

**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 7****31 March 2016**


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Review. Chapter 8, Verses 8.79–8.88. Verses 8.79–8.84: Reflecting on how desire produces all sorts of unwanted consequences (cont'd); Verses 8.79–8.81: It acts to hinder liberation & puts to waste the leisures and endowments; Verses 8.82–8.83: Contemplating the faults of samsara; Verses 8.84: Faults of desire. Verses 8.85–8.88: Cultivating a joy for isolation. Overview.

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**REVIEW**

In the last lesson, we looked at the methods for overcoming attachment to the body. These methods involve using our imagination, reasoning and analogies or examples. If these do not work, we are advised to observe directly how a corpse rots over time.

While the body is impure by nature and is filthy and dirty, this is not how we view the body. Naturally, we conceive that our body or the bodies of others to be clean and pure. But that is not the reality. In the last lesson, one of the verses talked about how some people are attached to a body because of its nice smell.<sup>1</sup> But that smell is not the natural smell of the body. Rather it is the pleasant smell of the perfume that has been applied to the body. Yet many people use that as a reason to justify their attachment and desire for the body.

What is wrong with applying perfume to the body? There is nothing wrong with this per se but isn't it incorrect to be attached to the body because of some artificial scent that is not even a natural part of the body? The point is that it is meaningless to be attached to the body because of that artificial smell. The smell that we are attached to is not the natural smell of the body but the smell of perfume. Yet the mind still gets attached and become desirous of the body because of that smell.

We saw how the body is by nature filthy, impure and unclean. Why is this so? If we were to leave the body on its own without taking care of it, slowly, the hair and the fingernails will grow long and the body becomes quite unsightly. In fact, some people may look like ghosts! This shows that the body is by nature unclean, dirty, and filthy.

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So far we have been looking at how attachment to the body, be it our own body or the

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<sup>1</sup> 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?

bodies of others, brings about a whole host of problems and suffering. The essence is that when we follow such attachment, we don't achieve what we want. Instead, we experience all the undesirable consequences. Because of our attachment, we obstruct our own achievement of liberation from samsara and we waste our human life of freedoms and endowments.

### **REFLECTING ON HOW DESIRE PRODUCES ALL SORTS OF UNWANTED CONSEQUENCES (CONT'D)**

*It acts to hinder liberation and puts to waste the leisures and endowments*

Verse 8.79 c, d

Those who are distracted by their attachment to wealth  
Have no opportunity to attain freedom from the sufferings of [cyclic] existence.

Verse 8.80

Desirous people  
Have many disadvantages such as these and little benefit,  
In the same way ox and the like drawing carriages  
Eat a few mouthfuls of grass.

Verse 8.81

Even ox and the like can achieve [this].  
Those who are pained by their actions  
Destroy the perfect leisures and endowments so difficult to find  
For the sake of something of little benefit which is not so rare.

Due to our attachment to the body, possessions and wealth, we cling on to these things very strongly. Because the mind is distracted by and attached to these things, by following attachment, we will not find any time or opportunity for real practice and to train in the three higher trainings.

- If we do not train in the three higher trainings, the achievement of liberation from suffering or samsara is not possible.
- In particular, if we are not able to manage our desire and attachment for the five sensual objects, the attachments of the desire realm, and weaken them to some extent, then there is no chance to practise calm abiding.
- If we are not able to achieve calm abiding, there is absolutely no way to actualize special insight.
- If there is no special insight, there is no liberation.
- If we are not able to develop calm abiding and special insight, then there is no way we will be able to achieve freedom from samsara or liberation from cyclic existence.
- If we don't achieve liberation from cyclic existence, then we will have to continue to circle in samsara over and over again.
- Then there will be no end to samsara.

When we follow attachment, we will face many problems in life. We have already discussed this before—all the undesirable consequences that will befall us when we follow a life of attachment. We will not achieve what we want.

Be it attachment for pleasant forms, sounds, smells, tastes or tactile objects, due to our attachment to them, we have to put in so much effort to meet these pleasant objects, and then we get so many problems. When we follow our attachment for these objects, we do get some pleasure in the beginning when we meet these objects. But even if we do succeed and our attachment for these objects is fulfilled, if you think about it, it is a very small pleasure. Not only is it small, the pleasure does not increase and it lasts only for a short time. We should think about this from our own experience.

The text likens us, sentient beings, to the ox or horse that pulls a very heavy carriage. Day in and day out, they have this burden on their shoulders and they just keep on going, pulling the carriage along. Every now and then, if they are lucky, they get some opportunity to stop and they may get a few mouthfuls of grass. When they stop, they stop only for a short while to eat the grass. Shortly after that, they have to start moving again and continue pulling the heavy carriage. We are like that. We put in a lot of effort to follow after our attachment, facing many problems along the way. When we get some pleasure every now and then, it only lasts for a very short time and it does not increase.

We have been working very hard for the happiness of this life. We run after all kinds of things—money, power, possessions, property, food and so forth—in order to survive and to take care of this life. But working hard to achieve these things is actually not a big deal because even animals know how to do that. In that sense, we are like animals ourselves.

Animals work very hard to stay alive. So being able to make a good living, running after wealth, power, property and the happiness of this life is not a big deal because animals, even the foolish ones, know how to take care of themselves, such as looking for food and so forth. In fact, there are some species of animals that are even more intelligent than humans when it comes to taking care of themselves, finding food and so forth.

To use this human life of freedoms and endowments that we have achieved for such a mundane purpose, it can be said that the rate of return on our investment is very low. We spend so much effort with regard to the happiness of this life and yet we experience so much suffering and problems in return. In fact, what we get is just some small pleasure that doesn't last. Using our life in that way is really a great waste.

In particular, this special human rebirth with its freedoms and endowments that we have achieved offers us so much power to achieve the state of full enlightenment. It is something even more special than the lives achieved by the gods. Even their kind of life is nowhere near ours in terms of its ability to achieve the state of omniscience. Even though some animals are physically more powerful and stronger than us, there is no way they can achieve enlightenment on the basis of an animal body.

In this life, we have achieved this special life of freedoms and endowments. We should think about this and realize for ourselves the special opportunity offered by such a human life. On the basis of this human life, we can achieve so much—all the way up to the state of full enlightenment.

By realizing that, while we still have this special opportunity, as much as possible, we should use it to study the three scriptural collections and strive to understand their

subject matter. After that, we should put them into practice and attempt to practise the three higher trainings. We should also use this opportunity to engage in virtue, to do our daily practice, recitations, retreats and so forth, so that we don't let this opportunity go to waste.

This topic of the human life of freedoms and endowments is not one we have not heard before. All of us know it and have heard it before. So what we need to do now is to meditate on this topic over and over again to remember it well. By thinking about these points, we will develop the wish to extract the essence from our human life of freedoms and endowments and generate the desire to make our current life meaningful.

As you already know from your study of the lam-rim, there are three different ways to extract the essence from this human life of freedoms and endowments, in accordance with the path and the practices of the three types of persons, the person of small capacity, middling capacity and great capacity.

So these couple of verses here are stating the fact that if we follow our attachment and become distracted, our attachment to our body or the bodies of others, or our attachment to wealth, property, enjoyments and so forth will become obstructions or hindrances to our achieving permanent, everlasting happiness and liberation.

If we don't achieve liberation from samsara, the only option left for us is endless samsara. If we still follow after our attachment, the only result is a very long, continuous stay in samsara.

If we live our whole life, motivated by just taking care of ourselves for this life because of our attachment to our bodies and our current life, then everything we do in this life is just for this life alone. We may work very hard and we may appear to be very capable, but actually there is no difference between animals and us because animals can also do that. If we live our lives in such a way, there is nothing to differentiate us from animals, although we have achieved not just a human life but a human life of freedoms and endowments. Nevertheless, we will be no better than animals.

The whole point of this exercise is to think about it so that we will do something meaningful with our human life of freedoms and endowments. We need to be better than animals and do better than them.

Next is generating the wish for liberation from samsara, by contemplating the faults of samsara.

Verse 8.82

The objects of desire will certainly disintegrate  
And then I shall fall into the hells and the like.  
The hardship of exhaustion arises  
For the sake of what is not very great.

Verse 8.83

If buddhahood itself is achieved  
With just one millionth of that difficulty,

The desirous have greater suffering than  
Practitioners of enlightenment, but there is no enlightenment.

We do experience some pleasure from the forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile objects that we are all so desirous of and so attached to. But those pleasures will disintegrate and do not last for a long time. Even the objects themselves—be it forms, sounds, smells, tastes or tactile objects—do not last but will disappear sooner or later. The pleasure we get from them will disappear when those objects disappear. As such, sensory pleasures are not stable at all. They are only fleeting.

The end of birth is death. What follows gathering together is dispersal. What comes after accumulation is depletion. So no matter how famous, how popular or how well-liked you are, at the end of the day, everything you have will just crumble and fall away. This is the nature of life and is everyone's reality. This happens to everybody, yet knowingly or unknowingly, people work so hard and put in so much effort in their jobs or businesses in order to accumulate wealth, power and possessions. Some want to be in power, to be well known or to climb the corporate ladder. It is not easy to achieve all these goals. One has to do so many things and say all kinds of things. In the process, one accumulates so much negative karma, which will ripen in future lives.

In return for working so very hard for the happiness of this life, we do not achieve real, everlasting, permanent happiness—the kind of happiness that doesn't decrease and disappear. We don't achieve this kind of happiness. What we get in return for all this blood, sweat and tears, for the physical and mental exhaustion, is only fleeting pleasure. This is the case for the majority.

Instead of working so hard for the affairs and happiness of this life, which brings only fleeting pleasure, Shantideva is saying that all we have to do is direct just a portion of that effort to practising the Dharma and enlightenment can be achieved.

Shantideva is saying that we work so hard day and night. We are exhausted physically and mentally. But what we get in return is still a life full of problems and unhappiness. Yes, every now and then we may get some small pleasure but it is unstable, fleeting and doesn't last. Forget about enlightenment. We can't even achieve some kind of real satisfaction or happiness that we can count on. Therefore, we should reflect and realize the faults of attachment and through that, we should then really try to generate this wish for liberation in our heart.

The next verse points out the faults of desire.

Verse 8.84  
Having contemplated the sufferings of hell and the like,  
For the desirous ones,  
Weapons, poison, fire, ravines, and foes  
Do not compare.

The negative karma that we accumulate, motivated by desire and attachment for sense objects, will result in rebirth in the lower realms. Depending on the severity of negative karma accumulated:

- the heaviest negative karma will throw us into the hell realms
- middling negative karma will result in rebirth as hungry ghosts
- small non-virtues will cause us to be reborn as animals

All of us will agree that the pain from being harmed by weapons, poison and fire, from enemies and falling off cliffs are terrible and frightening. But to the wise one, these sufferings are nothing compared to the suffering of the lower realms. The wise one looks for permanent, everlasting happiness and is skilful, knowing what should be abandoned and what should be cultivated.

When we are harmed by weapons, poison, fire and so forth, they cause us a lot of pain. But what can they really do to us? At the very most, we lose our life. This is the very most that weapons, poison, fire and enemies can do to us. They can take away our life but they cannot throw us into the lower realms. However, if we were to follow our attachment and desire to forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile objects, our attachment and desire can lead us to the lower realms.

### **CULTIVATING A JOY FOR ISOLATION**

Next is generating a liking for living in isolation.

Verse 8.85 a, b

Having in this way developed disillusion to objects of desire,  
I should generate joy for solitude.

Someone who really understands from the heart, the disadvantages and faults of having attachment to sentient beings, our body or the bodies of others, worldly possessions, gain and fame, such a person should seriously consider going into isolation.

This heartfelt feeling for the faults and mistakes of attachment is said to be stronger than the understanding that one has ingested poison. When a person accidentally ingests poison, he will be very worried, seeing that a terrible thing has happened. But this fear is nothing compared to the fear of the faults of attachment. A person who feels deeply the faults of desire from the bottom of his heart should generate the aspiration to go into retreat and live in isolation. This is why it says here, "I should generate joy for solitude," i.e., develop enthusiasm for and delight in living in solitude.

What kind of place should one live in when one goes into solitude? What kind of environment should one look for?

Verse 8.85 c, d

Within pacified forests  
Devoid of disputes and afflictions,

Verse 8.86

The fortunate ones, at joyful mansions of vast flat stones  
Cooled by the sandalwood moonlight and  
By the stirring peaceful forest breeze free from noise,  
Think of what is of benefit for others and stroll there.

- “Within pacified forests”: “Pacified” here means calm and peaceful.
- “Devoid of disputes”: This refers to being without any companions and without any wish or desire for objects and gain.
- “(Devoid of) afflictions”: I think it was mentioned earlier in this chapter that if we were to live in isolation in places such as forests and so forth, due to the power of the environment and place, the mind naturally becomes pacified and calm. Our attachment and other afflictions will subside easily.

Kings have the freedom to enjoy their life and possessions. They live in big, beautiful palaces with excellent facilities. They have many people attending to them. Just as kings have the freedom and good fortune to enjoy their beautiful palaces, food and clothing with many attendants, likewise, the fortunate who has developed bodhicitta and who has no desire for anything else is able to enter into solitude and enjoy the experience of living in that way.

Sometimes, kings do leave their palaces and go into the city to see how their subjects are doing. Likewise, the fortunate ones living in solitude, the bodhisattvas who have bodhicitta and have no desire, sometimes leave their hermitages and go to other places. They do so for the sake of sentient beings.

It is said that if one is able to live with this kind of attitude and in such an environment, one will experience much happiness and have real peace, even in this lifetime. The kind of environment that is ideal for living in solitude was already discussed earlier. There is a list of characteristics of such a suitable place. Some of the descriptions in this list come from the *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutra*.

There is also the benefit of retaining one’s freedom and independence when one lives in solitude.

Verse 8.87

They dwell for as long as they wish  
In empty houses, at the foot of trees and in caves,  
Having abandoned the suffering of owning and guarding [possessions],  
They are carefree without concern.

Such practitioners are able to live for as long as they want, be it months or years, in places such as vacant buildings, at the foot of trees or in caves. Whatever the place may be, the point here is that person should not regard that place as belonging to him, thinking, “This is *my* empty house. This is *my* cave. This is *my* tree.” If this happens, he may even think later on, “I am going to renovate my house/cave/tree!” This should not happen.

When one begins to develop the idea, “This is *my* house/cave/tree,” then self-grasping arises. When self-grasping comes into the picture, then there will only be problems.

When you live in solitude, there is nobody to disturb you. Enemies will not come to disturb or irritate you. You don’t have people around you that you have to worry about or take care of. You also don’t have to worry about being politically correct because

when you live in society, you have to interact and rely on the people who have power. Or there may be people who are lower than you, who rely on you and will ask you for help. Now, you are free of all these things so the text says, “They are carefree without concern.”

This verse I think fulfils one of the three prerequisites of developing calm abiding such as the one relating to having few desires. I think this verse may go with that specific prerequisite.

The next verse describes how this lifestyle of living in solitude brings about contentment.

#### Verse 8.88

Utilizing freely without attachment,  
Having no ties with anyone,  
Even lords have difficulty finding  
That which is the enjoyment of happy contentment.

Living in isolation, one has the freedom to go wherever one likes, to stay for as long as one wants and to do whatever one likes. There are no ties to bind one such as worries about possessions and objects. When one lives in isolation, one will be cut off from the world and one does not need to deal with people, be they friends, enemies or strangers.

“Even the lords have difficulty finding/ That which is the enjoyment of happy contentment”: The “lords” here can refer to the gods such as Brahma or the lords of human beings such as powerful kings. These people will not experience this kind of freedom, satisfaction or contentment in their hearts. This is said to be the happiness that can be found when one lives in isolation. Of course, this kind of happiness comes from contentment.

The freedom to enjoy life comes from peace, satisfaction and contentment. This kind of freedom is not possessed even by the powerful in the world, like kings and rich people. In this world, we can see that even the very rich are still not contented and satisfied. They are not happy. In fact, their level of unhappiness can be said to be commensurate with their level of dissatisfaction and lack of contentment. The more one thinks one doesn’t have enough, the more one suffers. This is clear. When we look at people who are content and easily satisfied, they are happy.

Earlier on in this chapter, there was already a discussion about the benefits of living in isolation. Here, after discussing the faults of attachment and so forth, there is again this discussion of the benefits of living in isolation. Aren’t they talking about the same thing? Actually, there is no fault of repetition.

- The earlier exposition of the benefits of living in isolation is to motivate the person to want to go into isolation.
- This later discussion of the benefits of living in isolation that comes after the presentation of the faults of attachment is aimed at somebody who has already entered into isolation. It is to reinvigorate her enthusiasm to remain in isolation because sometimes when one has entered into isolation, one may experience some difficulties.



**OVERVIEW**

In essence, what we have just discussed is that if one lives with satisfaction and a mind of contentment, in a beautiful place and a pleasant environment, it is said that the kind of happiness that one experiences will far surpass the happiness experienced by the rich and powerful, kings and queens. The lifestyle and pleasures of such people cannot be compared to the peace, calm and satisfaction experienced by the meditator.

Although this is fact, this is not what we think. We don't think like that. People in the world, including us, think that to be happy, we need money. The richer we are, the happier we will be. This is what we believe and this is what drives us to work so hard day and night for money.

We believe that this life brings happiness and we believe that living in isolation brings suffering. We believe that living in isolation is a crazy idea. We will be dissatisfied and miserable, and will meet with many problems.

If we look at our own worldview, which is basically the worldview of everybody in this world, we are looking only for physical happiness and pleasant bodily sensations. Mainly, this is what we looking for. Nobody is looking for mental peace and happiness or really wishing to achieve them. Instead, we look for money and power and so forth and day in and day out, we only seek to satisfy our senses.

This is all right if mental happiness and satisfaction can come about from the experience of bodily pleasure since we work so hard to enjoy the latter. But it doesn't happen this way. We work so hard but there is no peace, no happiness and no satisfaction in the heart.

What the Buddhadharma is all about is finding the peace, calm and mental satisfaction that is real happiness. This is why we talk at length about the importance of having a mind that is serene, pacified and disciplined.

A large portion of this chapter is advice about achieving calm abiding—what the prerequisites are and what we have to do. Calm abiding is just like the rest of the Buddhadharma. The overall goal of the Buddhadharma is to achieve mental happiness, peace and calm.

The verses up to Verse 8.88 is a discussion about the preliminaries to developing calm abiding.

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