

**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 9****14 April 2016**

Chapter 8: The way to meditate on the equality of self and other. A. Verses 8.92–8.93: Abandoning the [position that holds that] it is unreasonable to equate discarding pleasure and taking on suffering. B. Verses 8.94– 8.100. Explaining the reasons why it is reasonable to meditate on such an equation.

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

The way to meditate on the equality of self and other has two parts:

- A. Abandoning the [position that holds that] it is unreasonable to equate discarding pleasure and taking on suffering
- B. Explaining the reasons why it is reasonable to meditate on such an equation

*A. Abandoning the [position that holds that] it is unreasonable to equate discarding pleasure and taking on suffering*

First, in Gyalsab Je's commentary, he raises a hypothetical qualm: Since others' suffering do not harm one's body or one's own suffering, it is invalid or incorrect to say that the elimination of their suffering is equal to clearing away one's own suffering.

In the previous lesson, we had looked at the meaning of equalizing self and others—just as we want happiness, others are the same in wanting happiness too. Just as we don't not want any suffering, others are also the same in not wanting to suffer.

The mind that sees oneself and others as equal is the mind that is concerned about the happiness of others. Just as we are concerned about our own happiness, we have the same concern and wish for others to be happy. This mind regards these two as the same. It is the same with suffering—just as we do not want to suffer, we recognise that others also have the wish not wanting to suffer.

This is the meaning of meditating on equalizing self and others. "Just as I want to be happy, I am also concerned about the happiness of others. This mind recognizes that the happiness of others and my happiness are the same. Likewise, the same applies to suffering."

But what if we were to say, "But they are not really the same thing. The suffering of others doesn't harm me and my suffering doesn't harm others. If that is the case, how can it be that the elimination of the suffering of others is equal to clearing away my own suffering?" This is how we think. It is very natural. The answer to this qualm is in Verses 8.92 and 8.93.

## Verse 8.92

My suffering

Does not cause any harm to the bodies of others.

But that is my suffering.

Due to adhering as “I,” it becomes unbearable.

## Verse 8.93

Likewise the suffering of others

Does not befall me.

Nevertheless, that suffering of me,

Due to adhering as “I,” will be hard to bear.

Although our suffering does not harm directly others, our suffering harms us directly. Since we are harmed by our own suffering, we find it unbearable and are unable to tolerate that suffering. Likewise, although the suffering of others does not harm us directly, due to holding others as equal to ourselves, likewise, we will not be able to tolerate the suffering of others.

The reason we are harmed by our suffering is because we hold on to an “I” and cling to the self. We have been doing this since beginningless rebirths and even in this very life, right from the very first moment when we took rebirth in our mother’s womb.

Due to holding on to the “I” and clinging on to the self, we find it difficult to tolerate whatever suffering befalls this “I”. But nothing exists from its own side. Nothing exists intrinsically. As such, there isn’t an “I” that exists from its own side. Likewise, there are no inherently existent others and there is no inherently existent suffering. Since nothing exists inherently, as such, it is possible for us to generate the mind that is unable to bear the suffering of others, precisely because “I” and others do not exist inherently from their own side.

It is possible to regard others as oneself by cherishing others and holding on to sentient beings as oneself, because there is no inherently existent “I” and no inherently existent “others”. By cherishing others, by holding others as oneself, one will be able to generate the mind that is unable to bear the suffering of others.

This is why bodhisattvas are unable to bear the suffering of others when they see them suffering. Although the suffering of sentient beings do not harm or hurt directly the bodhisattvas, since bodhisattvas hold on to sentient beings to be themselves, they are unable to tolerate the suffering of others.

This happens even to us, ordinary beings. Imagine how parents are worried about their children, especially if they happen to have only one child. When something terrible happens to their child, they worry so much. They are unable to bear the suffering of their child. Why is this so? The child’s suffering does not affect directly the parents. But because the parents conceive the child as being theirs, “This is my child,” therefore, when they see their child suffer, they experience great anguish and are unable to bear it.

Why do parents feel such anguish when their child suffers whereas an outsider will not feel the same way towards that child?

The difference lies in whether the concept of that child as being “mine” is involved. Because the parents feel, “This is *my* child,” they hold on to the child as they would their own self, and when their child suffers, they also suffer. They can feel that suffering. So in general, generating the mind that holds on to others as oneself is not terribly difficult.

Let’s say you own a very beautiful and valuable object. When you are in the midst of negotiating with somebody to sell him that object, until the transaction is completed, and until you have sold the object, if something bad happens to that object, for example, if you break or damage it in some way, you will feel terrible.

If the object to be sold is damaged before the transaction is completed, the seller will feel great pain but the prospective buyer will not feel any pain or sense of loss at all. However, once the transaction is completed and money is exchanged, if something happens to that object or it is broken, the seller won’t feel any pain. Now it is the buyer’s turn to feel the pain.

This change happens right away after the transaction is completed. Once the transaction is completed, immediately the buyer has the idea, “This object is mine.” He regards that object as “mine” right away. The “I” comes into the picture. It is not as if he has to meditate for hours in order to feel that object is “mine”. He feels it straightaway. The point is that holding on to something as “mine”, with the introduction of the self into the picture, happens immediately. It is the same thing here with equalising self and others.

From the side of the object that is being sold or bought, it doesn’t really belong to the seller or the buyer. The object doesn’t have the idea, “I’m yours,” “I’m his,” or “I’m hers and not yours.”

When we buy something, for the transaction to be complete, many conditions have to come together. There is the seller, the object itself and us, the buyer. Once the transaction is completed, we regard that object as ours. But if we look at the object from its own side, it doesn’t belong to anyone. It is only due to the coming together of causes and conditions that the object is bought when we come into the picture as the buyer. Because of the coming together of those conditions, the object is now “mine” and belongs to “me”.

But that object being labelled as “mine” is literally, merely labelled, and exists in mere name. It doesn’t exist from the side of the object. The transaction is completed due to coming together of causes and conditions. The mind that regards the object as being “my object” is our own mental projection.

Our possessions are not inherently established as our possessions. They haven’t always been like that. When we sell that object to somebody else, it becomes somebody else’s object.

This is not possible if that object is inherently existent from its own side as “my” object or possession. In that case, it can never change, but it does change. In one moment, it is “mine” and in the next moment, once we sell it to someone else, it is no longer “mine” but now belongs to somebody else. That change occurs within a short time. It shows that change can happen in a moment.

Similarly, there is no inherently existent “I” and “others”. The “I” or self that we cherish so much does not exist from its own side. Likewise, the “others” that we feel are so disconnected, separate and different from us also do not exist from their own side. There is no inherently existent “I” and no inherently existent “others”, just as there are no inherently existent possessions.

The important point here is that the “I”, the self or person and “others” exist as mere projections of the mind and are merely imputed by thought. As such, if we regard others to be us, it is possible to equalize self and others precisely because “I” and “others” do not exist from their own side and they do not exist inherently. Therefore, it is possible to regard others as oneself. Since it is possible to generate the mind that views others as oneself, it is possible to feel the suffering of others although their suffering do not directly harm us.

When we are able to feel the suffering of others, in the process, we are unable to bear their suffering. Then it is possible to generate the wish to free others from their suffering.

To reiterate, the most important point that makes all this work is that we have to understand that the “I” and “others” do not exist from their own side. Rather, they exist in mere name, as merely imputed by thought. They are mere creations or projections of the mind. As such, it is possible to meditate on equalizing self and others. It is not a terribly difficult thing to do. Just think of some of the examples we have discussed. Imagine somebody giving you something now. The object, which belongs to that person, will belong to you in the very next moment. All it takes is one moment.

*Khen Rinpoche: The Buddha said in one of the sutras that if the mind is subdued, and has entered the path, then the mind becomes very obedient and becomes the easiest thing in the world to tame and deal with. In this world, there is nothing quite like the mind. The tamed and subdued mind can be moulded in whatever way one wishes. The mind is very obedient.*

*But the Buddha also said that if the mind is not subdued and not tamed, there is nothing in the world that is more difficult to manage than the mind. It is not obedient. It never listens. It is the most difficult thing in the world.*

Going back to the example of the object. Before the object is given to you, it belonged to someone else. After it is given to you, it belongs to you. Prior to receiving the object, you do not have the concept of holding on to the object as “mine”. You think that it belongs to someone else. However, when the object is given to you, immediately, you conceive it to be “mine”. The mind changes immediately but the object has not changed. You can’t change the object but the mind changes right away, in a single moment.

The mind can change easily provided we do the work. With some practice, familiarity and habituation, it is possible to change the mind. The mind can change very quickly provided it is trained to do so.

The point the Buddha was trying to make is that it is very important to change the mind. Because the mind can be changed, therefore it is very important to change the mind and

to subdue the mind. If we don't subdue our mind, then it is not possible to subdue the mind of others.

The essence of this section is that by holding others as ourselves, when others suffer, we will be able to generate the mind that is unable to bear their suffering. Therefore, the elimination of the suffering of others is equal to eliminating one's own suffering.

### **EXPLAINING THE REASONS WHY IT IS REASONABLE TO MEDITATE ON SUCH AN EQUATION**

1. *Extensive explanation*
  - A. *Stating the reason*
  - B. *Establishing the pervasion*
    - (1) *The actual established pervasion*
    - (2) *Dispelling hindrances to that*
  - C. *Dispelling the hindrance of thinking that it is unsuitable to meditate on the equality of self and other*
2. *Synopsis*
3. *Abandoning objections*

The next verse states the reason why it is appropriate for us to meditate on the equality of self and others.

1. A. *Stating the reason*

Verse 8.94  
I should dispel the suffering of others  
Because it is suffering, just like my own suffering,  
And I should benefit others  
Because they are sentient beings, just like my body.

This verse is phrasing the argument in the form of a logical statement, "I should dispel the suffering of others/ Because it is suffering, just like my own suffering." Therefore, it is also appropriate to make others happy because they are sentient beings just like us.

Next, we establish the pervasion of the reason that was employed earlier.

1. B. (1) *The actual established pervasion*

Verse 8.95  
When both others and I  
Are similar in wishing to be happy,  
What is the difference with me?  
Why do I strive for my happiness alone?

Verse 8.96  
And when both I and others  
Are similar in not wishing to suffer,  
What is the difference with me?  
Why do I protect myself and not others?

Since others and ourselves are equal in not wanting to suffer and wanting to be happy, why do we work only for our own happiness and not the happiness of others? Why do we work only to overcome our own suffering and not the suffering of others?

1. B. (2) *Dispelling hindrances to that*

We then dispel the objections to the above reasoning. This is similar to what was discussed before. There is this line of argument, “I do not protect other sentient beings when they experience suffering because their suffering does not harm me.”

Verse 8.97

OBJECTION: I do not protect them

Because their suffering does not cause me harm.

RESPONSE: Then why protect [myself] against future suffering

If it causes me no harm?

Verse 8.98

The conceptualization thinking

That I shall experience that is wrong.

The person who died thus is one

And that reborn is another.

Verse 8.99

If whenever there is suffering

That itself must protect from that,

The suffering of the foot is not that of the hand,

Why then does it protect from that?

Verse 8.100

OBJECTION: Although this may not be reasonable,

It is engaged in due to apprehending a self.

RESPONSE: Whatever unreasonable self and others

Should at all costs be abandoned.

This is the objection that is raised, “I have to guard against my own suffering because my suffering actually hurts me. I do not protect others from their suffering because their suffering is none of my business.” It is natural that we have such thoughts. They come easily to us. But when such thoughts arise, what can we do to counteract them?

With regard to impermanence, there are coarse impermanence and subtle impermanence. A good example of coarse impermanence is death. When we die, we go from this life to the next life.

But change also occurs over a shorter period of time. It can happen within a year, a month, a week and even a day. Within a day, there is morning and night. There is change all the way down to a moment in time.

With reference to coarse impermanence, we know we are going to die. We accept that there are future lives. When we think of the future, we are worried if we know that we are going to the lower realms. When we think of the suffering we will have to

experience there, we are terrified. So we work hard to avoid that situation.

Somebody may say to us, “Why are you protecting yourself now from something that has yet to happen?”

We do everything we can to avoid going to the hell realms but that is something that hasn’t happened yet. It will happen in the future. So we are protecting ourselves now from that eventuality by doing practices.

This is in response to the objection we pose with regard to protecting others from their suffering. We don’t protect others from their suffering because we think that their suffering is none of our business, “Since it doesn’t harm or hurt me, why do I have to protect others from their suffering?” But if that is the case, why then are we doing practices now to protect ourselves from the suffering that has yet to arise, and which is not harming us now ?

When there is such a rebuttal, we are not going to accept it. So we will say, “That is different. You can’t equate the two as being the same. My future suffering is something that I will have to experience. It is just a matter of time. If I go to the hell realms after I die, I will have to experience the suffering there. That will happen to me. Therefore, I have to protect myself from that suffering. It is a completely a different thing.”

But that kind of thinking is also wrong. The mind that holds the person of a former moment and a later moment to be the same person is mistaken. The person who is a human being in this life and who is a hell being in the next life—are these two persons one and the same?

We work hard so that we don’t suffer when we are in our old age. We think, “When I get old, I am going to suffer. I’m going to experience this and that. I must not let that happen to me. Therefore, I’m going to do this and that.” Such thoughts arise because we see the person we are now and the person who will be an old woman in the future to be one and the same. Similarly, we hold the person of this life and the person who is a potential hell being in a future life to be one and the same.

This thought holding the person or self of a former moment and that of a later moment to be the same is essentially erroneous. It is a wrong concept and goes against reality. They are not the same. How can the person who is a human being in this life be the same as the person who is a hell being in the next life?

The person who is a human being in this life is a result of virtuous projecting karma whereas the person who will become a hell being in the next life—with the aggregates of a hell being and the consciousness of a hell being—is a product of non-virtuous projecting karma. They are two different persons.

One’s present life as a human being is the result of virtuous projecting karma. One has a human body and a human consciousness. When this life ends, one is no longer a human being. The consciousness is also no longer a human consciousness. The end of this life comes about as the result of the exhaustion of the virtuous karma that projected this rebirth. With the last moment of the human consciousness acting as a substantial cause,

together with the non-virtuous projecting karma, which is the cooperative condition, one is reborn as a hell being. In the next life, one gets the aggregates of a hell being and the consciousness of a hell being.

It is not a case of this human body transforming into and becoming the body of a hell being. Similarly, it is not the case that the human consciousness transforms in the next moment into the consciousness of a hell being. This is a point that you really have to think about.

It is clear then that this human body and the aggregates of a hell being in the next life are not one and not the same. The consciousness we have now as a human being is not one and the same with the consciousness of the hell being we will become.

An example is how the flame of a single candle or butter lamp can be passed on. One can pass on that flame and light up as many flames as one wants. Although the flame is being passed on, the original or the first flame is still there. Of course, without the first flame, we will not have the subsequent flames but that doesn't mean that the first flame has become the second flame, third flame, fourth flame and so forth.

If you understand this example, you can apply it to our discussion of how the human consciousness does not become the consciousness of a hell being. Rather, that last moment of human consciousness acts as the substantial cause—together with the cooperative condition of the non-virtuous projecting karma—for one to get the consciousness of a hell being.

A human consciousness does not exist from its own side. It exists as a projection of the mind, merely imputed by thought and exists in relation to the human body. This is why it is called a human consciousness.

But in the next life, if one is reborn as a hell being, then one gets the aggregates or the body of a hell being. In relation to that body, the consciousness of that being is called the consciousness of a hell being or a hell being consciousness. That hell being consciousness does not exist from its own side. Although there is a continuation of consciousness but the human consciousness itself is not transforming into and becoming a hell being consciousness. Once this human body disintegrates and ceases to exist, there is no longer any basis for calling the consciousness a human consciousness.

In general, we talk about how due to the coming together of various causes and conditions such as karma and so forth, one gets a good rebirth or a bad rebirth. If one wants to go into the specific details of each experience, trying to find out what is the exact karma for a particular experience—these are extremely hidden phenomena.

After all this discussion, you may think, "If the person of this life is not the same as the person of a future life, then whatever I do in this life will not have any effect in my future life either." But this is where karma comes in. Otherwise, it may seem that the general characteristics of karma are no longer valid. One of these characteristics is that you will not meet with the result of karma you did not do. Another is that whatever karma is done or accumulated, it will never disappear on its own accord.



Here is another way of thinking about this. The person of the past and the person of the future or the person of an earlier moment and a person of a later moment, they are not the same. They are different precisely because they exist at different times. Based on the time that you are looking at, you have a person of this moment, a person of the next moment and so forth. The person of the earlier moment and the person of the later moment are not one and the same.

Let's take morning and night. The person exists in the morning. Does that person who exists in the morning exist at night? If the person who exists in the morning has not disintegrated and ceased, we will not have the person who exists at night. The person of the morning time must cease to exist before we can have the person of the night time. There is this continuum. At night, the person of the morning time has ceased to exist or does not exist whatsoever.

The person of an earlier moment is not the same as the person of the later moment. The person of the morning time has ceased to exist when night comes. This is the reality but we find this very difficult to accept both emotionally and intellectually. This is because we have an extremely strong grasping at permanence, believing that things never change, that they are always the same. We have this very strong tendency to conflate earlier and later moments into one.

Are the person of this life and the hell being of the next life the same? Are they one or not one? They are not the same. If they are not the same, then the person of the morning time and the person of the night time also cannot be the same. The "you" of the morning and the "you" of the evening are not the same. The "you" of the past does not exist in the present or in the future. It is called the past because time has passed. The person that is imputed in dependence on that past, since the time has passed, does not exist.

When we are alive now, the mind we have now is called the human consciousness. But when we die and we end up in the hell realms, would one still call our mind a human mind? Therefore, the person of the morning is not the person of the night because at night, the person of the morning does not exist.

If you understand all of this, you will understand the reasoning that is used to refute the objection that the suffering of others do not harm us and therefore, there is no need for us to do anything about that suffering as it is not our suffering.

Precisely because we use this excuse, why then do we plan for the future? We say, "When I'm old, I will suffer so I need to do this now," but our old age is not here yet. Still, we work to prepare for the future because we hold the person of the now and the person of the future to be one and the same.

Likewise, why do we work for our future life? "Because it will be me. I'm going to suffer in hell." We grasp at the "I" of the future to be the same as the "I" of now.

Having said all this, it is also not correct to think, "Therefore, I don't need to practise virtue, because it doesn't matter anymore as it is not the same person." This is not the point at all.

Everything we have discussed is a response to the natural objection we all have to justify our lack of concern for the suffering of others. Why? Because we think that the suffering of others is their problem. It doesn't harm or hurt us at all. This is what we think.

This is why we say, "Forget about it. It doesn't matter." The response to that indifference is this, "Why then do we protect ourselves from future suffering if it causes us no harm now?" Our natural objection is rebutted in this way.

Then we argue, "No, it is not the same."

We work now to protect ourselves in the future. Whether it is old age or the next life, we hold on to that person of the future, be it the person of the later part of this life or the person of the next life, to be the one and the same as the person now. This is a wrong concept.

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#### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ON SUNDAY, 17 APRIL 2016**

Q1. What are the antidotes for abandoning busyness?

Q2. What are the antidotes to the erroneous conceptions in relation to Chapter Eight?

Q3. When you look into your mind and ask yourself, "Am I able to abandon everything and live in isolation? If not, why not?" (Do not give an intellectual answer to this question but reflect on the answers that lie in your own mind).

Q4. Since we have completed the section on calm abiding in the lam-rim, you should refresh your understanding of the methods to achieve calm abiding through abandoning the five faults and cultivating the eight antidotes as explained in Maitreya's *Differentiating the Middle from the Extremes*. How does one achieve calm abiding by abandoning the five faults and cultivating the eight antidotes?

Q5. With reference to Maitreya's explanation of the way to achieve calm abiding through the nine stages as explained in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutra*, when are the coarse and subtle forms of excitement and laxity abandoned during the nine stages?

Q6. What are physical and mental pliancy? How are they generated and which one is generated first? Likewise, there is a bliss of physical pliancy and there is a bliss of mental pliancy. What are they? How are they generated? Which one is generated first?

Try your best to come for the discussion session because discussion is very important. It is very helpful for real learning and to refresh whatever you have learnt. I plan to come for the discussion as well. You have to prepare before you come for discussion. You have to read and think about the questions. There is not much benefit if you just turn up without reading or prior preparation. So please prepare and come on Sunday.

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Patricia Lee and Julia Koh; edited by Cecilia Tsong.