

**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 13****28 April 2016**


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Review. Chapter 8. Verses 8.121—8.137: The way to exchange self and other—Extensive explanation; Verses 8.121—8.124: Making effort to abandon self-cherishing; Verses 8.125—8.135: Reflecting on the faults and benefits of cherishing self and other respectively; Verses 8.136—8.137: Synopsis.

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**REVIEW**

In the last lesson, we saw that the meditation on compassion does not increase one's suffering. On the contrary, it can exhaust and bring one's suffering to an end. We have to figure out for ourselves, "Why is this the case?"

It is mentioned in the earlier verses that if we manage to equalize others and ourselves—we work to eliminate the suffering and accomplish the happiness of others just we would for ourselves with the recognition that others and ourselves are one—with this attitude, we will not experience any difficulties.

It is said in the text that the happiness one can experience through freeing sentient beings from the ocean of samsaric suffering is much greater than the happiness one experiences when one liberates only oneself from samsara. Do we understand why this is so? If someone were to ask us this question, we have to know the answer since we have studied the material.

If you do know the answer, that is good. But if you can't answer this question even for yourself, then you have to look it up in the text and try to figure out the answer.

In the last lesson, we saw how individuals who dedicate themselves completely to others without any self-interest, naturally, their pride is pacified. When they work for others, they do not expect anything in return.

Many reasons were put forth to show why it is possible to equalize self and others. The text also shows that actually, we can do it, i.e., it is achievable.

So you have to be able to answer these questions, whether somebody is asking you the questions or whether you are asking yourself these questions. You have to come up with something. This text and what we have covered so far is not intellectually challenging.

What is the answer to the question I asked at the end of the last class?

*Khen Rinpoche: Anybody has an answer? Can somebody share their answer?*

The question is: Is there any benefit to just having the mere thought of wanting to benefit someone?

*Student 1:* I think that just the thought of wanting to benefit others expands our mind and brings us happiness because it takes us away from our self-cherishing. The thought of benefitting others is the opposite of self-cherishing. We know that suffering comes from self-cherishing so the thought of benefitting others creates more happiness.

*Khen Rinpoche:* OK. Does anybody have a different idea?

*Student 2:* I don' have a different idea but I think it is very useful. If I can stand in front of a hospital and aspire to liberate all the patients inside, eventually, I would get down to doing just that even though it is very difficult. I think aspiring to do something is very important because it pushes you to want to achieve something. I also think that you cannot just be thinking about it and then not get down to do something to achieve it.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Anybody else?

*Student 3:* I think aspiration is good but without any action, what is the point of that aspiration? You can aspire till the cows come home but nothing gets done. So aspiration alone is of no benefit.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Good. Good. Just say whatever you think. It doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong. Student 3 says that there is no benefit. The two other students say that there is benefit. Anybody else?

*Student 4:* I think it is beneficial because sometimes, when I am having bad thoughts about someone, if I use this reverse thinking, I actually subdue those bad thoughts. Instead of wishing that person ill, I want to help him instead and slowly turn around my black mind towards something good. So I think in a way, a person's character can change slowly, bit by bit.

*Khen Rinpoche:* OK. Good.

*Student 5:* I think it is beneficial because karma is accumulated by the mind. By merely thinking of benefitting others, you already accumulate virtuous karma.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Everybody have different ideas. That is good. Anybody else?

*Student 1:* The only thing I want to add is about training the mind. Thinking about benefitting others is like familiarizing ourselves with this process of not cherishing ourselves. So it is a way to train the mind against self-cherishing. It is like the first step in the right direction.

*Khen Rinpoche (addressing Student 3):* Do you agree?

*Student 3:* Maybe it is a mind training. But if you just say the words, "to benefit all sentient beings," and there is no action, then you are not benefiting anyone. To me, it is not just the words per se but the actions you do. Otherwise, you are not doing anything.

You are only benefitting yourself and not others.

*Khen Rinpoche:* It is said in the teachings that everything is a fabrication or projection of the mind. It is produced by the mind. Before we can do anything, the mind must move. There must be a thought.

If the thought to benefit others arises sincerely from the depths of one's heart, that will accumulate virtuous karma. We are preparing the mind and leaving an imprint in the mind to be able to benefit others one day. If the thought to benefit others arises sincerely and strongly, whether that translates into action that directly benefits others or not, a positive imprint is left on the mind. This may ripen in this life and one may be able to do something beneficial for others. Even if that does not happen, it sets up the mind that wants to be of benefit to others in our future lives. But first, we must generate the intention that will leave an imprint on the mind. From then on, there will come a time, sooner or later, when we will be able to do something for others.

As mentioned in the earlier verses, when we manage sincerely to develop the thought of benefitting others, we will experience many benefits. It is obvious that our ego, self-preoccupation, jealousy and so forth will decrease. The stronger our intention to benefit others, the weaker will be our self-cherishing. This means the mind becomes more disciplined and subdued. When our self-preoccupation and self-cherishing are weakened, definitely, there will be more peace in the heart and happiness in the mind.

Having a strong and sincere intention to benefit others also makes the work of benefitting others easier. Even if our thought of benefiting others does not translate into action that directly benefits others at this time, it changes us from the inside. Slowly, it will show in the way we conduct ourselves physically and verbally. There will be an effect on the people we interact with. At the very least, we do not harm them or we will cause them less harm than before. Perhaps in the process, we may be able to offer them some peace and happiness.

As mentioned in the last lesson, merely remembering or reciting the name of Chenrezig protects us, sentient beings, from many fears and sufferings of samsara. The only reason why hearing or reciting Chenrezig's name has such an impact on us is because of the powerful prayers he made while he was on the path. He made many powerful prayers to benefit us. Those prayers originated from his initial thought to benefit us, sentient beings.

The person who possesses a good heart, great compassion and the thought of benefitting others has peace inside. She also brings peace to the people around her and will have a positive influence in their lives. Her mere presence can have a positive effect on the environment and her surroundings as well. This is due to the power of her good heart and her thought of benefitting others.

A person who has a good heart and a strong and sincere thought of benefitting others definitely can offer many benefits. He can benefit others both directly and indirectly. Just by being around such individuals with their good heart, compassion and bodhicitta can alleviate whatever problems we may experience in life. Although that person is not doing anything to benefit us directly, just being in their presence has that effect.

So does the meditator who is meditating on bodhicitta up in the mountains benefit sentient beings or not? What do you think?

We shouldn't think that just generating the thought of benefitting others is useless. In fact, it is extremely beneficial. Of course, there are different stages of generating the mind of enlightenment as taught in the lam-rim.

- First, there is just the mere generation of the mind of enlightenment.
- Then there is adopting aspirational bodhicitta through a ritual.
- This is then followed by taking on the engaged bodhisattva vows.

These are the different stages of generating and cultivating this good heart. This means it is not sufficient to only generate the mind of enlightenment. One has to move through the various stages of developing that bodhicitta.

It is like making mentally imagined offerings. Mentally, we can imagine many different pleasant offering substances filling the whole of space. In reality, there are no actual offerings there but we still accumulate merit even though the offering practice is performed only at the level of mental projection and visualization. We will still get the benefit of the offering practice even though it is just a mental exercise.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you accumulate merit just by imagining in this way?*

You can't just give the answer and keep quiet after that. Those of you who believe the answer is yes, you have to account for how this works.

*Student 6:* I do all these visualisations because it is in the text book. The textbook says that if I can visualize a lot of offerings, if I have a good heart and think of benefitting others, I accumulate merit. But does it really benefit me and gives me merit? I really don't know.

With regard to the question about the meditator, sitting in his cave thinking of benefitting us, is he really benefitting us? The devil in me says he is just sitting there, doing nothing. Then the angel on my other shoulder says, "Well, if this meditator is actually a bodhisattva on the Mahayana path, he can manifest many bodies that reach out to every sentient being to benefit them. In that way, he does benefit everybody."

*Student 7:* I don't understand the difference between this question and the previous question. If we think about benefitting others, it is said we cease our self-cherishing, our happiness increases and we are accumulating merit. But as to whether thinking of benefitting others actually benefit others, I don't think so because other people have their own karma. They have to train their own mind. Regarding those yogis who are sitting in the mountains, meditating on benefitting others, I don't believe there is benefit to others. He is just accumulating merit for himself. I think in order to benefit us, he has to teach us the Dharma. It has to be some form of action.

*Khen Rinpoche: Anybody else? Just go to the point and answer my question.*

*Student 8:* I disagree. I think the meditator benefits us, not only in his way of thinking. Even hearing of such meditators is very inspiring. They are examples of practitioners who are on the path to becoming bodhisattvas. One has to start somewhere.

It is also taught in the text that one of the best methods is to meditate in isolation. So whether the meditator is in isolation in the mountains or somewhere else, he is on the path.

Even if he does not benefit us immediately, sentient beings around him will benefit from the positive energy he exudes. It is true that if you are near somebody who is compassionate and always thinking of benefitting others, just being in their presence helps. Hearing stories of such people also helps. This is my view. Thanks.

*Khen Rinpoche:* The point that I have been trying to make all this time is that it is not sufficient just to say, yes or no. Stand up for what you believe in and state the reasons why you are saying yes or no. You have to know the reasons why.

This is the purpose of this long-term study program. We have the time. The point is to think about the teachings. It is not sufficient to just sit there, read the text and listen. This is definitely not enough!

You have to take a position and your position has to be based on reason. Why is your answer yes, why is it no. You have to go deeper and not leave things at a superficial level. You must analyse more deeply in order to get a definite ascertainment in your heart with regard to whatever topic is being covered.

When we do not use our wisdom and intelligence to study the topic with a fresh, alert mind that really wants to know the answer, this is when we will get bored listening to the Dharma. When we are listening to the Dharma, we think, “I have heard this before.” At a superficial level, we think we know the words. We get bored because we don’t think that we are learning anything new. We are like that to a certain extent. This is why we really have to think about and analyse deeply what we have learnt.

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## **THE WAY TO EXCHANGE SELF AND OTHER—EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION (CONT’D)**

*Making effort to abandon self-cherishing*

*~ Self-cherishing is the cause of all fear*

Verse 8.121

Because of attachment to my body,  
Even a small object of fear frightens me;  
Who would not abhor as an enemy  
This body that gives rise to fear?

We have to put effort into abandoning our self-cherishing. Verse 8.121 states that our self-cherishing is the cause of all our fears and problems.

Because of our self-cherishing, we cling on very strongly to our body. We cherish and are very attached to it. Due to this strong cherishing and attachment to our body, we are afraid of the tiniest things, such as insects. We are so afraid of, say, mosquitoes, worrying about how they are going to bite us and how we will get sick from the diseases they carry. If a tiny mosquito can bring us so much worry, it goes without saying that

other things will worry us even more.

We should understand that there is no need to cling on to our body because it is the source of all our suffering. This is why we talk about pervasive compounded suffering, the basis for all the other sufferings we have to endure. That suffering relates basically to our contaminated aggregates, our body.

Because the wise see that the body, these contaminated aggregates, is the source of all our fears and problems, they do not cling on or allow themselves to be attached to the body. Because the body is the source of all our problems and suffering, we are advised not to cling and be attached to our body.

*~ Reflecting on how self-cherishing acts to encourage one into all negative conduct*

Verse 8.122

Wishing for a procedure to alleviate  
The sicknesses of hunger, thirst, and the like of the body,  
I kill birds, fish and deer  
And ambush [travelers] at the roads.

Verse 8.123

For the sake of profit and honor  
I kill even my father and mother  
And appropriate the property of the Three Jewels.  
Thus I will burn in Relentless Torment.

Verse 8.124

What wise man would desire,  
Protect and venerate this body?  
Who would not scorn it  
And regard it as an enemy?

Because of our strong attachment and clinging to our body, whenever we are sick or hungry, too cold or too hot, we will put in much time and effort to alleviate these discomforts. We kill or harm many beings in order to keep this body alive. As said here, we kill “birds, fish and deer” and so forth.

Due to our self-cherishing and our attachment to our body, we will rob and steal. Some people even kill their parents who have been so kind in bringing them into this world and bringing them up. Motivated by self-cherishing, some people also appropriate the possessions or properties of the Three Rare Sublime Ones. That can only result in them burning in the lowest of the hells.

The intelligent and wise ones who want happiness see how self-cherishing leads to attachment. This in turn leads to all kinds of non-virtuous actions. They would not regard the body as something to be cherished or protected out of attachment. Since attachment to our body brings about so many problems, fears and worries, we should work on subduing our attachment to it.

Next, we think about the faults of holding on to the self as most important thing in the

world and the benefits of regarding others to be most important instead. First, let's look at this from the viewpoint of giving or practising generosity.

*Reflecting on the faults and benefits of primarily cherishing self and other respectively*

~ *In terms of giving*

Verse 8.125

“If I give them, what shall I enjoy?”—

Such thinking for my own purpose is the way of ghosts;

“If I enjoy them, what shall I give?”—

Such thinking for others' purpose is a quality of the gods.

A person who thinks, “I would have nothing for myself if I were to give my food, money and possessions to others,” is someone who considers himself to be more important than anybody else. Such a person would find it difficult to give away anything and to practise generosity.

Thinking of our own welfare in this way is said to be “the way of ghosts.” Why is this so? Due to our self-cherishing, we always think that we are more important than others. Because of that, when there is the opportunity to give, our self-cherishing will tell us, “No, don't give. I am more important.” This gives rise to miserliness, which makes it really difficult to give. Miserliness leads to the karma to reborn as a hungry ghost or preta. Therefore, the thought “If I give others what I have, what will I have left for myself?” is said to be “the way of ghosts.” This example illustrates another fault and disadvantage of our self-cherishing.

On the other hand, a person who considers others to be more important would think, “If I were to use these things for myself, then others would have nothing to enjoy. I would have nothing left to give them.” This way of thinking of others' welfare is said to be “a quality of the gods.” Those who are able to cherish others and consider them to be more important than oneself are able to give or share their possessions with others.

It is said that from giving comes wealth, from ethical discipline comes a good rebirth. When one has less self-cherishing and one can generate the thought to benefit others, considering others to be more important than oneself, one will then be able to share and give to others. This results in wealth for oneself in this life. In future lives, one can be reborn in the god realms where one will have many enjoyments. As such, thinking in this way leads to a good outcome, i.e., a good rebirth and is therefore, said to be “a quality of the gods.”

Miserliness and generosity are states of mind. They are just thoughts. What is miserliness? It is a mental grasping that holds on tightly to an object and is unable to let go. It is a very tight mind. It does not refer to physically holding on tightly to all our possessions and not letting them go.

Generosity is also a state of mind and is the opposite of miserliness. As soon as the mind thinks, “I have given it away,” that's it. It is done. Whether we actually give away the object or not, when we don't have this mental clinging to the object, we have already given because generosity is a state of mind.

If we mentally dedicate something to others, if that is already done, then we don't have the idea that it is ours anymore. We don't hold on to it. Here I am talking about sincerely dedicating and giving the object from our heart. Once we have given away the object mentally, the object may still be in front of us but we should think that it is not ours anymore as we have given it away. We don't have any attachment to it anymore. So it is not a case of saying that we will give away the object but deep down in our heart, we are still unwilling to give up the object. It is not like that.

*~ In terms of harming*

Verse 8.126

If, for myself, I cause harm to others,  
I shall fall into the hells and the like;  
If for the sake of others, I cause harm to myself,  
I shall acquire all that is magnificent.

When we follow the self-cherishing thought for our own selfish purposes, in order to get what we want, we harm others. We kill. We steal. In the process, we accumulate the negative karma that will throw us into the lower realms. On the other hand, if motivated by concern for others and with the thought of benefitting them, we dedicate our body, possessions and roots of virtue to sentient beings, we will acquire "all that is magnificent." We will gain good rebirths as humans and gods.

*~ In terms of praise and renown*

Verse 8.127

Desiring eminence for myself  
I shall become of unfortunate migrations, bad and stupid;  
If it is shifted to others  
I shall acquire honor in good migrations.

If we were to run after fame and power, possessions and high status, motivated by our self-cherishing, it will only cause us to go to the lower realms. Even if we are reborn as a human being again, because of the desire for power, fame and possessions motivated by our self-cherishing, we will be born in a low caste, with an unpleasant physical appearance and low intelligence.

But if we were to reverse that desire, sincerely wish for others to gain power, fame and high status instead, and we habituate ourselves to that way of thinking, we will accumulate the karma to have good rebirths. In our future lives, we will receive praise, respect and honour.

*~ In terms of application to activities*

Verse 8.128

If I employ others for my own purposes,  
I myself shall experience servitude and the like;  
If I use myself for the sake of others,  
I shall experience lordliness and the like.

Due to our self-cherishing, we enslave others, forcing them to work for us without any choice or freedom for our own comfort and happiness. What will that lead to? It will



cause us to be reborn as a slave in our future lives. We will be enslaved by others in the same way. However, if we were to work for the happiness and benefit of others, motivated by a genuine concern for them, we will be born with an attractive physical appearance and have power, high status and so forth.

~ *In terms of benefit and bliss*

Verse 8.129

Whatever joy there is in this world  
All comes from desiring others to be happy,  
And whatever suffering there is in this world  
All comes from desiring myself to be happy.

*Synopsis*

Verse 8.130

What need is there to say much?  
The childish work for their own purpose;  
The Muni worked for others' purpose.  
Look at the difference between these two!

This summary is telling us to look at ourselves and everything we do, day in and day out. Every day and every single moment is devoted to looking for happiness for ourselves. It is all about me, me, me, me, me! "I want to be happy so I do all these things." But look at what we have achieved. We don't achieve what we want. Instead, we get a lot of problems. This verse is saying that we have been doing this since beginningless rebirths.

Look at the bodhisattvas and the buddhas. They have achieved only happiness and bliss without any problems. Why is that so? It is due to their thought of cherishing sentient beings and benefitting them.

This verse is asking us, "Don't you see the huge difference between the two?" It is exhorting us to think carefully, to meditate and look at the difference between these two.

This is the summary of the section on all the problems that result from self-cherishing and all the benefits of cherishing others.

We have to analyse for ourselves what the problems and losses that arise from our own selfishness are and what we stand to gain from cherishing others instead. We have to think about these points as much as possible and meditate on them so as to bring about the thought of benefitting others.

The teachings tell us that if we are really able to cherish others, to think of others rather than ourselves, there is so much happiness, bliss and peace.

*Thus, the reasonableness of discarding self-cherishing*

~ *The unseen disadvantages*

Verse 8.131

If I do not correctly exchange my happiness  
And the sufferings of others,  
I shall not accomplish the state of buddhahood

And even in cyclic existence shall have no happiness.

At the present time, we are pre-occupied with only achieving our own happiness and overcoming our own problems. If we do not exchange our current world view to that of benefitting others, eliminating their suffering and focusing on that, this verse says that there will be no enlightenment. There will be no happiness even in samsara.

This is obvious. Since beginningless rebirths until now, innately, we think of ourselves to be the most important thing in the world. We focus on and prioritize ourselves above everybody else. If we are like that, no matter where we are, I think it is really difficult to be a happy person inside. As this verse says, “even in cyclic existence shall have no happiness.”

~ *The visible disadvantages*

Verse 8.132

Let alone what is beyond this world –  
Because of servants not doing work  
And because of masters not giving pay,  
Even the purpose of this life will not be fulfilled.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you see these visible faults? Are they visible?*

Since they are visible, there is no need to talk about them.

~ *The disadvantages in brief*

Verse 8.133

[By rejecting the method that] establishes foreseeable and unforeseeable  
happiness,  
The happiness of success will be completely cast away.  
And because of inflicting suffering on others,  
The confused will take upon terrible suffering.

~ *The reasonableness of discarding self-cherishing*

Verse 8.134

If whatever harms,  
Fear and suffering in the worlds  
All arise from grasping at a self,  
Then of what use is that great ghost to me?

Verse 8.135

If I do not completely forsake it  
I shall not be able to abandon suffering,  
Just as I cannot avoid being burnt  
If I do not cast aside fire.

The apprehension of the self is the source of all our problems. As long as there is still an apprehension of the self in our heart, we will never be free of suffering. It is like somebody holding on to fire instead of letting it go. He will continue to be burnt.

Starting from Verse 8.141, there is the section on meditating on jealousy and pride. I think we covered this before. This section can be a bit confusing. For the next class, please read the text, starting from Verse 8.141.

We will just read and go through the remaining verses. So, the way of exchanging self and others.

### **SYNOPSIS**

#### *The way to exchange self and other*

Verse 8.136

Therefore, in order to pacify the harms inflicted upon me  
And in order to pacify the sufferings of others,  
I shall give myself up to others  
And cherish them as I do myself.

Verse 8.137

“I am under the ownership of others,”  
Of this, mind, you must know certainly;  
Now, except for the purpose of all sentient beings,  
You must not think of anything else.

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