

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 6**29 March 2016**

Review. Four erroneous conceptions. Chapter 8, Verses 8.65–8.70: Reflecting on aspects of those who are still alive (cont'd)—Thus, arrest this grasping at the body and things as being clean. Verses 8.71–8.79: Reflecting on how desire produces all sorts of unwanted consequences.

REVIEW

In general, there are many erroneous conceptions. In the context of Chapter Eight here, the erroneous conception to be abandoned is desire and attachment. In this discussion, first, there is the description of the faults of desire and attachment.

If we were to summarize the faults of following desire and attachment, when we follow desire and attachment in this life, we will suffer endlessly and face many problems. But this is not the end because by following attachment and desire, we accumulate non-virtue and negative karma, which would bring about more suffering in future lives such as suffering as a hell being, a preta or an animal. These sufferings are not experienced just once. We create the karma to experience rebirths in the lower realms many, many times in future lives. This is something we have to understand.

We can be attached to many things. One of the basis for our attachment is the physical body, be it our own body or the body of someone else. In this text, there is a discussion on what we can do to counteract this attachment for our body and the body of others.

One way to counteract the attachment to our body or the body of others is to bring to mind that the basic nature of our body is no different from that of a corpse. In fact, there will come a day when our body will definitely become a corpse. Likewise, the bodies of others that we are attached to will also become corpses. By bringing to mind this fact, we can counteract our attachment.

Besides thinking about how our bodies and the bodies of others will become corpses, another approach is to employ common sense and reasoning in order to counteract our attachment. One way is to understand how the body, whether our own or those of others, is the origin of filth and impure substances. There is a list of 36 impure and dirty substances that can be found in the body. The body has many orifices—the nose, the mouth, the anus and so forth—and whatever comes out from these orifices is dirty, filthy, impure and unclean. Everybody knows that. Where do these dirty substances come from? They come from the body. If those substances are dirty and impure, then the very source or origin of those substances, which is the body, also has to be impure. This is common sense. Therefore, by thinking about this, we will be able to see the reasons why the body is dirty. We understand that the body is dirty and impure because the body itself is a source of impurities.

Not only that. If we can see that the body itself arose from impure substances, which we have no attachment to, then we would also be able to counteract any attachment that we have for the body that is the result of these impure substance.

What is the main cause of the body? The substantial cause is the egg and sperm of our parents. We are not attached to these substances. We don't think of the egg and sperm as objects of attachment or substances that are clean or pure. Rather we think of them as impure, dirty and filthy. So if the cause is dirty and impure, then the result, i.e., the body, will also have the same nature.

There was also a discussion of how we have no attachment for the maggots that live in the septic tank or the maggots that grow in corpses or faeces. This is highlighting the impurity of the body through an analogy. If you understand the analogy and apply it, you should understand the meaning behind the analogy, i.e., that the body is impure.

So the way to meditate to counteract our attachment to our bodies and the bodies of others is by thinking about these points:

- what the body really is and how it is no different from a corpse
- how the body is a source of impurities
- how the body is a result of impurities

We can use these various examples and reasons in our meditation to counteract our attachment.

If for whatever reason, these points do not move your heart and you are still not convinced, then the text says that maybe you should go to the cemetery and look at a corpse for yourself, to directly observe the dead body of a person who has just passed away and look at the dead body again after a few days. You will observe how the body changes and rots.

When you directly observe this, it will remind you that there is no difference between a corpse and your own body, and that there is also no difference between a corpse and the body of the person that you are attached to. The only difference is a matter of time. There will definitely come a time when your body will look like the corpse that you are staring at.

You should also bring to mind that the corpse that you are looking at was not any different from when that person was alive. It was moving around, talking, feeling hot and cold. When you feel hot, you don't like it and when it is too cold, you can't tolerate that either. The corpse that you are staring at now was exactly the same when it was alive. The only difference now is that the person died and became a corpse. Your body and the body of the person you desire have the same nature. They will become corpses one day.

If we meditate on all these different methods—by using our imagination, common sense and applying reasoning together with the direct experience of seeing a corpse when someone dies—definitely we can deal with our attachment, whether it is for our body or the body of somebody else.

This is a summary of what we have discussed in the previous lesson. If we think about,

analyse and meditate on all the verses in the text that are related to this discussion, I guess this is the conclusion. By meditating on the impure and impermanent nature of the body, we come to develop disenchantment. The point is to counteract attachment for the body.

Student: I have some trouble with this concept. First, it is quite difficult for me to understand why we have to see the body as dirty and filthy. To me, what is dirty and filthy is the thought and idea in my own mind with regard to the body of others or myself. It is not necessarily coming from the side of the body or the object itself.

So I am wondering whether we are thinking about the object itself or are we talking about the thoughts I have about the body of myself, of someone else or even the bodhisattva. This is something that I have difficulty understanding.

I was also thinking about the teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche when he mentioned about the reaction of Khandro-la with regard to (the faeces of) His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Now we learn that everything that comes out from the body is dirty and filthy. To me, it is difficult to reconcile the two.

Ven. Gyurme: You are saying that the thought is dirty but the body is not dirty?

Student: Yes.

Ven. Gyurme: So it is not the fault of our body. It is the fault of our attachment. You are saying something like that.

Student: Yes, exactly. I don't think the object itself is dirty but the thought of being attached to the body is dirty or is wrong. It is not virtue.

Answer: The whole purpose of this meditation exercise that employs common sense, reasoning and direct observation is to counteract the attachment that we have for our own bodies or for the bodies of others.

If we don't have such attachment, it is a completely different matter. Then there is no need for this exercise. But if we have attachment for our own bodies or the bodies of others, we need to do something to reverse and counteract that attachment. If we think we need to counteract the attachment to our body or the bodies of others, what can be done? So this whole exercise is about counteracting that kind of attachment.

FOUR ERRONEOUS CONCEPTIONS

We have four major erroneous conceptions or mistakes of the mind.

1. First, with regard to the body, in reality, the body is impermanent. But there is an erroneous conception lying very deep within us that innately makes us believe that the body is permanent and never changing. This is how we operate day to day.
2. The second erroneous conception is apprehending something, for example, the body, which is by nature dirty to be clean and pure. So apprehending something impure to be pure is mistaken and is an erroneous conception.
3. The third erroneous conception is conceiving something that is in the nature of

suffering to be happiness and pleasurable.

4. The fourth erroneous conception is apprehending that which is selfless to have a self.

Just look at the evolution of our own desire and attachment. How do they arise? When we are attached to our own body or somebody else's body, in the view of that attachment, how does the body look to us? Naturally, we believe that the body is very clean and pure. We don't think that the body of the person we are attached to is dirty. Never! There is no way the mind will think like that. The mind will think that the body is very beautiful, very nice and very clean.

If we were to see our object of attachment, the body, as dirty right from the beginning, then there is no way for us to have attachment. There is no way for desire to arise.

Naturally, we don't see our body or the body of others as dirty. We see them as being very nice, beautiful, pure and clean when in reality, they are dirty and impure. The body being dirty and impure are not inherent characteristics of the body. They do not exist from their own side. Yes, the body is dirty and impure but that impurity of the body exists as something that is merely imputed by thought.

Let's think about this in detail. In general, does impurity exist? When we say something is dirty, filthy or impure, does it exist in that way? It exists. Likewise, when we talk about purity or cleanliness, does it exist? It exists.

Nobody will say, "There is no such thing as being pure and impure." Otherwise, one will probably have to end up saying, "There is no impurity and purity. There is no cleanliness and dirt. There is no samsara and nirvana." But there is samsara and there is nirvana. They exist as being merely imputed by thought and are dependently originated. They do not exist in and of themselves, from their own side, but they exist as merely labelled by thought. Likewise, there is impurity. There is purity. There is cleanliness. There is filth. There is dirt. We can't say that these things do not exist but although they exist, they are dependently originated. They don't exist in and of themselves.

Just because impurity and purity do not exist in and of themselves but as something that are imputed by thought, it does not mean that they do not exist. Conventionally speaking, they do exist.

When we eat food, we put it in our mouth and it goes into our stomach. After a day, it comes out as excrement or faeces. Nobody will say, "That excrement is so beautiful and so clean." We all agree that it is labelled as excrement. Conventionally speaking, it is known as excrement and is considered dirty. Everybody accepts that. The mind that accepts that it is excrement and sees it as excrement is a valid mind or valid cognizer. It is excrement because it is conventionally accepted by human beings as such and it is conventionally known in the world as excrement. However, it is very interesting that to a pig, the excrement is considered delicious and is something to be eaten.

How then do phenomena exist? Phenomena exist as mere appearances of the mind. They appear to the valid mind and are established as they appear. This is how things exist. Depending on the level of the mind of the perceiver, there is a certain appearance, and for that individual, it exists as such. This is a very difficult concept.

Think about this. It is common sense that we see excrement as disgusting. Nobody would want to eat it as it is dirty. But from the viewpoint of a pig, it is delicious food. Therefore, it is very important to know how the mind works and how things appear to our mind. The way a particular object appears to the mind can be very different even for just one person.

First, we all have different kinds of mind. There are some minds that have erroneous concepts and erroneous views. An object appears in a certain way to the erroneous concept. The very same object also appears in a completely different way to a valid mind. So one object can appear to the same person in different ways depending on how he is looking at the object.

When we have very strong attachment for a person or an object, how does that person or object appear to our mind? That same object may look different the moment our attachment subsides a little. When our attachment to the object or person has completely subsided for even a little while, the way the same object or person appears to our mind is very different. This is very interesting.

When we are angry at a situation or a person, that situation or person appears to our anger in its own way. We have our own feeling of that situation or that person. But when the anger subsides and is not manifest, the way the situation or the person appears to us becomes very different. At least, it is different from how they appeared to us when we were very upset.

So when we are very desirous of a person or object, or very angry at someone, our entire being is completely absorbed in that attachment or anger. There is no space in the mind whatsoever for other concepts or thoughts. It is completely sucked into our attachment or anger. In the view of that attachment or anger, the object looks very different. There is no space for any positive thoughts or correct thoughts.

Only after the attachment or the anger has subsided somewhat and with a correct state of mind, only then is there a possibility or space for a valid mind (or valid cognizer) to arise. Only then can we look at the situation or the person differently. As Shantideva said in one of the earlier chapters of the text, "Who created the burning iron ground? ... The Muni taught that all such things/ Are the negative mind."¹ Likewise, Lama Zopa Rinpoche said that these are the projections of our negative mind.

We go back to the body. As with every other thing that exists, the body by nature is dependently originated and merely labelled by thought. It does not exist in and of itself. Likewise, the impure and dirty body does not exist in and of itself.

If there is a dirty body that exists in and of itself, from its own side, without being **dependently** originated, it would follow that whoever looks at that body would see that body as dirty, filthy and impure. Although the impure body does not exist in and of itself, nevertheless, there is a need for us to oppose our wrong concept of holding on to the dirty body as a pure body. We need to do this.

¹ Verses 7 & 8, Chapter 5.

Since there is a need to counteract this wrong concept, then we have to apply the antidote by analysing the object of attachment—be it our own body or the body of somebody else—and observe that it is by nature impure. When we look at the cause of the impure body, the cause is impure. If the cause is impure, the result that is the body has to be impure. If we look at the body itself, it is the result of impure substances. Therefore, it has to be impure.

It is so natural for us to conceive of our body and the body of others to be pure and clean. This comes naturally and effortlessly to us. But this is a wrong concept and this erroneous concept brings about many problems. Therefore, there is a need to stop it. But stopping it and realizing that it is a wrong concept is not easy. This is why we have to apply many lines of reasoning, as this wrong concept is very stubborn. We have to attack this wrong concept from every angle.

This is why there is so much discussion here. We should do this and we should do that. We are not done yet. There is more to come. We may think, “OK. The body is dirty. But if I apply some perfume or I shower it, then the body will smell nice again. There is nothing wrong with that, so what is wrong with me liking it?” This is how stubborn our mind is. In order to counteract this, we have the next verses.

REFLECTING ON THE ASPECTS OF THOSE WHO ARE STILL ALIVE (cont’d)

Thus, arrest this grasping at the body and things as being clean

Verse 8.65

The scents which anointed the bodies
Are sandalwood and the like, not that of others.
Why are you attached to others
Because of scents of something else?

Verse 8.66 a, b

Since it has a naturally foul odor,
Isn't it good to be unattached to it?

We get attached to our body or the body of others when something that smells nice is applied on it. But the argument here is this: the smell that we like is not the smell of the body or the object of attachment. It is the smell of flowers or sandalwood. When someone applies perfume and we think that person smells very nice, “It smells so nice. Therefore, I like it.” But the argument is that it is the smell of the perfume that is nice. It is not the smell of the body.

Verse 8.66 c, d

Why do those who crave for the meaningless things of the world
Anoint it with pleasant scents?

Verse 8.67

However, if that pleasant scent is sandalwood,
How can it arise here in the body?
Why am I attached to others
Because of scents of something else?

The following section points out that if you leave the body alone and do not take care of it, it is actually a very scary thing.

Verse 8.68

If the naked body in its natural state
Is very frightening due to its long hair and nails,
And yellowish foul-smelling teeth
Being coated with the odor of dirt,

Verse 8.69 a, b

Why do I clean it with effort,
Like cleaning a weapon that will cause me harm?

If we leave the body on its own, without taking care of it and letting it be, such as not cutting our hair or nails, not brushing our teeth and not showering, after a few days, a few weeks or a few months, can you imagine what the body will look like? This is one of the ways to counteract attachment. After a few months, we would look very frightening.

We need to sit down and think about this. This is not difficult to think about. What will happen to the body is just as it is described. It is a fact. Think about the things that people do to their bodies. People spend hours in a hair salon to have their hair done in many different styles. They also go for manicures and pedicures to put designs on their nails. Out of attachment for the body, people spend so much time on things like that. They do not take just ten or fifteen minutes but may spend hours on such things.

You must not misunderstand this advice. The Buddha is not telling us to not brush our teeth, or cut our hair and nails. This is not the point. The point is not to spend so much time in our life doing meaningless things out of attachment. Of course, personal hygiene is important. It is important for our health. We have to take care of our health but not to the extent where desire and attachment are allowed to overwhelm us.

It is a completely different matter if you are a dedicated practitioner whose mind 24/7 is not interested in the affairs of this life. All you care for is only practice and you cannot find the time to cut your hair or cut your nails or even to shower. That is a completely different matter. But there are people who are actually not like that, yet they pretend to be this kind of practitioner, looking shabby and unkempt. Such behaviour is a waste of time and is meaningless. In general, personal hygiene and keeping ourselves healthy are important.

Next we contemplate that the body is an object of disenchantment or revulsion.

Verse 8.69 c, d

Hence this world is completely disturbed by insanity
Due to the effort of those who are confused about themselves.

Verse 8.70

When my mind is despondent in the charnel grounds
Through having beheld nothing but skeletons,
Will there be any joy in the charnel grounds

Which are cities filled with moving skeletons?

In Verse 8.69 c, d, “Those who are confused about themselves,” refers to beings like us who hold on to wrong concepts—by conceiving that which is selfless to have a self and following from that, that which is not mine to be mine, conceiving of the impure to be pure and the dirty to be clean.

Such wrong concepts give the opportunity for attachment for our bodies and the bodies of others to arise. This is why people are driven by attachment. There is nothing else in the mind. They don’t think of anything else but just completely follow their attachment. Because of that, they do many things such as having manicures and pedicures, cutting and washing their hair, buying and applying perfume and so forth. Their whole life is spent on putting so much attention to looking good and smelling good. There is no mental space for anything else.

The vast majority of people in the world are like that. They are completely overwhelmed by their attachment to many things including attachment to the body. They spend their whole life following that attachment.

This is why we, sentient beings, become the objects of compassion for the bodhisattvas. The bodhisattvas look at us and develop so much compassion for us because we have so many wrong concepts. Because of these wrong concepts, we suffer so much. While there is no “I”, we hold on to an “I”. We hold on to dirty, impure things to be clean and pure.

Just think of the person that we are attached to. We are attached to the body of that person but there will come a day when the person will die. The person’s body will be brought to the cemetery and left there. Obviously, we have attachment for the person’s body while the person is alive. But even when the person passes away, at their last breath, their body may look exactly the same to us and we still have attachment for it. Amazingly, we still have attachment even after the person has stopped breathing.

But when the body starts to rot after a day or two, there is no way we will have any attachment to it. Our attachment will stop completely after a while. There will come a time when whatever attachment we had for that person’s body ceases.

In reality, our bodies and the bodies of the people that we are attached to will be like that at the end of the day. They are nothing more than skeletons. Of course, we are not attached to skeletons. The only difference is that while our object of attachment is still alive, it is a moving skeleton because the mind or consciousness is still in the body. As mentioned in one of the earlier verses,² it says that it is actually a skeleton. It happens to be moving because the mind is still in it. It is also moving because of ignorance, anger and attachment. This is what we are attached to. Isn’t it inappropriate and incorrect to

² 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]?

be attached to such a thing?

The next section is the contemplation on how by following our strong attachment to the body, what we get in return is only a lot of problems. All the undesired consequences will arise.

REFLECTING ON HOW DESIRE PRODUCES ALL SORTS OF UNWANTED CONSEQUENCES

Verse 8.71

In this way, the unclean
Is not found without paying a price;
Through accomplishing their purpose I exhaust myself
And will be harmed in the hells and the like.

Verse 8.72

A child is unable to increase his wealth,
So with what can he be happy when he is in the prime of life?
When life is spent due to accumulating wealth and the like,
Having aged, what use will sex be?

Verse 8.73

Some lustful negative people
Wear themselves out by working all day
And when they return home
Their exhausted bodies lie prostrate like corpses.

Verse 8.74

Some have the suffering of afflictions of long-distance travel,
And of being faraway.
Although they long for women,
They will not see them for entire years.

Verse 8.75

Those who wish for benefit, out of confusion,
Even sell for the sake of that,
But not attaining that, they are driven
By the winds of others' actions that lack purpose

This section is talking about the disadvantages of being a layperson or a householder with a family. The whole idea of having a family is people wanting to be together and couples wanting to sleep with one another. Because of that, so much preparation have to go into the marriage and into buying a house. Also, in order to stay together and in order to survive, one has to spend so many hours working in the office and doing business. But since one has to work so hard, there is not much time to see one another.

The next section talks about how we will become inseparable from these undesirable consequences.

Verse 8.76

Some sell their own bodies
And without any power are exploited by others.
Even when their wives give birth
Their children fall at the foot of trees and in isolated places.

Verse 8.77

Fools who are deceived by desire,
Wishing for a livelihood, although afraid of losing their lives,
Go to war, thinking, "I shall make a living."
They become slaves for the sake of profit.

Verse 8.78

Some lustful people even have their bodies cut,
Some are impaled on the points of sticks,
Some are stabbed with daggers,
And others are burnt- such things as these are seen.

Verse 8. 79 a, b

Due to the torment involved in collecting it, protecting and finally losing it,
I should realize wealth to be fraught with infinite problems.

We are desirous of different things. We work very hard to get whatever we are attached to. In the process, we suffer physically and mentally but we put up with and endure that suffering because we want to get our objects of attachment.

This is similar to what we saw earlier on. When we follow our attachment, we become very unhappy in this life. We have so many problems. But that is only the start. Because of the non-virtue that we had accumulated in the process of following our attachment, we will encounter problems in all the lifetimes to come.

In the teachings, we are likened to moths. Moths are attracted to light and they will fly towards the flame of a butter-lamp or candle, burning themselves in the process. The teachings say that we are like that.

It is said that deer are very attached to sound. Hunters are aware of that and they make some beautiful tunes to distract the deer. This is how the hunters get them.

Then there are insects that are attached to the smell in certain plants. Because of their attachment to the smell, these insects enter the plants and are gobbled up by the plant.

We have attachment to form, sound, smell and taste. For example, when the fish see the worm, they are attached to the taste of the worm, not the shape of the worm. So when the fish see the worm, which the fishermen use as bait, the fish will bite the worm and get itself ensnared by the hook. This is how the fish is caught.

Another example that is given is that of an elephant. Elephants enjoy mud baths. I guess because the baths are cooling. When the elephants see the water and mud, they will happily plunge into it. Some of them get stuck and they cannot get out.

These are examples that help us to understand how we suffer when we follow our attachment. We are attached to all the five desire objects: form, sound, smell, taste and touch. Because of that, we run into so many problems. When attachment is manifest, we run towards the object of attachment and we never think what will happen to us afterwards. We only see what our attachment wants us to see. We never imagine what will come after following that attachment. Then we get caught and we suffer.

This is the explanation of all the faults, disadvantages and problems that we experience because of following our attachment.

In the next lesson, we will continue with how attachment obstructs the achievement of our own liberation.

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