

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 8**12 April 2016**

Review. Chapter 8, Verses 8.89–8.91. How to cultivate calm abiding. Verses 8.89 – 8.90. Brief presentation; we are all the same in being empty of existing inherently. Verse 8.91: Explaining the purpose of meditating on the equality of self and other.

REVIEW

In the earlier lesson, we looked at the prerequisites for developing calm-abiding:

1. One has to practise in an agreeable place.
2. One has to have few desires.
3. One needs to have contentment.
4. One needs to live a simple and not busy life.
5. One needs to have pure ethical discipline.
6. One needs to have few discursive thoughts.

If one attempts to achieve calm abiding after fulfilling these prerequisites, it is said that it is relatively easy to do so.

The teachings say that in order to cultivate calm abiding, one has to depend on physical isolation. Prior to that, one needs to reflect on the faults and disadvantages of living a busy life over and over again. One also needs to reflect on the benefits of living in isolation over and over again till one develops a real enthusiasm and delight for living in isolation in order to achieve calm abiding. Once one has generated such enthusiasm and delight, together with the gathering of all the other necessary prerequisites, one can then attempt to achieve calm abiding.

Earlier on in this chapter, we saw the many faults and disadvantages of living a busy life and following after our delusions, especially attachment. In short, by living a busy life and letting the mind following after our delusions, especially attachment, there will be many problems and so much unhappiness in this life. But that is not the end of it. Such a lifestyle where we constantly give in to our attachment will bring about many problems in future lives as well. So, in summary, the fault of living a busy life following our attachment brings us problems and suffering in this life and all future lives to come.

When one is attached to the modern, busy lifestyle, following after one's delusions, in every second of one's life, one is just accumulating the karma to continue to circle in cyclic existence. Then there is no hope whatsoever of achieving freedom from suffering and liberation from samsara.

Furthermore, we are just wasting this human life of freedoms and endowments that we have acquired by following our attachment to the small happiness of this life. We allow

ourselves to get sucked into it. This is how we waste this human life of freedoms and endowments.

The fact is that people work so hard day and night to achieve some happiness in this life. We put in so much effort but what we get in return is just some fleeting pleasure and happiness. In the process, there is also a lot of pain and suffering and we accumulate so much negative karma. Unfortunately, most people do not recognise and see things in this way.

But if we were able to see this for ourselves, how that is the reality—we work so hard for such a small return and on top of that, we have to experience the result of the negative karma we have accumulated—it will help us to generate some level of renunciation. We should recognise that this is not the first time we have been living this way. We have been doing this since beginningless rebirths. Yet what we have achieved is just some meagre fleeting happiness but many problems and suffering in the process.

One of the verses in this chapter says that since beginningless rebirths, we have put all our effort into achieving this fleeting happiness. If we were to put in a fraction of that effort towards achieving liberation or enlightenment, we would have achieved enlightenment by now.¹

It is the same even when we look at this life alone. All the hard work, effort, time, blood, sweat and tears that we have put into achieving some happiness of this life, if we had put in just a fraction of that effort into developing our mind and into our practice, definitely, we would have achieved some progress by now.

We have to see for ourselves the faults and mistakes of being attached to this busy life and having a liking for the hustle and bustle of life. It is only after seeing and realising this for ourselves that we will be able to put aside some mental space and time in our life to develop our mind in the Dharma.

The first 88 verses of Chapter Eight cover the prerequisites or the conditions to be gathered for developing calm abiding. We have completed this section now. What follows is how to go about developing calm abiding.

HOW TO CULTIVATE CALM ABIDING

This is the next point in the outline but if you have read your text, you will see that there doesn't seem to be any mention of developing calm abiding. It is all about meditating on bodhicitta. Why is this so?

Khen Rinpoche: I couldn't get a good answer for this. Maybe you have an answer.

According to Gyalsab Je's outline, the way to meditate on calm abiding has two sections:

1. The way to meditate on the equality of self and other
2. The way of exchange self and other

¹ Verse 82 a, b: If buddhahood is achieved/ With just one millionth of that difficulty.

THE WAY TO MEDITATE ON THE EQUALITY OF SELF AND OTHER*Brief presentation*

Verse 8.89

Having through such ways as these
Thought about the excellences of isolation,
I should completely pacify conceptualizations
And meditate on bodhicitta.

Verse 8.90

First of all I should make an effort
To meditate upon the equality between self and others:
I should protect all as I do myself
Because of equal happiness and suffering.

What is the purpose of abandoning the external hustle and bustle of life and pacifying the internal disturbing thoughts or conceptualisations? By abandoning a busy life and by relying on isolation, and at the same time, subduing the mind by pacifying the disturbing thoughts, one will not only achieve real peace and happiness in this life but also perfect long-term happiness.

Verse 8.89 is saying that by completely pacifying all the discursive thoughts, then with that pacified mind, one strives to generate bodhicitta. Although there is no mention of calm abiding here, I think that by depending on isolation, when one is able to subdue the mind by pacifying, at the very least, the gross discursive thoughts, one will be able to achieve some single-pointedness of mind. With that single-pointed mind, one then meditates on bodhicitta, which is the main subject matter of this chapter.

If you were to look at the great treatises, many of them state clearly that the generation or realization of bodhicitta has to be preceded by the realization of calm abiding. Not just calm abiding but the union of calm abiding and special insight.

We have used many words such as calm abiding, meditative stabilization, *samten* or concentration. What is the mind of concentration? Concentration is a mind whereby when one chooses to place one's attention on an object of observation, it is able to remain firmly on the object. It is also a mind that has the ability to engage powerfully with whatever object one chooses, i.e., one is able to focus one's concentration or attention on the object of one's choice.

When one has calm abiding, one has control or mastery over one's mind. If one decides to place one's attention on a chosen object of observation, one can do so easily. One can also stay on that object firmly for as long as one wants. One's mind is as stable and as firm as a mountain. But when one decides to move one's attention to another object of one's choosing, one can also do so easily. So, basically, one has complete control over one's mind, whereas before achieving calm abiding, one does not have any real control over one's mind.

According to the system here, when one meditates on bodhicitta, one has to meditate on equalizing self and others, and then meditate on exchanging self and others. So prior to

meditating on exchanging self and others, first, one must meditate on equalizing self and others. As such, Verse 8.90 says, “First of all I should make an effort/ To meditate upon the equality between self and others.”

It is said that if one does not meditate well on equalizing self and others, one will not be able to generate real bodhicitta.

First, we have to meditate on equalizing self and others. There is a reason for this. All sentient beings, including us, are equal and the same in wanting happiness and not suffering. Since that is the case, “I should protect all as I do myself.” Meditating on the equality of self and others means to cherish others as we cherish ourselves. This is the essence. This is what is meant by equalizing self and others.

Just as we work for our own happiness, by equalizing self and others, we should also work in the same way for the happiness of others. Just as we work to eliminate our own suffering, we should also work in the same way to eliminate the suffering of others. This is the realization that we need to actualize and to generate. This is what is meant when we say, “to equalize self and others.”

So, in Verse 8.90, “I should protect all as I do myself,” means that just as I work hard for my own happiness, likewise I need to do the same for others, i.e., to work for their happiness. Just as I protect myself from all undesirable sufferings, I must and will do the same for others.

“Because of equal happiness and suffering”: “Equal happiness and suffering” is the reason why we should protect others as we do ourselves. How does this reason work here?

Khen Rinpoche: That is a question.

Usually, when we talk about the equality of self and others, it is phrased in this way—we are all the same and equal in the sense that you and I do not like suffering and what you and I want is happiness. This is true.

We are all the same in being empty of existing inherently

If we were to push this reasoning a bit further and think more deeply, “What is the basis of this equality?” then it boils down to the fact that all of us are the same in that we are all empty of existing inherently.

Whether it is others or ourselves, if we were to look for the self on the basis of designation, i.e., if we look for the “I” on its basis of designation, or if we look for “others” on their basis of designation, we will not find anything that is the “I” or “others” on their respective bases of designation. Even the basis of designation of the “self” does not exist from its own side and the basis of designation of “others” does not exist from its own side.

There is discussion on whether there is a valid base or not. A valid basis of designation, in short, is a valid base. There are two schools of thought on this:

- One school of thought says that there is such a thing as a valid base, i.e., we need to

talk about the valid base.

- Another school of thought is that we can't talk about a valid base.

When you think of the term, "valid base," it seems to suggest that there is something existing right there from the side of the base. As such, this is contradictory.

- The fundamental position is that nothing exists inherently from its own side.
- As such, there is a school of thought that asserts that there cannot be a valid base.
- Because the term, "valid base," seems to have the connotation that there is something right there from its own side that is the valid base, this cannot reconcile with the fact that things are merely imputed by thought.
- If there is something there from the side of the base, then it is not merely imputed by thought because whether we impute it or not, it is always there.

This is a very challenging topic. You must really try to focus. By the way, I am not exactly sure whether what I am saying is correct or not!

In the first place, you need to get some points straight. It is certain, for example, that the basis of designation of the person or the self does not exist from its own side. This much is clear.

Likewise, when we talk about another person, that person is also imputed in dependence upon its basis of designation. If we look at that basis of designation, it is also very clear that it cannot and does not exist from its own side.

Then how does the "I" and "others" exist?

The "I" is that which is merely imputed in dependence upon a basis of designation. In dependence upon a basis of designation, then the thought thinks, "I". The "I" exists in relation to that basis of designation. This is how it exists. It is merely imputed. Likewise, just as we are merely imputed, others also exist as merely imputed upon their bases of designation.

What is "I" and what is "others" are relative. In dependence upon the "I", then there is "others". In dependence upon "others", i.e., relative to the existence of others, there is the "I". As such, there is no inherently existent "I" or "others" and there is no inherent difference between the "I" and "others". The difference between "I" and "others" is not established from its own side and does not exist inherently.

While it is easy to say that the "I" is merely imputed, existing in mere name on the basis of designation, but if we were to check our own experience of the "I", how does the "I" appear? How does our aggregates, which is the basis of designation of the "I", appear? Whether it is the "I" or the basis of designation, they appear to us as something that exists from its own side. There is something right there and it is not merely imputed by mind.

Not only is there this appearance of a real "I" and a real basis of designation of the body and mind, we assent to that appearance completely. We hold on to and believe that there is a real "I", and that there is a real basis of designation, the real body and mind.

It is the same when we think of “others”. How does the bases of designation of “others” appear to us? Of course, there is something right there from their own side. When we look at “others”, “others” also appear to exist right there from their own side. Likewise, not only is there such an appearance but we assent completely to that appearance, “Yes, it is there.”

As such, in our experience, “you” and “I” are as solid and different as black and white. There is no connection between us whatsoever. We are completely unrelated and unconnected. Therefore, “you” are “you” and “I” am “I”, and “you” are there and “I” am here. This is completely opposite to equalizing self and others.

If we check up and question our own experience, it is quite clear that while we believe there is a real body and mind that are the bases of designation, if we were to look for them, we can’t find them.

When you look for the real body and mind, you cannot find the real body and mind. How then can there be a real “I” that exists in relation to the real body and mind? If the body and mind does not exist from their own side, then how can the “I” exist from its own side? So the “I” is that which is merely imputed by thought, existing in mere name in dependence upon the body and mind. If that is the case, then “others” must be the same.

Imagine we take a knife and start cutting up space. Then we say that there is an eastern space. There is a western space. There is a northern space and there is a southern space. Is there such a thing?

Khen Rinpoche: Can you do that?

(Student’s answer is inaudible).

Khen Rinpoche: Can you cut up the sky?

Just as we cannot cut space with a knife and end up having different pieces of space, likewise, for those who have realized emptiness, when they realize that the “I” exists only in mere name and the “I” is empty of existing inherently, then in the space of the emptiness of an “I”, there is no real “I” and no real “others”.

Once the realization of the emptiness of the “I” is generated, one would also realize the emptiness of “others”. Within that sphere of emptiness is the space where there is no real “I” and no real “others”. There isn’t that solid differentiation between the two like what we see now. All that dissolves away.

As such, with that kind of understanding and experience in the back of his mind, that yogi is able to work for others in the same way as he would work for himself. Because there is no longer any solid differentiation between the two—“you” are “you” and “I” am “I” and therefore I don’t want to work for you—in that sense, “self” and “others” are equal. The yogi is able to work for the happiness and remove the suffering of others just as he would for himself.

If you think about it, in the absence of this kind of understanding, it is quite difficult to

say truly that you can get this feeling of the equality of self and others. In our own experience, we have this very strong feeling, “You are over there” and “I am over here.” So without understanding the ultimate nature of the “self” and “others”, it is very difficult to break down that solid feeling of others and us being completely unconnected and unrelated.

You should know that there are two systems for cultivating bodhicitta:

1. the sevenfold cause and effect instructions
2. exchanging self and others

It is said that the sevenfold cause and effect instructions are for the dull facultied trainees and the system of exchanging self and others are for the sharp facultied trainees.

So what makes a bodhisattva a sharp facultied bodhisattva as opposed to one who is not so sharp?

- Prior to becoming a bodhisattva, the sharp facultied bodhisattva has already realized emptiness. After realizing emptiness, somewhere along the way, he actualized bodhicitta and became a bodhisattva.
- Dull facultied bodhisattvas are those who generate bodhicitta first, and after that they realized emptiness. Dull facultied bodhisattvas are still bodhisattvas so definitely, they have achieved bodhicitta. Otherwise, they cannot be bodhisattvas.

In order to actualize bodhicitta, we must develop in our mind the aspiration for full enlightenment.

Question from Khen Rinpoche: How does the dull facultied trainees develop such an intention for full complete enlightenment?

Student 1: Can it be due to the tremendous amount of merit accumulated by the bodhisattva?

Student 2: I think the aspiration comes from seeing that all sentient beings have been our mothers who have benefitted us greatly.

Khen Rinpoche: When real bodhicitta arises in the heart, what is that mind looking for?

One part of the mind is looking for full enlightenment. This mind that is looking for full enlightenment realizes that full enlightenment can be achieved. What you think? Can it be achieved or not?

In order for real bodhicitta to arise in the heart:

- Does that person need to feel the purpose for achieving complete enlightenment?
- Does that person need to feel in his heart, “I can do it. It (full enlightenment) is definitely achievable.”

Khen Rinpoche: I am asking the two of you who answered my first question. Yes or no? Think carefully before you speak.

The thought, “I must achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings,” is that just a prayer? When bodhicitta arises in the heart, is it just a wish without knowing what its purpose is and without feeling that it (enlightenment) is actually possible?

(Student’s response is inaudible).

The point is that the mind (of bodhicitta) understands and knows why one needs enlightenment and that enlightenment is possible. One can achieve it. What do you think?

Student 2: My answer is “Yes” to the question because the mind knows that it can achieve the state of full enlightenment to benefit sentient beings.

The dull facultied bodhisattva knows this through remembering the kindness of his mother of this life and through understanding that other sentient beings have been our mothers. From there, we develop the mind. We also think of the Three Jewels.

- We have to do it because all of them have been kind to us.
- I can do it because other people have done it before. Not only have they have done it but they also show us the methods and give us the instructions to do so. In history, there are people such as Shakyamuni Buddha and his followers had done it.

Khen Rinpoche: Do you accept that if you have bodhicitta, that mind knows “I can (achieve full enlightenment),” i.e., that mind already believes “I can do it”?

Student 2: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: We are talking about dull facultied bodhisattvas here. Do they realize this?

Student 2: Yes

Khen Rinpoche: In order for anybody to see he can achieve full enlightenment, first, he must see that the two obscurations can be abandoned. Right?

Student 2: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: That person must realize that the knowledge obscurations can be abandoned, and the afflictive obscuration can be abandoned.

Student 2: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: If you say yes, this means that this bodhisattva also sees that the apprehension of a self of persons and the apprehension of a self of phenomena can be abandoned, and therefore, definitely, he can abandon his own ignorance.

Student 2: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: If that bodhisattva sees all these—the knowledge obscurations, the afflictive obscurations, the apprehension of a self of persons and the apprehension of a self of phenomena—can be abandoned, does he then not see the antidote?

He has to see the antidote. If he doesn't see the antidote, it is as if he doesn't see the medicine. Then he doesn't see the end of his sickness. Right?

Student 2: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: Then he sees emptiness?

Student 2: Not yet. But he sees and cognizes that emptiness is the antidote. Even though there is no realization of emptiness yet but the person can see that the antidote to ignorance is to develop the wisdom realizing emptiness. That means that the person doesn't know yet the method correctly as that person have not realized emptiness but he knows that is the method and he is going to apply the antidote by thinking of dependent arising. We work from a coarse level and then work through inference to the subtler understanding, "Indeed, there is dependent arising."

Khen Rinpoche: In order to see for ourselves that the apprehension of true existence, our own ignorance, can be abandoned, that understanding comes from either reasoning or belief. It is quite difficult to imagine that this understanding can come about through belief. If it is not through belief, then it is through reasoning. If you see the reasoning, that means you have seen emptiness.

In order to see that ignorance can be abandoned, first, one must see how ignorance is a wrong consciousness and a factually discordant consciousness. Then slowly, one can develop the confidence, "Maybe ignorance can be abandoned."

I guess it is difficult to really feel that it is possible to overcome our ignorance through faith, i.e., just because somebody says so. First, one must see for oneself that ignorance is a wrong consciousness. Then one has to know why it is a wrong consciousness. As such, without some real understanding of emptiness, it is probably quite difficult to do this.

In equalizing self and others, one sees how one exists in mere name. There is no existence from its own side. Likewise, one comes to understand and realize that others also exist only in mere name. They do not exist from their own side. There isn't that strong feeling of the "you" and "I" being so real, distinct and unconnected. With that mindset and understanding, one is able to feel for others. The merely labelled "I" wants to be happy and the merely labelled "others" are also the same in that sense, wanting to be happy and not wanting to suffer.

Therefore, generating the correct view is very important. Realizing emptiness is extremely important. These two verses are the brief explanation on the way to equalize self and others.

Next comes the extensive explanation. There are many points under this outline:

1. Explaining the purpose of meditating on the equality of self and other
2. The way to meditate on the equality of self and other
3. The benefits of such meditations
4. One can develop such an attitude if one familiarises oneself with the equality of self and other

Explaining the purpose of meditating on the equality of self and other

Verse 8.91

Although there are many different divisions and aspects such as the hands,
They are same in being the body that is to be thoroughly protected.

Likewise all the different migrating beings in their happiness and suffering
Are the same in wishing to be happy just as I do.

At this point, Gyaltsab Je raises a qualm: “As there are infinite different sentient beings, it is not correct or suitable to generate the mind, thinking, “I”, with regard to them. How can their acceptance and rejection of happiness and suffering be suitable to equal one’s own happiness and suffering?”

This is the qualm and Verse 8.91 is the response.

Although our body has many parts—the head, the torso, the arms, the legs and so forth—nevertheless, we regard all these body parts to be the same, conflating them into one thing, “my body”. We regard the different parts of the body as being the whole body and as being “mine”.

If we understand that, then we can extend the argument that likewise, although there are many sentient beings like gods and humans, their suffering and happiness are no different. Focusing on how they are the same, one sees others as oneself and think, “I shall establish them in happiness and I shall clear away their suffering.”

To understand the arguments that are going to come soon, frankly, it is difficult if you don’t have at least some idea of what we have just discussed earlier—how one and others are equal in being empty of existing inherently. Without some understanding of this, it is difficult to understand this argument and the other arguments that are to come.

The “I” is that which is merely imputed upon the basis of designation, which in itself is composed of many parts. The basis of designation of the “I” or the “person” is the body and mind, and the body and mind have many parts. As such, they don’t exist from their own side.

The “I” is that which exists in mere name in dependence upon the basis of designation, the body and mind. As such, there is no real truly existent “I”. Likewise, it is the same with other sentient beings. There isn’t any real difference between others and us. Yes, there is some difference but we are not inherently different from others. But we hold on to others and us as being distinctively different, unrelated, right there from their own side.

Since this difference does not exist, the person who understands this is able to regard the happiness of others as being the same as his own happiness. Likewise, he regards the suffering of others as the same as his own suffering. Therefore, he is able to work for the happiness of others and eliminate their suffering.

With that understanding, the meditator is able to feel, “Likewise all the different migrating beings in their happiness and sufferings/ Are the same in wishing to be happy just as I do.”

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*Student 3:* For the dull facultied bodhisattva, his object of observation, enlightenment, is not a fully qualified one because to him, it exists inherently.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Are you making an assertion?

*Student 3:* I am coming to that conclusion if ...

*Khen Rinpoche:* You already gave that conclusion in your first sentence. What made you arrive at that conclusion?

*Student 3:* He cannot ascertain emptiness, even inferentially.

(Khen Rinpoche asked Student 3 to repeat his first sentence.)

*Student 3:* The object that is observed by this dull facultied bodhisattva, i.e., enlightenment, is not a fully qualified one.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Are you asking whether that enlightenment is fully qualified or not fully qualified?

*Student 3:* Based on the discussion here, the dull facultied bodhisattva has not ascertained emptiness. Therefore, his object of observation, which is enlightenment, will be an inherently existent enlightenment. He is focusing on that because he has not realized that enlightenment does not exist inherently. So his object of observation is an inherently existent enlightenment. Won't that be the case?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Is it not possible to have both? He is apprehending a truly existent full enlightenment but he is also seeking full enlightenment

*Student 3:* Can Khen Rinpoche please explain how he is able to do that?

*Khen Rinpoche:* When we are eating food, we think we are eating food, right?

*Student 3:* He is observing an existent while apprehending a non-existent.

*Khen Rinpoche:* When we eat food, are there times we are apprehending truly existent food? Definitely, yes. While apprehending that the food is truly existent, we are also eating the food.

*Student 3:* But he doesn't know that? He hasn't realized that because, for ordinary beings, they do not realize the difference between these two. So he doesn't realize something that he is achieving. In that sense, would his wish be a fully qualified wish?

*Khen Rinpoche:* If it is an actual mind generation, it is a fully qualified mind generation. And if it is a fully qualified mind generation, then that person has a fully qualified aspiration for complete enlightenment.

*Student 3:* So for a dull facultied bodhisattva, even though he does not realize emptiness, still he has that fully qualified ...

*Khen Rinpoche:* If it is a mind generation, it is necessarily a fully qualified mind generation. If it is a fully qualified mind generation, then that mind generation necessarily consists of a fully qualified aspiration for full enlightenment. There is no need to discuss the level of faculty of that person.

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