

**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 12****26 April 2016**

Chapter 8. Verses 8.104—8.106: Explaining the reasons why it is reasonable to meditate on such an equation (cont'd); Abandoning objections. Verses 8.107—8.110: The benefits of such meditations. Verses 8.111—8.112: One can develop such an attitude if one familiarises oneself with the equality of self and other. Verses 8.113—8.120: The way to exchange self and other; Verses 8.113—8.114. Brief presentation; Verses 8.115—8.120: Extensive explanation.

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

In the context of equalizing self and others, the point is that others are equal to oneself. So, just as we will do whatever we can to eliminate our suffering and accomplish our own happiness, likewise, we should do the same for others, i.e., we should also eliminate their suffering and accomplish their happiness.

In the practice of equalizing self and others, one trains to regard others as one, i.e., equal to or the same as oneself. When one has that view of equality, naturally, when one sees others suffer, one will generate the mind that is unable to bear their suffering.

This qualm may arise: “Why do we need to subject ourselves to this additional suffering?” When we see others suffer and we are unable to bear it, isn’t that a form of additional suffering for ourselves? Why should we add this additional suffering to our lives? Why do we need to do that?

The point is that we want to overcome suffering and not create additional suffering on top of whatever suffering we may already have in our lives. In the practice of equalizing self and others, if we are really able to regard others as one, then when we see others suffering, naturally, we will feel uneasy and are unable to bear their suffering.

The main purpose of this exercise is to overcome suffering. If we feel that we are getting more suffering at the end of the day, then why should we do it? This qualm is raised in Verse 8.104.

*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?

Do you understand the response to the qualm? Are you able to explain how it is an

answer to the qualm?

You can approach this root text in a very simple way. You can give it a cursory look and read it in a superficial way. Then we can finish the text very quickly. But if you were to probe beneath the surface and look at what the text is trying to say exactly, then this text becomes more challenging.

You are in a long term study program. This is not an introductory course to Buddhism. This study program demands that you read the text, think about it, analyse it and find out what exactly it is trying to say. You have to go beneath the surface, to think about the text and work at finding out the meaning of the teachings. If you are seriously interested in learning, if you are a real student, then you have to read the text, think about it and pursue this topic in-depth. This is what you have to do. But if you are not serious about learning, then that is a completely different matter.

The response is saying is that for those who possess bodhicitta in their minds, i.e., bodhisattvas, when they meditate on the suffering of sentient beings, their own suffering does not increase. Rather, when they meditate on the suffering of sentient beings, their own suffering is lessened. When the bodhisattvas meditate on compassion for suffering sentient beings, not only do their suffering not increase but their meditation exhausts and brings to an end their own suffering.

It was mentioned before that the bodhisattvas' realization of bodhicitta is conjoined with the wisdom realizing emptiness. Their ultimate good heart, bodhicitta, is supported by a valid mind, i.e., the wisdom that sees the ultimate nature of reality. So when these special beings meet with challenges, difficulties or suffering, their suffering does not bother them and do not affect them in a negative way.

In fact, because their bodhicitta is conjoined with the wisdom realising emptiness, they are able to transform the adverse situations and difficulties that they encounter into conditions for increasing their happiness and their practice of the good heart, bodhicitta. Their hardships do not bother them and do not cause them any mental anguish or disturbance. In fact, it only serves to strengthen their practice and increase their happiness. Furthermore, the stronger their compassion, the nearer they are to attaining full enlightenment. As such, in the context here, their meditation on compassion does not contribute to their suffering. Rather, it actually brings them even more happiness.

Of course, this is not our experience. We are not able to do this. Even in a situation where our good heart manifests, let's say, when someone is telling us his problems, we will be affected and our mind will be disturbed. We will feel unhappy and uneasy. This happens because whatever good heart we have is not supported by a valid mind. In fact, most of the time, it is based on wrong concepts and is completely biased. It is not real love and real compassion. It is only concern or affection for those we consider to be on our side, in our camp. This is the reality.

Why then is there a need to reflect on suffering?

Verse 8.105  
If by one suffering

Much suffering would be destroyed,  
Kind people would produce it  
For themselves and others.

Verse 8.106

Thus Supusha-chandra,  
Although aware of the harm the king would cause him,  
Did not prevent his own suffering  
Because it would eradicate the suffering of many.

Verse 8.105 points out that if our experience of a particular suffering can lead to the elimination of a greater suffering, it is appropriate and there is purpose to experiencing that suffering.

For example, we go for an operation knowing we will experience pain and discomfort but we are prepared to put up with it as there is a greater purpose to be served by undergoing the operation. Likewise, if our experience of suffering is going to be very beneficial for all sentient beings, contributing to their happiness and eliminate their suffering, then our suffering should be embraced instead of avoided. We must go through it for the sake of others.

It is said that bodhisattvas accept suffering voluntarily. In the first place, it is difficult for bodhisattvas to experience any mental anguish because of the level of their mind. Even if they should experience some unhappiness, they will accept it voluntarily because they know that it is going to be beneficial for all sentient beings.

There is an account of the bodhisattva Supusha-chandra from the *King of Concentration Sutra*. This bodhisattva and several thousand other bodhisattvas were living in an area under the control of a king. The Buddha's teachings were already in decline during that time. They had been banished to the forest by this king. One day, through his clairvoyance, this bodhisattva saw that if he returned to where the king was and teach the Dharma to many of his subjects there, many of them will be liberated from their suffering. If he didn't teach them the Dharma, all these sentient beings will not be free of their suffering. But he also knew that if he went, the king will chop his head off.

This bodhisattva went into that town and stayed there for seven days during which he revealed and taught the Dharma to many beings. At night, without food and rest, he would circumambulate a stupa containing the relics of the Buddha for the whole night.

The king was not happy with this bodhisattva and ordered a butcher to kill him. The butcher did kill the bodhisattva. However, no matter where the holy body of that bodhisattva was cut, blood did not spill out. Instead, milk flowed out. That was an extraordinary sign. The bodhisattva died but when the king saw those unbelievable signs, he generated great remorse and regret. So he gathered all the remains of that bodhisattva's holy body and enshrined them in a stupa.

This account serves to illustrate the point made earlier—if the experience of suffering will lead to great benefit for many sentient beings, then one should endure it. That bodhisattva knew that he will be killed but as a result of him teaching the Dharma and

sacrificing his life, tens of thousands of sentient beings were freed from their suffering and from samsara. Many achieved the higher rebirths of humans and gods. Many also achieved liberation. Others generated bodhicitta. Because of these great benefits, he endured the suffering of being killed.

What is the benefit of meditating on and generating this kind of compassion? It is said that those special individuals who are dedicated completely to the welfare of others—their only mission in life is to benefit others—do not have many problems in their life.

### **THE BENEFITS OF SUCH MEDITATIONS**

#### *1. Singly applying oneself to the welfare of others is not in itself great suffering*

Verse 8.107

One whose continuum is familiarized in this way,  
Since he takes joy in pacifying others' sufferings,  
Will enter even Relentless Torment  
Just as a swan enters a lotus pool.

The minds of these special beings, the bodhisattvas, are completely trained in and habituated to equalizing self and others and exchanging self and others. They enjoy pacifying the suffering of sentient beings even if they were to experience some challenges or hardships in that process. They do so happily. They don't suffer. Their experience is likened to swans happily taking to a pool of water. It is said that bodhisattvas will have no qualms about going to even the deepest of hot hells, the hell of Relentless Torment, if there is benefit in doing so.

Even in our own limited experience, we can see the power of the mind. If we are doing something that we really enjoy, we will never feel that it is difficult or a burden. When we were young and playing under the sun, there were times when we were so engrossed in our play that it didn't matter that the sun was very hot indeed. We just continued playing. We were not bothered by the heat of the sun. This shows the power of our mind.

Our mind decides on and controls everything. This applies to everything we do in life. If we really want or enjoy doing something, then nothing is difficult. It is the same with coming to class to learn the Dharma. If you are really enthusiastic and yearning to learn the Dharma, it is not difficult at all. But if there is no real interest and yearning, it is difficult to do so. Not only does your suffering not decrease, but when you come to class, you may feel more stressed and unhappy inside.

The next verse is saying that the joy of working for others is the highest level of happiness. It is the best happiness. As such, it is only reasonable and appropriate to work for others.

#### *2. As the bliss of that is supreme, one engages in [working for] others' welfare*

Verse 8.108

Will not the ocean of joy  
If all beings are free  
Satisfy me?  
What is the use of desiring liberation?

This verse is saying that the happiness one will achieve through one's own individual liberation is nothing compared to the bliss and the satisfaction one gets when one is able to liberate all sentient beings. The happiness that one can achieve by benefitting all sentient beings is unparalleled. The happiness one gets from achieving one's own individual liberation pales in comparison.

3. *One's own arrogance comes to be pacified*

Verse 8.109 a, b

Due to that, although working for the welfare of others,  
There is no conceit or amazement.

4. *The pleasure and benefits of such meditations do not depend on reciprocation and fully ripened effects*

Verse 8.109 c, d

Because of the joy in others' welfare unequivocally,  
There is no hope for ripening effects

Those who genuinely and solely work to benefit others, without any hidden agenda or other motivation, will never feel any sense of superiority, "I did this" or "I did that." They don't feel any need to claim credit or to feel important, "There is no conceit or amazement." These bodhisattvas regard working for sentient beings as their job, something that they must do. Since this is the case, they do not have any inflated sense of pride or arrogance because to them, they are just doing their job.

They also do not expect anything in return from anybody, "Because of the joy in others' welfare unequivocally,/ There is no hope for ripening effects." They do not even expect to experience the fruitional effects of their good deeds.

These extraordinary bodhisattvas do not expect anything in return or to gain anything in this life, such as appreciation, praise or reward. Not only that. They do not hope for any results in the future, such as, "I am creating merit now so that I will get a good result in the future." They don't even wish for that. Basically, they don't wish for anything that has to do with samsara.

The main message here is that if we really want to benefit others, make sure we do so without any hidden agenda. If we can do this sincerely from the heart without any expectations, we will not experience any difficulties. It is said that those who work sincerely for others experience only bliss and happiness.

So we have to try our best and think about what it means to benefit others. If we are in a position to help others in our daily lives, we need to make sure we are doing so without any other motive or agenda. If we can do this sincerely, it is said that there is only peace and happiness. For these reasons, it is therefore appropriate to meditate on equalizing self and others.

5. *It is due to such reasons that meditating on the equality of self and others is said to be reasonable*

Verse 8.110

Therefore just as I protect myself

From unpleasant things however small,  
In the same way I should act towards others  
With a mind of protection and a compassionate mind.

Since self and others are equal and there is no difference between us, we should meditate on equalising self and others. Just as we protect ourselves from suffering, we should also protect others from suffering. The example given here is that just as we would go all out to protect ourselves from the smallest suffering, we should do likewise for others and protect them from any suffering.

It is said that if we meditate and train our minds in developing this sense of equality, we can develop it.

**ONE CAN DEVELOP SUCH AN ATTITUDE IF ONE FAMILIARIZES ONESELF WITH THE EQUALITY OF SELF AND OTHER**

Verse 8.111  
Although not [my] possessions,  
Through familiarity  
I have come to regard  
The drops of sperm and blood of others as “I”.

Verse 8.112  
So in the same way, why should I be unable  
To apprehend the bodies of others as “I”?  
It is not difficult to posit  
My body as also “other.”

It is said that if we are not accustomed or habituated to equalizing self and others, it is very difficult to do so. However, the teachings point out that if we are habituated to it, it is possible.

Our body came from the egg and sperm of our parents. The egg and sperm of our parents do not belong to us but we regard the body that results from them to be “my” body, not somebody else’s body. However, if we think about it, what we have come to regard as “my” body actually doesn’t belong to us. Our body came from our parents, specifically, the egg and sperm of our parents. These are parts of our parents’ bodies, not our body. Why then are we calling something that is not ours “our” body?

*Student:* (Inaudible).

*Khen Rinpoche:* How can you have control over your parents’ egg and sperm?

*Student:* Because I have inhabited this body for a long time, it belongs to me and I can do whatever I want with it. Legally, if you stay in a place for a long time, the land belongs to you.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Even if it is your own house, it doesn’t mean that you will be able to stay in it for as long as you like.

The egg and sperm that our consciousness entered are not ours. However, through the power of familiarisation and appropriation, we say the body is “mine”.

Does the concept of “my” body exist from the side of our parents’ egg and sperm? Did that concept exist from day one, “It is my body”?

The answer is no. It has never been “our” body from the side of the egg and sperm. They are the basis of designation. Our consciousness entered our parents’ egg and sperm and because of that relationship, they are the basis of designation upon which we impute “my” body. “Our” body is merely designated in dependence upon the egg and sperm. There is nothing coming from the side of the egg and sperm. Then through familiarity, we have become accustomed to seeing it as “my” body.

The argument is that then we should be able to apprehend the bodies of others in the same way by being accustomed to doing so.

*Khen Rinpoche: Are you getting the point here?*

We are always trying to prove that it is possible to equalise self and others. By using this example and understanding its meaning, if we become accustomed to doing so, then it is possible to regard the bodies of all sentient beings as our own body. Therefore, we will be able to generate the attitude of wanting to benefit them, remove their suffering and accomplish their happiness.

On the basis of equalizing self and others, when one reflects on the advantages of cherishing others, one will be able to work to eliminate their suffering.

## **THE WAY TO EXCHANGE SELF AND OTHER**

*A brief presentation*

~ *The way to exchange self and other*

Verse 8.113

Having seen the mistakes in (cherishing) myself <sup>1</sup>

And to be an ocean of excellences with respect to others,

I shall cultivate completely discarding cherishing myself

And adopting others.

This is a brief explanation of the way to exchange self and others. What exactly is it and what does it mean?

It is said that cherishing oneself is the doorway to all suffering and problems while cherishing others is the source of every happiness and all qualities. So first, we have to understand the faults of cherishing oneself and the benefits of cherishing others. By understanding this, the way to exchange self and others is to reverse the two, i.e., we abandon our self-cherishing and we cultivate the mind that cherishes others.

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<sup>1</sup> The heading for Verse 8.113 as well as the first line of this verse is missing from the root text. Verse 8.113 b, c, d are merged with Verse. 8.112.

~ *The reasons it is appropriate to familiarize oneself with such attitudes*

Verse 8.114

In the same way as the hands and so forth  
Are asserted as limbs of the body,  
Likewise why are embodied creatures  
Not asserted as limbs of migrating beings?

Our hands and feet are different parts of the body. They are not the same but because they are parts of our body, we protect them along with our other body parts. Similarly, although sentient beings are numberless and they are all different, we should meditate on cherishing all of them.

This is related to what we have been discussing all this while. Right from the beginning, if we are able to regard others as “my” sentient beings, as one with us, it is said that one will be able to cherish and protect them.

*Extensive explanation*

~ *Familiarising oneself with cherishing others*

First, in the extensive explanation, there is the meditation on cherishing others and starting with that, eventually, one will be able to exchange self and others.

Verse 8.115

Through familiarization a mind of “I” arises  
Towards this body devoid of a self;  
In a similar way, why would a mind of “I” not be produced  
Towards other sentient beings also through familiarization?

Verse 8.116 a, b

Although I enact others’ welfare in this way,  
Conceit or amazement will not arise.

I think these verses are similar to Verses 8.111 and 8.112. It is a matter of getting habituated to the idea. Once the mind is trained, one will be able to see others as the same as oneself. With that attitude, one works for others and one will not generate any arrogance, conceit or amazement.

Verses 8.111 and 8.112 belonged to the section on equalising self and others. The same point is being made here in the section on exchanging self and other.

Here, there is the advice to make an effort to meditate on exchanging self and others but without hoping for any reward in return.

~ *Instructions on making effort in this meditation without looking to the fully-ripened effect*

Verse 8.116 c, d

It is just like not hoping for a return  
Due to having fed myself.

Verse 8.117

Therefore, just as I protect myself



From unpleasantness however slight,  
In the same way I should familiarize myself  
With a mind of protection towards migrating beings and a compassionate mind.

~ *Doing more for the sake of others*

Verse 8.118

Hence, out of his great exalted compassion  
The Protector Avalokiteshvara even blessed his name  
To dispel the fear  
Of being among migrating beings.

Even if sentient beings are experiencing just some small suffering, we should protect them from it. The example given here is of people who are unsure of themselves and feel very uneasy among crowds of people. They become very meek like a mouse, i.e., they don't dare to talk when there is a lot of people around. They fear being around others and have difficulty in relating to people. This is not a big suffering but the point here is that Chenrezig had blessed his name and prayed that the mere recall of his name will help to eliminate this small suffering for such people.

It is said that Chenrezig blessed his holy name and prayed that, just by thinking of the name, Chenrezig, sentient beings will be free from their fears and unease of being in a crowd and being unable to speak.

Feeling small, anxious, uneasy and tongue-tied in a crowd may be due to the mind feeling very tight. If the mind could be more open and expansive, maybe one will not have that kind of worry or fear. One way to open up the mind is to think of others and to generate the wish to benefit them.

Many of our problems, fears, worries and anxieties can be attributed to our ego. We think primarily about ourselves all the time. We tend to be small-minded and uptight. On the other hand, people who think of benefitting others tend to have an expansive, open mind and tend not to have that kind of stress.

I am not exactly sure whether just remembering the name of Chenrezig can help one to overcome feeling uptight and uneasy instantly. I am not sure whether it works like that.

However, if one works on one's mind—focussing on the thought of cherishing others and benefitting them—making one's mind more expansive in the process, and at the same time, one relies on and prays to Chenrezig, due to the compassion that is developed and those prayers, there will be some blessings. Perhaps, that is the relationship.

One recalls the qualities embodied by the exalted mind of Chenrezig and one makes aspirational prayers to him in order to open up one's heart and mind to cherishing others. Maybe there is some benefit then.

When we reach a point in time when our heart is completely dedicated to others, henceforth, there will really be no problems in our daily life.

It is said that if we train our minds to exchange ourselves with others, we will be able to generate it.

~ *One will be able to develop such an attitude if one familiarizes oneself with it*

Verse 8.119

I should not turn away from what is difficult;  
By the power of familiarization in this way  
I will become unhappy even when someone  
Whose name when heard once frightened me is not around.

This verse reminds us that it is not right to give up because it is a tough method and is a very difficult thing to do. The teachings tell us that if we work at it, we will be able to do it.

The example given is that of people whose very names instil fear in us. But it is possible to come to know that person we are afraid of and become his friend to the point that, when he is not around, we will miss him.

This example illustrates that what seems impossible can become possible.

The point here is that we may have the thought, “How is it possible to do all these practices? It is just not possible.” But it is possible. We need to meditate on exchanging self and others because, at the end of the day, others and ourselves all wish to be free of suffering.

~ *One should meditate on exchanging self and others with the desire to free both self and others from suffering*

Verse 8.120

Whoever wishes to quickly protect  
Himself and others  
Should practice that holy secret –  
The exchanging of self for others.

People who want to free others and themselves quickly from both the extremes of samsara and nirvana should do this practice.

The instruction of exchanging self and others should not be made known to the hearers and solitary realizers because it cannot fit their minds. They are unsuitable vessels as this instruction of exchanging self and others is the ultimate and highest secret of the Mahayana. It should not be taught to people who are unripe.

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*Question:* This text sounds to me to be more like an inspirational text rather than one of actual instructions. What it says is very inspiring and amazing but at the moment, I am not a bodhisattva and I don't have bodhicitta. I do not have the courage to see others' suffering as my own and I worry if I have to suffer myself in the process. So what can I do now?

*Answer:* Of course, it is difficult now. At the most, what we can do now is to generate the wish or make the aspirational prayer to be able to practise these instructions. This is why the mind needs to be trained gradually. We can't do it overnight but the mind can be trained if we apply consistent effort. The question is whether we are willing to train ourselves in this way.

- The teachings are very clear in telling us, first, to meditate extensively on the faults of cherishing ourselves. We have to be convinced ourselves that self-cherishing is bad. But are we doing this?
- Secondly, we must meditate extensively on the benefits of cherishing others to the point that we are convinced that this is true. Only then can we talk about doing this practice.

We have to develop that bodhicitta thought over and over again. It takes a long time and we must apply consistent effort. There are many stages to go through and we cannot skip any of them. Only then can we generate the bodhisattva attitude. Even if we cannot put it into action, we can verbalize, think about it, express the intention and practise as much as we can. This is why when it comes to taking the bodhisattva vows, there is a gradual way of doing so:

- First, after training the mind in all the various stages for developing bodhicitta, when we reach the point where we have some experience of the bodhicitta thought, then we generate bodhicitta formally through a ritual. This does not come with any commitment. It is merely generating bodhicitta.
- Then when the mind is stronger, we adopt bodhicitta through a ritual that comes with a commitment. This is called aspirational bodhicitta with a commitment.
- After that, we take on the engaged bodhisattva vows.

So it is training ourselves gradually in this step-by-step way.

We start by generating the mere wish that aspires to benefit others and then we make aspirational prayers. After that, we train our mind, practising whatever we can manage at our level. We start by taking these baby steps. Of course, determination and effort are required. But if we say, "It is too difficult," and we do nothing, never even trying to start because there is too much to do, then things will stay the same forever! Nothing will ever change. This is certain.

You have to ask yourself this question, "If all of us are able to generate just the mere thought, 'May I be able to benefit all sentient beings,' is it of any use?"

*Khen Rinpoche: Give me your answer in the next class. This is my question to you.*

If we truly develop that thought sincerely from the heart—not just lip service but really heartfelt—even without doing anything at all, i.e., it is at the level of mere thought, is there any benefit? If you were to say that it is beneficial, then what is the benefit?

*Khen Rinpoche: So in the next class, you stand here and explain to me what is the benefit of even such a mere thought.*

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