

**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 11****21 April 2016**

Summary—The practice of equalising self and others. Chapter 8. Verse 8.104. Explaining the reasons why it is reasonable to meditate on such an equation (cont'd); Abandoning objections.

**SUMMARY—THE PRACTICE OF EQUALISING SELF AND OTHERS**

Over the last few lessons, we have been looking at the practice of equalizing self and others. I am going to give you a summary of what we have covered so far for that specific topic. Try to concentrate and listen to what I am going to say. Since we have already gone through the verses in the text in class, now is not the time to read the text. Rather, just pay attention to what I am going to say and as you listen, see whether you can reflect on what is said.

*1. All sentient beings have been our mothers and loved ones*

First, see whether you understand that your rebirth has no beginning and your consciousness will go on forever with numberless rebirths to come. Try to get a feeling for that. Since beginningless rebirths, all of us have had to rely and depend on others so all beings have been our mothers, and all beings have been our loved ones. There isn't any sentient being who has not been our mother or who has not been our loved one.

To arrive at an ascertainment of this—a definite feeling and understanding from the depths of your heart with the application of reasoning and logic—you need to think that there isn't a single sentient being who has not been your mother or your loved one. This is the first thing you need to generate in your heart.

Of course, you cannot expect to achieve this ascertainment, understanding and feeling right away, simply by thinking about it now. What I am doing now is to suggest to you an approach to this topic, especially for those of you who intend to meditate on this topic. So I am showing you one of the methods that you can bring home with you to work on for a period of time.

So, that is the first thing to think about. By meditating on this—that there isn't a single sentient being who has not been your mother or loved one since your beginningless rebirths—you will get the feeling in your heart that definitely, all beings have been your mother and loved one. You will know whether it is a real ascertainment or not.

*2. Wishing every happiness for others & wishing them to be free from suffering*

The next thing to think about is this: wishing that every happiness that we have experienced in our own lives since our beginningless rebirths be bestowed on others. We generate this thought, "May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes. How wonderful it would be if they have happiness and its causes. I will make sure that they

have happiness and its causes.”

Likewise, with whatever suffering we have experienced in this life, be it physical pain or mental unhappiness, we use those experiences and generate the wish from our heart, “May others never experience this kind of suffering.”

### 3. *Overcoming qualms*

But when we attempt to generate such thoughts in our mind—sincerely wishing others to have happiness and not to experience suffering—the qualms mentioned by Shantideva in this text may arise.

~ *The qualm that the suffering of others does not affect us*

For example, we may think, “But why is the suffering of others any of my business? So what if they suffer? Even if they are suffering, I don’t experience their suffering. Just as when I suffer, they don’t experience my suffering.”

When such qualms arise, we cannot just ignore them. We have to deal with them and remove these qualms and doubts.

The qualm we have now is the thought, “There is no need for me to eliminate the suffering of others because their suffering doesn’t harm or affect me at all. So why should I work to remove their suffering?” The main reason is that their suffering doesn’t harm us.

If this is the qualm, we should look at the effort we make, working so hard to prepare for our old age. We put in so much time, effort and money to make sure we have a happy retirement. Hopefully, everything will go well and we can have a comfortable life. But why do we do this? Why should we prepare for our retirement, for a potential future suffering that is not affecting us right now? We have to ask ourselves this question.

We put in so much time, effort, money and resources to ensure that we will live happily in our old age because we are afraid of suffering when we are old. But why are we working on something that hasn’t happened yet? There is no guarantee that it will happen and, in the first place, there is no guarantee we will even make it to old age!

The “I” of now and the “I” that we will become when we are old are not one and the same. They are different. But although they are different, innately, we believe that they are the same. We have this strong belief that the “I” we will be when we are old and the “I” of now *are* the same although they are *not* the same.

For example, if we drop something into a very fast flowing river, that object will be carried away by the river. When we return to the same part of the river the next day, we think, “This is the river that carried away the object I had dropped into it.” But it is no longer the same river. Nevertheless, when we look at it, instinctively, we think it is exactly the same river. The mind that holds on to the earlier and later moments of the river to be one and the same is a mistaken mind.

This example serves to illustrate the natural thought we all have that holds on to the “I” of the present and the “I” of the future to be one and the same. This is a completely

wrong concept and it has to be eliminated.

When we deal with this wrong concept, it will help us to overcome the natural feeling we have that the “I” and “others” are completely unrelated and unconnected, that there is a real “me” over here and there is a real “you” over there and we are completely individual, independent and unconnected.

*~ The qualm that the “I” of now and the “I” of the future belong to one continuum*

By reflecting in the abovementioned way, I think we will see that the suffering we will experience in the future has yet to or may not even happen. But then another qualm may arise: “The suffering of the future does not exist now but my mind of the present will continue on into the future. Likewise, my body of the present will exist when I’m old. These two “Is”—the “I” of the present and the “I” of the future—are connected in the sense of being the same continua of consciousness and body. Therefore, it is right for me to eliminate my own suffering and to achieve my own happiness. You cannot say that there is equality between others and myself. This is a completely different matter.”

This qualm arises because we think that there is a real continua of the consciousness and body, whereas they do not exist from their own side. They do not exist truly.

When we think of a continuum, we conceive it to be independent and real, something that we can point to. But a continuum has to depend on earlier and later moments. If it is a real continuum, it has to be found either in the earlier moment, the present moment or the later moment. So where is the continuum? Is it in the earlier moment of the continuum? No, that is not the continuum. We cannot find the continuum in the later moment either. What is left then is the present moment.

But we cannot talk about the present moment without the past moment. It is only in dependence on the past that we have the present. Furthermore, if we look for the continuum in the present moment, and we divide up the present moment, then where is the continuum that we can point to?

When we think of a continuum, how does it appear to our mind? Without checking further, naturally, it appears to us as if there is something right there from its own side, existing independently. Yet, when we look for it, we cannot find it. This reflection helps us to see the fact that there is no inherently existent continuum.

*~ The qualm of the inherently existent “I”*

But even if we get some understanding that there is no independent continuum or collection through reasoning, we still have this strong feeling that there is a real “I”. We think that there is an “I” that pervades all time—be it the past, present or future—who is the experiencer of suffering or happiness. How does this “I” appear to us? We believe that this “I” is real and inherently existent.

At the end of the day, it comes down to checking whether there is such a real, inherently existent “I” or not. Does this “I” exist in the way it appears? This is something we have to analyse over and over again. It is through that analysis that we will be able to delineate the view of selflessness.

The “I”, the self or person has to exist in relation to the body, which is a collection, and the mind or consciousness, which is a continuum. The “I” or person is that which is imputed in dependence upon the aggregates, the body and mind.

From an earlier analysis, you will understand by now that whether it is a collection, the body, or a continuum, the consciousness, if the basis of designation, the body and mind, does not exist inherently from its own side, then the person, the “I”, which is the phenomenon that is designated in dependence upon the body and mind, also cannot exist inherently. Understanding how the body and mind are not inherently existent helps us to understand that the person, the “I”, cannot exist inherently.

The teachings tell us that the “I”, the self, which we cherish so much and consider to be most precious and important, actually does not exist in the way we believe it to exist. The reality is that the “I” does not exist in the way it appears to us. As such, the “I” is like an illusion. It is a falsity.

By applying this line of reasoning, we would be able to generate the understanding that the “I” exists in mere name and is merely imputed by thought.

The “I” normally appears to us to exist independently and from its own side. We feel as if we can almost touch it and we are confident that we can find it. But it is possible for us to see that it doesn’t exist, to believe that it does not exist and to understand that the “I” does not exist in the way it appears to us. So, it is possible to see the emptiness of that “I”.

Once we see the emptiness of the “I”, from that experience, we can turn our attention to “others” and any phenomena that exist and are included in samsara and nirvana. We will be able to realize that they are all the same in being empty of existing inherently. They exist only in mere name and are like illusions.

Just as we see the emptiness of the “I”, because of that realization and understanding, we will also be able to see the emptiness of “others”. Although “others” exist, we realize that they do not exist in the way they appear. Although they still appear to be truly and inherently existent, we realize that is hallucinatory. They exist in mere name and they do not exist in the way they appear.

Once we have the experience of the points that we are talking about here, the teachings then say that it is possible to regard others as we regard ourselves.

In order to generate bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self and others, before that, first, we must meditate on the methods that will enable us to equalize self and others.

There are two obstacles to generating the equality of self and others:

- The feeling that “I am here” and “You are there,” that we exist inherently and are completely unconnected to one another.
- Our suffering is real whereas your suffering is your own business.

This feeling of disconnectedness is the obstacle to generating the thought of equalizing self and other. This is why it is said in the teachings that the bodhicitta that is generated

through cultivating exchanging self and others is very powerful because it has the support of the realization of emptiness. Even in this summary, there are points that are presented to support this argument.

This is a summary of what we have been looking at in the past few lessons. We have gone through the relevant verses already but if we were to summarize all those verses, this is it.

Do you have any qualms or questions pertaining to what we have just covered? Please ask if you do.

*Student 1:* Coming back to the conventional “I” and conventional “others”, I would like to break them down and simplify them into the same and different:

- The similarity between the conventional “I” and the conventional “others” would be their emptiness of inherent existence. On that basis, we generate the feeling of equalizing self and others.
- The difference lies in the momentary experience that the conventional “I” and the conventional “others” have. Obviously, all these experiences are dependent arising and are dependently designated.

*Khen Rinpoche:* I don't get what you are talking about.

(Student 1 attempts to clarify her question).

*Khen Rinpoche:* What we have to figure out is how innately we view the world and others. There is a real “I” that exists as real, solid, and the most important and precious thing in the world. It is not just simply a case of there being a “you” and an “I”. There is a *real* “I” and a *real* “you” where the distinction is so black and white there is no room for change. We are completely unrelated, unconnected and truly different from one another. Isn't that our reality?

But it is said that this view is false and wrong. We have to see that for ourselves. This requires us to look into our own mind and see how our mind operates. According to the teachings, we don't exist in the way we believe we exist.

If we look at our own experience, our natural sense of the “I” is that it is very real, self-established and independent, truly and inherently existent, existing from its own side.

The fundamental reason why we *can* equalize self and others is the fact that the “I” is merely imputed by thought. Just as the “I” is merely imputed by thought, “others” are also merely imputed by thought. This understanding breaks down our solid concept of “I” and “others” being completely unrelated and unconnected to one another. It is said that we need to get rid of that concept. Only then can we equalize self and others. We have to see this for ourselves.

*Question:* It is said that the reason why the “I” of now is helping the “I” of the future is because we see that there is an inherently existent “I”. But even if I were to accept that there is no inherently existent self because there is a causal relationship between the “I” of now and the “I” of the future, this the reason why we are helping each other. How

then do we counter this argument? This is why I find the earlier reason to be incomplete. Even though there is no inherently existent self, the “I” of now will help the “I” of the future because there is a causal relationship.

*Khen Rinpoche:* You still have to accomplish your own purpose. We are not saying that once you have realized emptiness, you don’t have to accomplish and work for your own purpose. We are not saying that.

The point here is that if you do realize the emptiness of the self, you will also realize the emptiness of others. That realization of the emptiness of others and yourself—that you are both the same in being empty—makes it possible to equalize self and others. This is the argument.

Your questions should pertain to what we have discussed today, not on other things. If you don’t buy the argument, state your objections but make it short and to the point.

*Question:* How does understanding that the self of the present is different from the self of the future help to reduce my grasping at the “I” and “others” to be different?

*Answer:* Proving that the “I” of the present is different from the “I” of the future is seeking to eliminate a wrong concept. In the first place, you must understand where this reasoning came from.

What was the qualm that we were trying to eliminate? The first qualm is this: “Your suffering does not affect me so it is none of my business. Why should I care?” We have this mind that thinks that others and ourselves are different. Because we are different, therefore there is no need for us to take care of others, “There is no need for me to eliminate your suffering.”

In order to address that qualm, we throw this argument back to ourselves, to our negative mind that is making this difference. The argument is this: “Why then are you preparing to have a happy retirement and to eliminate the suffering of your old age? The suffering of old age is different from now, as it does not affect you now.”

This is how the reasoning arose in order to address that qualm.

But we will refute that reasoning in this way, “How is that the same thing? Others and I are completely different whereas we cannot say that the “I” of the future is different in the same way. In the future, it is still me. I am the one who is going to suffer. It is the same body and the same mind.” This is what we think.

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Although Chapter Eight is called *Teachings on Concentration*, these are the most important points in this chapter and the main ones we have to think about.

The meditation on bodhicitta is extremely important.

In the presentation of karma and its effects, the Buddha said that every single happiness

and pleasure that we have experienced, is experiencing and will experience are the results of virtuous karma or virtue.

If that is the case, where did this virtue come from? Virtue does not arise without a cause or conditions. The question we have to ask is, “Why do we have virtue?”

The answer is this: “This is due to the Buddha’s enlightened activities.” Simply speaking, the Buddha is the empowering condition and the Buddha’s enlightened activity is the cause of the virtue in the minds of all sentient beings. To put it in an even simpler way, virtue come from the blessings of the Buddha.

If all the happiness in our continuum, the result of our virtue, come about because of the Buddha’s enlightened activities, then what is a buddha? Where did buddhas come from?

Buddhas come from bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas come from bodhicitta. Bodhisattvas arise because of their meditation on bodhicitta.

From this, we can see that bodhicitta is the source of every happiness, not just our own happiness but every happiness that has ever existed and will ever exist. It is the main source of all the temporal happiness in samsara and the source of nirvana, liberation.

Where does bodhicitta come from? It comes from cherishing and respecting sentient beings. Basically, it comes from suffering sentient beings. Going by this reasoning, logically, we have to say that sentient beings are most precious because they are the source of every single happiness.

We have to accept this. Those who are able to see this point are also able to see how all sentient beings are more important than themselves. This is why they are able to work so hard for sentient beings, to achieve their happiness. There is no concept of difficulty or the word, “difficult,” in their vocabulary. Even if they do meet with so-called “difficulties,” these will never become causes for them to be tired or discouraged. In fact, it will make them even more determined. Because they see the point, even if they meet with challenges or difficulties, in their heart, they don’t find them difficult. They are not affected at all because of their unbelievable determination. The point is that generating bodhicitta is founded on reason.

To people who have bodhicitta, from their perspective, what are normally considered challenges are not considered difficulties or challenges. They are not affected by them in a negative way. They do not get discouraged; instead, they become more courageous and determined. Such bodhisattvas are not affected by whatever difficulties, problems, sicknesses or spirit harms they may encounter. Not only that, they are able to utilize every single experience and transform it into a cause for enlightenment. So these so-called obstacles such as spirit harm or sicknesses only become causes for them to achieve enlightenment. This is why this is described in the teachings as transforming adverse conditions into the path for enlightenment.

For those who have bodhicitta, difficult conditions do not discourage them. Instead, it makes them even more courageous and more determined, their compassion grows stronger and it makes them work even harder for sentient beings.

The great Kadampa masters said, “If you have bodhicitta, your bodhicitta will quickly purify your obscurations. If you have bodhicitta, your bodhicitta will enable you to quickly finish the accumulation of merit.”

All these are teachings on generating the thought of benefitting others, the ultimate good heart, and bodhicitta. They help us to benefit others, starting from something as small as just wishing to be able to help others by making prayers. It is said that one’s meditation on bodhicitta is more powerful than doing the tantric practice of Vajrasattva recitation and meditation to purify our negativities. It is even more powerful than reciting hundreds of thousands of Vajrasattva mantras.

This is the answer to the qualm, “If I meditate on compassion, my own suffering will increase and there will be so many problems.

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

#### *Abandoning objections*

Verse 8.104

OBJECTION: Since compassion will multiply suffering greatly,

Why should I diligently develop it?

RESPONSE: If one were to contemplate the suffering of migrating beings,

How could the suffering of compassion be more?

Whatever compassion we may have in our heart is not the real compassion that is founded on valid reasons or support. Whatever compassion we think we have is based on attachment. It is biased compassion, which is not compassion at all because it does not have a valid support. Rather, it is based on attachment, which is a delusion and wrong concept. This is why our so-called compassion brings about more suffering.

Real compassion and bodhicitta are founded completely on valid reasons. If we meditate correctly on compassion, our meditation on compassion will not cause us more suffering.

*Khen Rinpoche: So, please meditate. The answer is “Don’t worry. Please meditate. With good reasons as support, it will bring more happiness.”*

*Question: If we generate compassion, how can we tell whether it is objectified or non-objectified compassion?*

*Khen Rinpoche: Are you asking how do you know whether it is real compassion or not?*

*Answer: There is only one kind of compassion. I guess you can say that if it is valid compassion, when we see others suffering, our compassion—the mind that is unable to bear the suffering of others—should increase instead of weakening. If it is false compassion or not compassion at all, then the mind that is unable to bear the suffering*



of others will lead to you giving up and losing hope, becoming less determined to help others and bring you more unhappiness and suffering. Then you know it is not real compassion.

*Khen Rinpoche: You can see for yourself whether you have compassion or not.*

When it comes to whether compassion will degenerate or not, I think the compassion of those people who generated bodhicitta on the basis of having realised emptiness will never degenerate.

In the presentation of mind generation into 22 types by way of simile or example, the first mind generation is called earth-like mind generation. The second mind generation is called gold-like mind generation. These are achieved only when one reaches the middle or medium path of accumulation.

It is said in the teaching that once one reaches the middle path of accumulation, the mind generation of bodhicitta will never ever degenerate.

If that is the case, can we make a case for the necessity of generating the realization of emptiness at that point in time? That means once one is on the middle path of accumulation, one necessarily has the realization of emptiness. Can we make a case for that? This is something for you to think about.

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