

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 10**19 April 2016**

Q&A. Review. Chapter 8: The way to meditate on the equality of self and other. B. Verses 8.99—8.103. Explaining the reasons why it is reasonable to meditate on such an equation (cont'd); Verses. 8.99—8.102 a, b. 1. Extensive explanation; Verses 8.102c, d—103. Synopsis.

Question: I agree the mind can be trained from just seeing *my son, my father, my brother* and *my things* and enlarging that view to include all sentient beings, to the extent that one is able to see the happiness and suffering of others to be the same as one's own happiness and suffering. That is the mind part.

However, I was thinking that we have a conventional "I", which consists of the mind and form. With regard to form, when somebody is being cut, I cannot feel that. Likewise, somebody else cannot experience my sickness. When I see someone being harmed, my mind feels the pain but I my body feels nothing. How do I overcome this?

Ven Gyurme: To summarise your question, "I cannot feel the physical pain of others. Therefore, how can I generate the wish that his physical pain be the same as my own?"

Khen Rinpoche: So, when you see somebody in physical pain, you are not affected by it?

Student 1: The mind is affected but I don't feel the physical sensation of that pain.

Khen Rinpoche: You feel that there is a need to feel that pain physically?

Student 1: I have difficulty in relating to the physical, not mental, pain of somebody else. When my son is not happy, I feel that as a mother. Sometimes, I may feel even unhappier than him. But when, for example, his leg was broken, I don't feel my leg is broken.

Khen Rinpoche: Since you do not feel his pain, you don't give him medicine?

Student 1: At the mental level, the care is always there. I am stuck with regard to physical pain. How should I think?

Answer: We saw recently that it is possible and indeed necessary to generate the mind that regards all sentient beings as being connected to us, as "*my sentient beings*," just as a mother would regard her child as, "*my son*" or "*my daughter*." It is possible to train the mind in this way. A mother feels the pain of her child when the child breaks his arm or leg. Although the mother does not experience that pain physically, due to seeing *her* child suffering, the mother generates the mind that is unable to bear the suffering of her child. So when the thought of being unable to bear the suffering of others arises, the goal is achieved.

You don't have to feel physically the physical pain of the person in question. Not only is there no need for this, in fact, it is impossible to do so. Otherwise, how are you going to account for karma? We will experience the result of the karma that we have accumulated. When somebody breaks his leg or is in pain, it is not possible for us to have the same experience of the physical pain of that person. Likewise, if the child breaks his leg, the child is in physical pain but that specific pain cannot be experienced by his mother. However, the mother can still generate the mind that is unable to bear the suffering of her child.

In the teachings, it is mentioned that prior to cultivating and meditating on bodhicitta, first, one must train the mind and generate renunciation. One must have actualized the determination to be free from suffering. Renunciation is generated by focusing on one's own suffering, whereas the generation of compassion for other sentient beings occurs in dependence on seeing the suffering of others.

First, one has to see and feel one's own suffering. Lama Tsongkhapa's *Three Principal Aspect of the Path* states,

Swept away by the current of four powerful rivers,
Tied by the tight bonds of karma, so hard to undo,
Caught in the iron net of self-grasping,
Completely enveloped by the total darkness of ignorance,

Endlessly reborn in cyclic existence,
Ceaselessly tormented by the three sufferings.

- If we apply these verses to ourselves, by understanding our own suffering, we develop renunciation with the determination to be free.
- When we apply these verses to thinking of the suffering of others, we develop compassion for others.

Then the verse continues,

Thinking that all mothers are in such condition,
Generate the supreme mind of enlightenment.

If we break our leg or hand, or we have a headache, these are our own personal experiences. We experience that pain. A person who has broken his leg before, because of having experienced it, he can empathize with us because he knows how we feel. That person's leg may have recovered and he may no longer be in any physical pain, but because of having experienced that before, when he sees us in pain, he can empathize and understand our pain. It is also possible that he is unable to bear our suffering. Such a mind can arise. If there is such a mind, then it is possible to develop the wish for others to be free from suffering. He may even be motivated to do something about it.

Khen Rinpoche: Once, my mother told me that whenever somebody mentioned having a toothache, she could never understand what this pain was like. She had no concept of what a toothache is.

But she suddenly had a toothache. She was in so much pain and couldn't bear it. It was only then that she understood the suffering of a person who has a toothache and what tooth pain is. At that time, she fully understood what a toothache is. Otherwise, when people mentioned toothaches, she had no experience of this in her life.

REVIEW

We have many doubts or qualms about cherishing others. There are many reasons why we find it so difficult. We don't even see the reason for doing so. One of our qualms is this, "It is none of my business. I don't care if he is suffering. His suffering doesn't affect me, so why should I care?"

We don't feel the need to help others to eliminate their suffering because we feel that their suffering does not harm us. If we were to analyse this attitude of ours, what is the source of this attitude? Where does it come from? It comes from our very strong belief that the "I" and "others" are totally unrelated and unconnected. This is the source of that attitude. Not only are we unrelated and unconnected, we are inherently unrelated and unconnected.

If that is true, somebody may ask you, "Why then do you care so much for your future lives? Why do you practise the Dharma now?" Or relating it to this life, the question may be, "Why do you make so many plans for your retirement? Why do you care so much about what will happen to you when you are old, since the person you will be when you are old and the person you are now are not the same and are completely unconnected?" What will your answer be?

We know now that our attitude of not caring for others due to our belief that their suffering doesn't affect us is based on the very strong belief that others and us are different, unconnected and completely separate. This is the reason why we don't care about others. But if we feel that that reason is valid, why don't we apply the same reason to ourselves?

"There is no need for you to work for your future lives. There is no need for you to plan for retirement because the person you will be when you are old is a completely different person from who you are now. It is not the same person. Why are you bothering about the suffering you will experience in the future since it does not affect you now? "

This is true. But of course, we will not give in so easily. We will rebut, "Yes, we may be different but so what? Sooner or later, I will become that person and I will have to experience that suffering. That suffering will not affect me now but that doesn't mean it will not affect me later. I will still experience it later so I must plan and do something about it now."

This is our answer. It sounds logical but actually it is not. Why do we feel that way? This is because we regard the "I" of today and the "I" of the future very strongly to be one. That is why we feel this fear for our future. But apprehending the "I" of today and the "I" of the future to be one is a wrong concept.

Khen Rinpoche: Are you seeing the reason for this?

We only want to protect ourselves from our own suffering. We do not feel the need to protect others from their suffering. Worse, we do not even see the point of doing so. “I have to protect myself from the suffering that I will experience in the future because it is going to be my suffering and I will have to experience it. Why should I protect others from their suffering as I am will not experience their suffering?”

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?

Shantideva said in Verse 8.99 a, b, “If whenever there is suffering/ That itself must protect from that,” i.e., we protect ourselves from that suffering.

Verse 8.99 c, d then continues, “The suffering of the foot is not that of the hand/ Why then does it protect from that?” When your leg, but not your hand, is hurt, why does your hand interfere by removing the pain in your leg?

The point here is to refute whatever logic our negative mind may come up with.

We continue with Verse 8.100

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.

It is true that the hand and leg are separate and different things. In that sense, they are not connected to one another. Likewise, the “I” of this life, the “I” of future lives, the “I” of the present and the “I” of old age are separate and different from one another.

But because we are habituated to holding on to a self—“This is *my* hand. This is *my* leg.”—and holding on to the “I” of the present and “I” of the future to be the same “I”, we work to eliminate only our own suffering.

The objection in verse 8.100 states, “Although this may not be reasonable,/ It is engaged in due to apprehending a self”.

What we need to do is to see why that response is given to the objection raised.

Khen Rinpoche: I am now asking this question, “Why is that response an answer to the first two lines of Verse 8.100?”

Student 2: Due to grasping at my “self”, I see myself as totally separate from others. If I grasp that my hands and feet are inherently existent, similarly, my hands and my legs are not related to one another.

If I do not grasp at my “self”, I will be able to see that others and I are not inherently separate from one another. Similarly, if my foot is in pain, I have to protect it with my hand, because the relationship of “others” and “I” are the same as the hands and legs. If I can see the emptiness of my hands and legs, I will be able to see the relationship of others and I to be like the hands and legs. Therefore, I will be able to feel for others.

Student 1: Everyone has a continuum. Now, I am human, and in the next life, I don't know what I will be but I know it will be in the same continuum. This is why my mind, the conventional “I”, is so important. I am not saying that it is inherently existent but I am saying that there is a conventional “I” all the way through.

Relating to the hand and legs, this is why I am struggling with the physical pain of my hand and legs. If they are my hand and my legs, I cannot see how they are separate. Why? Because they exist within my continuum.

Khen Rinpoche: But if your leg is hurt, that pain is not in your hand, right?

Student 1: But I feel it.

Khen Rinpoche: You feel it in the hand?

Student 3: I don't feel it in the hand.

Khen Rinpoche: You feel it in the leg?

Student 1: Yes, I feel the pain in my leg. When my leg is hurt, only my leg feels the pain. Until such time as I have valid reason to see that my hand being myself is not hurt, my leg being sentient beings in the future is hurting. Eventually, this is a method to get rid of our suffering and *eventually*, we will see that we are actually one continuum!

Khen Rinpoche: That is not the question.

Your hand and leg are separate. You established that already.

Student 3: My hand is not my leg.

Khen Rinpoche: It is clear that when your leg is in pain, you don't feel that pain in your hand. When your leg is in pain, you don't say that your hand is in pain. Why?

Student 1: They are separate parts of the body but they are in my continuum as a whole.

Khen Rinpoche: We are not debating about that. Separate means separate. It is also clear that the physical pain you may experience ten years from now when you are older, you are not experiencing now, right?

Student 1: No.

Khen Rinpoche: You are not experiencing it now. That much is clear. But you will feel the burden that it is going to come.

Student 1: Right.

Khen Rinpoche: Isn't this why your hand is helping your leg even though the hand is separate from your leg and is not suffering now?

Why are we planning for retirement? Why are we preparing for our old age? This is because we hold the future "I" and the present "I" as one.

Khen Rinpoche: Think of your innate experience. Normally, how do we feel inside? Why do we work for our future?

We don't make a distinction between the present "I" and the future "I". Innately, we never think that they are different. In fact, innately, we think that they are the same. Because of that, that is why we prepare for our future.

That is our experience but that experience is completely incorrect. The mind that views the "I" at all times to be one and the same existence is completely wrong.

Student 1: I am not arguing on that point. I agree with that, 100 percent. I am saying that there is one continuum that is not inherently existent and one will be continuing on that continuum. For me, it is to see that this is *my* hand while my leg represents the rest of sentient beings. Isn't this what we are trying to establish? Therefore, you have to feel that even though your hand is not hurt, you have to take care of the leg, which is hurt.

Khen Rinpoche: The qualm you are raising has yet to be brought up. It is coming.

What are we trying to understand now is how the response given in Verse 8.100 is an answer to the objection in that same verse?

The response, "Whatever unreasonable 'self' and 'others,'" can refer to the mental attitude conceiving the "I" and "others" to be independent. This is a wrong concept, a wrong or perverse consciousness. Seeing self and others to be independent is wrong. Similarly, the concept that conceives of the self and others to be truly existent, inherently existent is also wrong. So the apprehension of a self is wrong and clinging on to it is incorrect. That wrong consciousness leads to all the problems and suffering. As such, it, "Should at all costs be abandoned."

I don't know whether that works as the intent or meaning of the response to the objection in Verse 8.100.

Having said all that, it is possible for us to think that the two situations mentioned so far are not the same. Two different people can be unrelated to one another, but the hands and feet of one person belongs to one collection. Likewise, the young and old person and the earlier and later part of life belongs to the same continuity. So with regard to the latter situation, it is appropriate for one to help the other. But it is not appropriate with regard to the former situation. So there is a difference. We can't equate the hands and legs that belong to the same collection to be the same as "others" and "self".

Although our hands and legs are separate, they belong to one collection. Although the "I"

of the present moment and the “I” of the future are different, nevertheless they belong to the same continuum. As such, that is the reason for us to eliminate our own suffering. But it is a completely different matter when it comes to talking about others and us.

EXPLAINING THE REASONS WHY IT IS REASONABLE TO MEDITATE ON SUCH AN EQUATION (CONT'D)

1. Extensive explanation

C. Dispelling the hindrance of thinking that it is unsuitable to meditate on the equality of self and other

Verse 8.101

That called “continuum” and “collection”
Are like falsities such as a rosary and an army.
The possessor of suffering does not exist,
Who has control over this?

What we call a continuum of consciousness is a coming together of many former and later moments. A continuum is just like a flowing river, made up of the earlier and later parts of the river flowing. Likewise, with the rosary.

A continuum and a collection are none other than that which are merely designated in dependence on the coming together of many different moments and different parts. There is no truly existent or inherently existent continuum and collection. As such, they “are like falsities.”

Without depending on these moments or parts, we cannot have a continuum or collection. They are merely designated or merely labelled by the mind. This is the reality but innately, we don’t think like that.

Whenever we think of a continuum or collection, innately, we grasp at that continuum or collection as something that exists from its own side. There is an inherently existent continuum. There is an inherently existent collection. But in reality, they are not like that. The continuum and collection are falsities that are merely designated by thought.

Likewise, with a collection such as an army or a forest. That collection does not exist from its own side. Take an army, for example. An army is merely designated in dependence upon many things, such as many individual soldiers coming together and being equipped with weapons. If not, they are not soldiers. So many things must come together. Then in dependence upon the coming together of many things, the mind merely designates, “army”. There is no real army existing right there from its own side.

Likewise, when we think of a forest, we don’t think of a dependently arisen forest or a merely labelled forest. We think of it as something that exists right there from its own side, a real forest. But there can be no forest without a collection of trees.

So be it a collection or a continuum, we innately conceive of them to exist inherently from their own side. In reality, an inherently existent collection or an inherently existent continuum does not exist. They are merely designated by the mind.

We also feel that there is an “I” who is the owner of all our experiences and suffering, conflating the past, present and future together. The past, present and future are all different but there is this “I” that experiences them all and is like their controller.

We think like that. It is very natural. But Verse 8.101 states, “The possessor of suffering does not exist,/ Who has control over this?” So the answer is that there is no independent self or “I” who is a controller of the experiences of suffering of the past, present and future.

If a collection or continuum does not exist inherently from its own side, the phenomenon that is designated in dependence upon that collection or continuum cannot possibly exist inherently as well. If the basis of designation does not exist inherently, that which is designated in dependence upon it also cannot be inherently existent either.

Let us look at the person that is imputed or designated in dependence upon the body and mind. The body and mind are themselves a collection and a continuum. They do not exist inherently. Therefore, that which is designated in dependence upon the collection or the continuum cannot exist inherently. If the body and mind do not exist inherently, the person that is designated in dependence on the body and mind cannot exist inherently. So understanding that a collection and a continuum are not inherently existent helps us with the understanding of the selflessness of a person.

Verse 8.102 a, b
The owner of suffering being non-existent,
There can be no distinction in all.

“The owner of suffering being non-existent,/ There can be no distinction in all”: Since the “I”, the person, does not exist inherently, as such, there cannot be an inherently independent experience of suffering. Since there is no inherently existent “I”, there cannot be an inherently existent “others”. As such, there is no inherently existent suffering that is experienced by us. There is no such thing as “my inherently existent suffering.” Likewise, there cannot be an inherently existent suffering that is experienced by others. As such, in that sense, self and others, one’s suffering and the suffering of others are equal.

2. *Synopsis*

Verse 8.102 c, d
Because it is suffering, I shall dispel it:
Therefore, what is the point in that?

Verse 8.103
OBJECTION: Why should I avert the suffering of all?
RESPONSE: There is no ground for argument;
If I avert it, I should avert all.
If not, I am just like sentient beings.

“Because it is suffering, I shall dispel it”: The point here is that we should dispel suffering because it is suffering. What is the point in differentiating between our

suffering from the suffering of others?

At this point, we have established that there is no inherently existent person. Somebody may debate with us, “If there is no inherently existent person, then why do you need to work so hard to eliminate the suffering of others?”

Our response is that there is no need to debate about this because, while it is true that things do not exist inherently—the self, others, our suffering, their suffering—they do exist conventionally. The debate here is not from an ultimate point of view because conventionally speaking, there is a conventionally existent “self”, a conventionally existent “others” and conventionally existent suffering.

In the next lesson we will continue with a new qualm or objection.

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Some people think, “If I meditate on compassion, my own suffering will increase because I have to consider the suffering of others.” We have this kind of wrong concept. How do we eliminate it?

First, we have to consider whether our suffering actually increases when we meditate on compassion. When we generate compassion, does our suffering increase?

*Khen Rinpoche: The question is this: “When we meditate on and generate compassion, does our suffering increase or decrease?” Bring your answer to class on Thursday. The answer is in the text. So read up and bring your answer.*

*Question:* I understand that the self of the today and the self of tomorrow are not the same. Can I consider the self of tomorrow as “other” compared to the self of now?

*Answer:* There is a self of today and there is a self of tomorrow. Since these two are not the same, they are different. Is the self of tomorrow “self” or “other”? It is very clear that the “I” of tomorrow is not the “I” of now. Tomorrow is not today.

The “I” of tomorrow is not the “I” of now. Since tomorrow does not exist now, how can the “I” of tomorrow be the “I” of now? Because the “I” of tomorrow exists and is designated in dependence upon time, i.e., tomorrow. Since tomorrow is not today, therefore, the “I” that is designated in dependence upon the time, tomorrow, does not exist now.

*Student 4:* (Inaudible).

*Khen Rinpoche:* The “I” of tomorrow and the “I” of today are designated in dependence upon a continuum of consciousness. It is the same continuum, not somebody else’s continuum. This particular continuum of consciousness, designated in dependence on the “I”, be it the “I” of today or the “I” of tomorrow, is not designated upon the continuum of consciousness of another person.

Because the “I” of tomorrow and the “I” of today are designated in dependence upon

this one specific continuum of consciousness, i.e., the same consciousness, therefore, it is incorrect to say that the “I” of tomorrow is “other”. The “I” of tomorrow is not the “other” of the division into “self” and “other”. It depends on how you understand the word, “other”. If “other” here refers to the “other” in the sense of “self” and “other”, then the “I” of tomorrow is not “other”.

However, in the sense of being same or different, where “other” means different, then obviously, in that context, the “I” of tomorrow is an “other”.

*Khen Rinpoche: OM MANI PADME HUM. It is better to chant OM MANI PADME HUM.*

*Sometimes, some of these topics can be very challenging but this topic is really wonderful. At the same time, it is very challenging. Not like OM MANI PADME HUM.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

Some people have been asking about the practice of Six Session Guru Yoga.

I will give a brief introduction to this practice. There is no time to go through everything in detail.

The session is on this Sunday, at 10 am to 12 noon and is only for those who have received the highest yoga tantra initiation.

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