entrusting ourselves completely to the Three Jewels. If we are able to do that, then even at the time of death, likewise we can surrender and entrust ourselves completely to the Three Jewels. If we are able to die like that, definitely we will get a good rebirth.

As we already know, one of the benefits of going for refuge to the Three Jewels as stated in the lam-rim is that we will not fall to the lower realms. However, we should analyse this point in detail. I guess what it means is that if our refuge comes from the depths of our heart and is not merely lip service, if we can entrust ourselves completely to the Three Jewels especially at the time of death and we are able to die with that kind of faith, then I think we will experience that benefit. This means that we will not go to the lower realms, *provided* we have real devotion towards and entrust ourselves completely to the Three Jewels.

This is why the verse is saying that if we are able to live in solitude and to die in solitude without anybody crying and making noise around us, thus disturbing our mind, when we are able to die in this peaceful environment, thinking of the Three Jewels while we die, then that would be wonderful.

Verse 8.37

Therefore I shall dwell alone,  
Happy and contented due to insignificant difficulties,  
In very delightful forests,  
Pacifying all distractions.

If we are able to live in solitude in a beautiful place, then the mind becomes relaxed and we will feel happy. In the presentation of calm abiding, there are many descriptions of the kind of environment we should be living in in order to develop calm abiding.

- It is important to live in solitude in a pleasant place but we should be able to find food and water easily there.
- It should be a place where the soil and the environment do not promote sickness.
- When we live in isolation, we may still need to depend on people. Then we need to be in the company of people who share the same ideals and views and therefore, will be helpful to us.
- There shouldn't be people moving in and out of the area, i.e., it shouldn't be a busy or noisy place.
- Preferably it should be a place where we do not hear any sounds at all, whether it be from people or the sounds of nature, such as flowing water or the wind.
- It should also be a place where just by living there, naturally our mind becomes pacified, subdued and calm over time due to the energy of the place. Then naturally it would be easier to apply our body, speech and mind to the practice of virtue.

We should find a place with all these characteristics.

The verses we have been discussing so far are about the discordant factors and the obstacles to developing calm abiding. One obstacle is living a busy life. There was much discussion about this. We have now finished that section.

### **ABANDONING ERRONEOUS CONCEPTIONS**

Next is abandoning discursive thoughts or thoughts that are not beneficial to the development of calm abiding. Such thoughts are the discordant factors of calm abiding and are obstacles for developing calm abiding. As such, we have to abandon these thoughts. Under this section, first, there is an instruction for us to engage and strive in virtue.

*Instructions on exerting effort in virtue*

Verse 8.38

Having given up all other thoughts,  
With only one thought in me,  
I shall strive in order to set my mind in equipoise  
And in order to subdue it.

“Having given up all other thoughts”: The “thoughts” here refer to those thoughts pertaining to our involvement in and attachment to the happiness of this life, such as taking care of loved ones and relatives and subduing or defeating our enemies. After abandoning all these thoughts, then we should have only one thought in our mind, i.e., to engage in practice and to subdue one's own mind, “I shall strive in order to set my mind in equipoise/ And in order to subdue it.” This refers to developing calm abiding.

How do we subdue the mind? We subdue our mind with special insight. We generate the thought to engage in the practice of developing calm abiding and special insight. What the verse is saying is that we should strive to subdue the afflictions through the attainment of the special insight that sees the ultimate nature of all phenomena. This

special insight can only be developed on the basis of having calm abiding.

*Reflecting on the disadvantages of desire*

Verse 8.39

Both in this world and the next  
Desires give rise to great misfortune,  
Establishing in this one killing, bondage, and flaying,  
And hells and the like in the next.

Besides living a busy life, the other discordant factor of calm abiding is having erroneous thoughts, i.e., those thoughts that are harmful and not beneficial. In general, this text, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, is an antidote to the erroneous thoughts.

- Chapter Six talks about the antidote to the erroneous thought of hatred and anger.
- In Chapter Eight, the erroneous thought that is discussed here is that of attachment and desire.
- Chapter Nine, the chapter on wisdom talks about the antidote to the erroneous thought of bewilderment or the ignorance holding on to a truly existent person or phenomenon.

Next is the discussion about the faults or disadvantages of attachment and desire. We are either attached to sentient beings or to objects like material gain, praise, reputation and so forth. Whether it is following our attachment to material gain, reputation and power or running after men or women, because of such attachment and desire, all kinds of problems happen in life. People end up killing each other, fighting or physically harming others. This is just talking about this life. What follows in the next life is rebirth in the lower realms where one will be reborn in the hells, as a hungry ghost or as an animal. The great Kadampa masters said that when we accumulate karma motivated by desire and attachment, we engage in those actions happily, enthusiastically and voluntarily. But at the time of experiencing the results of that karma that we have accumulated, we experience them with tears.

*Reflecting on the unclean nature of the body and so forth*

~ *Reflecting on the disadvantages by considering what one finds in cemeteries*

Verse 8.40

For their sake many requests  
Are first made through male and female messengers.  
Negativities and notoriety too  
Are not shunned for their sake.

Verse 8.41

You even engage in fearful deeds for them  
And will even exhaust your wealth.  
You greatly enjoy  
Completely embracing them.

Verse 8.42

If they are nothing other than skeletons,  
Rather than being so desirous and completely obsessed

Towards that which neither is under your control nor belongs to you,  
Why do you not go to the state beyond sorrow?

When motivated by desire for a person, be it a man or a woman, we engage in all kinds of actions voluntarily, enthusiastically and happily to get the person we desire. When it is time to experience the results of those actions, we will suffer.

An antidote to attachment for a person, be it a man or woman, is to see that object of attachment as a skeleton. This is the truth because inside our body, we are basically just a skeleton. It is said that there are three hundred and sixty joints in the body, i.e., there are many bones held together in three hundred and sixty places. Our skeletal frame is held together in that way. There is no real body right there from its own side. As such, what is there for us to hold on to?

The last two verses are asking why we are so engrossed and completely caught up with a skeleton? Why do we not free ourselves from that sorrow?

Why is the discussion on abandoning attachment here? This is because if one is unable to manage one's desire and attachment effectively, one would not be able to live in proper ethical discipline. One must be able to deal with one's attachment to a reasonable degree. Otherwise, it will be quite difficult to have pure ethical discipline.

If one has pure ethical discipline, one will be able to settle the mind down fairly easily when one is trying to achieve calm abiding. When one has pure ethical discipline, one's mind is settled because one does not have the distractions that are fuelled by attachment. This makes it easier to engage in calm abiding.

Without abandoning at least one's gross attachment and desire for external objects and sentient beings, it is not really possible to achieve calm abiding. One has to have pure ethical discipline, without which one would not be able to develop calm abiding. And without calm abiding, one would not be able to develop special insight. Without special insight, one would not be able to abandon the afflictions belonging to the level of the peak of cyclic existence of the formless realm.

The next verses are saying that the person that we are attached to is someone that will be abandoned in the cemetery one day.

Verse 8.43

In the first place, making effort, you lifted [her face] and drew it [towards you].  
However she bashfully looked down.  
Previously whether anyone looked or not,  
Her face was covered with a veil.

Verse 8.44

But now why do you run away  
Upon directly beholding  
This face of afflictions  
As it is being removed by the vultures?

There exists in some cultures the tradition of unveiling the face of the bride. The bride's face is covered up and the groom can't wait for the moment he can lift up the veil to see the face of his bride. There is this very strong attachment on the part of the groom.

These verses are then asking that if that is case at the time of marriage, why is it not so at the time of death? The action of looking at the face is the same, whether it is at the time of marriage or at the time of death. But when the wife is dead, why would the husband run away the moment he sees her face. This question is asked, "Why do you run away?"

What we have to figure out in our mind is why we are not attached to the person when the person is dead? The act of looking at the face is the same but why is it that when one looks at the object of attachment at the time of death, one is repulsed instead of being attached?

Verse 8.45

You completely guarded it  
Even when others cast their eyes upon it.  
Why, miser, do you not guard it  
While they are devouring it?

When somebody looks at our object of attachment, we are not happy. It says here, "You completely guarded it/ Even when others cast their eyes upon it." But why do we not protect the same body when the person is dead? When the dead body is left in the cemetery and the vultures are devouring it, why are we not protecting the body then?

Verse 8.46

If, having seen this heap of flesh,  
The vultures and others eat it,  
Why do you make offerings of flower garlands, sandalwood, and ornaments  
To the food of others?

Verse 8.47

If you are frightened by the skeletons you see  
Even though they do not move,  
Why are you not frightened by that similar to a zombie  
Which is moved around by a few [intentions]?

Some people are frightened when they see a corpse or skeleton. Actually, there is nothing much to worry about because the corpse or the skeleton can't move and it can't talk. It will never harm us. Yet we are frightened of corpses and skeletons but we are not frightened of living beings, especially our objects of attachment.

When we look inside our objects of attachment, they are just skeletons too. Our objects of attachment just happen to be moving around and talking because they still have a mind. Their lives are driven by the three poisons, anger, attachment and ignorance. Yet we are not afraid. Not only are we not afraid. Rather we are attached to them.

## Verse 8.48

You are attached to it even when it is covered.  
 Why do you not desire it when it is uncovered?  
 If you have no need for it,  
 Why do you embrace it when it is covered?

This is something we have to think about for ourselves. These are just some points to help us to reduce our attachment and desire. They relate to seeing the person who is our object of attachment as being similar to a corpse.

What follows next is then trying to deal with our objects of attachment when they are still alive.

*~ Reflecting on aspects of those who are still alive*

*~~Attachment is seen to be unreasonable once the lack of cleanliness becomes apparent*

## Verse 8.49

If both excrement and saliva  
 Arise solely from food,  
 Why do you dislike excrement  
 And find joy in saliva?

## Verse 8.50

Cotton too is soft to the touch,  
 But while you find no delight in a pillow,  
 You think, "It does not smell,"  
 Lustful One, you are confused as to what is unclean!

## Verse 8.51

Thinking, "I cannot copulate with this cotton,"  
 Although it soft to the touch,  
 Confused, negative, and lustful people  
 Become angry towards it.

Next is stopping the wrong conception that the object of attachment is pure and clean.

## Verse 8.52

If you have no attachment to the unclean,  
 Then why do you copulate with another  
 Which is a cage of bone tied together with muscles,  
 Plastered over with the mud of flesh?

## Verse 8.53

You yourself have many unclean things  
 That you constantly have to utilize;  
 Out of obsession for the unclean  
 Also in other bags of filth, [why do] you desire it?

Next is the body and mind, individually, are not objects of attachment.



Verse 8.54

“I delight in this flesh.”

If this is what you wish to touch and behold,  
Why do you not desire flesh in its natural state  
Devoid of mind?

Verse 8.55

Any mind that you may desire  
Cannot be touched or beheld,  
And whatever you are able to [touch] will not be consciousness;  
What is the use of embracing the meaningless?

Verse 8.56

It is not so strange that you do not realize  
The bodies of others to be of an unclean nature,  
But it is indeed strange that you do not realize  
You yourself to be just unclean.

Verse 8.57

Having forsaken the young lotus flower  
Unfolded by beams of sunlight free from cloud,  
Why, with a mind adhering to the unclean,  
Do you take joy in a cage of filth?

Next is contemplating how our object of attachment, i.e., the body of another person, is actually the source of all impurities.

*~~By ascertaining the characteristics of the sexual organs, attachment is seen to be unreasonable*

Verse 8.58

Since you do not desire to touch  
A place that is sullied by filth,  
Then why do you desire to touch the body  
From which that arose?

Let's say there is a piece of clothing that is dirtied by the person who is our object of attachment. Say, that person has diarrhoea. We will consider that piece of clothing to be dirty. The point here is that we have to realize that our object of attachment, the physical body of another person, is impure by nature because it is the source of filth.

Verse 8.59

If you are not attached to what is unclean,  
Why do you copulate with others  
Which arise from the field of the unclean  
And are produced by its seeds?

- Verse 8.58 is the contemplation of impurity because our object of attachment is the source of the impurity.

- Verse 8.59 is the contemplation of impurity because our object of attachment is the result of impurity.

In verse 8.58, we saw how the object of attachment, the body of another person, is a source of impurity.

Somebody may not agree and object to this, “It is not dirty. How can that be?” In that case, we can reflect on Verse 8.59 on how our object of attachment, the body of another person, is a result of impurity.

If we look at the body of the person that we are attached to, it came about as a result of impure causes. In the first place, how did that body arise? It arose in the womb of that person’s mother. The womb is impure as it is a filthy, unclean place. If we look at the substantial causes of that body, it came from the egg and sperm of that person’s parents. Since the source or causes of the physical body of the person that we are attached to are impure, the body itself that is the result of such impure causes must be impure, filthy and unclean. By recognizing this fact, we seek to reduce our attachment.

Next is showing the impurity of the body with an example.

Verse 8.60

You have no desire for a small dirty maggot  
Which has come from filth.

[Why] do you desire the body which is in the nature of many impurities,  
And is also produced from filth?

Verse 8.61

Not only do you not disparage  
The uncleanliness of you yourself,  
But out of obsession for unclean bags of filth,  
You desire others as well.

Maggots arise from dirty places such as corpses. We don’t like maggots. If that is the case, Shantideva is asking us, “Why do you desire the body which is in the nature of many impurities?”

We can see maggots in the septic tank. Maggots grow out of faeces. Why are we not attracted to these maggots? This is because we know maggots are dirty as they come from faeces. This is why we are not attached to them.

Let’s say a housefly or a bug lands on our plate of food. Immediately, we will think, “My food is dirty.” Why? Because something dirty has contaminated it. So this argument and reasoning should also be applied to our object of attachment, the physical body of another person.

The body that we are so desirous of first arose in the womb of its mother, which is a dirty, filthy and unclean place. What is the substantial cause of that physical body? It is the egg and sperm of its parents which are also filthy, dirty and impure. If the cause is

impure and dirty, then the result, the body of our object of attachment, is also impure and dirty. If that is the case, then why are we so attached to something that is impure?

Verse 8.62

Even attractive things such as camphor,  
Cooked rice, and vegetables  
Make the ground dirty and filthy  
Should they be spat out after being put into the mouth

No matter how delicious the food may be—it can be the best food in the world—but once it is put into the mouth and taken out again, nobody will think that it is clean.

Before the food is put into somebody's mouth, on its own, it is not dirty. But if the food is put into somebody's mouth and spat out, everybody who looks at it will think that it is dirty. What made it dirty? It is that person's mouth. So if the cause for the food becoming dirty is the mouth that is part of the body of that person, why are we still attached to that person that is by nature dirty?

Verse 8.63

Although such uncleanliness is obvious,  
If I have doubt, then I should look at the unclean bodies  
That have been disposed of  
At the charnel grounds.

Verse 8.64

Although they understand that they will generate great fear  
Of that from which the skin is rent open,  
In any case they will again generate joy  
Towards those themselves.

In spite of this discussion on the various antidotes to counteract attachment, still these points may not get through to our mind. If they don't work, they will not affect our mind.

The verse says, "If I have doubt, then I should look at the unclean bodies/ That have been disposed of/ At the charnel grounds." The instruction then is to go to a cemetery or a place where corpses are stored. We should see what happens to those corpses from day one and observe how they rot progressively over time.

If one can dissect a body and look at its insides, one will see the flesh, blood, veins and bones. I think nobody will be attached to what he sees. Rather, he may be disgusted and may even throw up.

So just think of the body of the person that we are attached to as being the source of impurity and also think of that body as being the result of impurity. It is through thinking about this that will help us to reduce our attachment and desire for the body of another person.

- The bigger picture is that if one is not able to deal effectively with such attachment and desire, there is no way to have pure ethical discipline.

- If one does not have ethical discipline, there is no hope of pacifying the distractions. Then there is no hope of actualizing calm abiding.
- If one does not have calm abiding, there is no way one is going to attain special insight.
- If we do not have this special wisdom, there is no way we can free ourselves from suffering once and for all.
- Then there is no hope of achieving liberation.

Therefore, it is important to deal with this kind of desire and attachment.

So far we have been primarily looking at the faults and the disadvantages of being attached to sentient beings.

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