

**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 14****3 May 2016**

Chapter 8. Verses 8.134—8.154 a, b; Verses 8.134—8.137: The way to exchange self and other—Extensive explanation; Verses 8.134—8.135: Thus, the reasonableness of discarding self-cherishing; Verses 8.136—8.139: Synopsis. Verses 8.140—8.154 a, b: The way to practise after having reflected on this exchange; Verses 8.140: Brief presentation. The exchange with those we consider to be (1) our inferiors (2) our peers and (3) our superiors. Verses 8.141—8.143: Extensive explanation.

*Question:* As Buddhists, we often hear stories about people who have done something very inspiring and wonderful. We would say, “Wow! These people are bodhisattvas.” But we are ordinary beings and we can’t tell who is and who isn’t a bodhisattva since we have only ordinary view. If the bodhicitta of such people are not conjoined with a mind of refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, is that bodhicitta non-existent? I just want to clear this doubt in my own mind.

*Khen Rinpoche:* What is your doubt? Make it short and to the point.

*Student 1:* To be a bodhisattva, you must have bodhicitta. Is this mind of bodhicitta necessarily conjoined with a mind of refuge? Does a mind of bodhicitta that is not conjoined with refuge exist?

*Answer:* According to the great treatises, bodhicitta is called mind generation and it possesses two aspirations:

1. the aspiration to achieve the welfare of sentient beings
2. the aspiration to achieve full enlightenment

It is a mind that wishes to achieve full enlightenment in order to benefit sentient beings and to accomplish their welfare.

When we talk about refuge, there is causal refuge and resultant refuge. If you think about it, you will be able to see that mind generation is like resultant refuge. As such, one can say that in order for there to be a fully qualified mind generation in anybody’s mental continuum, one must possess refuge.

As for the thought to benefit sentient beings, there are varying degrees of that thought. However, as long as somebody benefits others, whether that person is a bodhisattva or not, we should rejoice in that person’s good deeds and praise and respect him. Whether that person is a bodhisattva in reality or not, the teachings tell us that we should meditate on seeing all sentient beings as bodhisattvas.

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

*Thus, the reasonableness of discarding self-cherishing*

*~ 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.

These verses state the reasons why we should discard our self-grasping. In samsara, we face many harms from all kinds of situations—harm from enemies, spirits and even insects, like mosquitoes. All these harms cause different kinds of fear and worry in us.

Due to self-grasping, we experience the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death, i.e., all the problems of this life and future lives. The root of every single problem and suffering is our self-grasping—the thought grasping at the self, the ‘I’, to be inherently existent. Our self-grasping is the source of every single problem. Here, it is referred to as the “great ghost.”

Our self-grasping has kept us circling in the three realms, preventing us from leaving this ocean of great suffering. In fact, all the disturbances we experience from spirit harms arise from our self-grasping. This is another reason why self-grasping is called the “great ghost” here.

Until we are able to destroy our self-grasping, there will be no end to our suffering. Holding on to a self and not abandoning it is likened to somebody who does not want to be burnt by fire, yet is still holding on to the fire. This analogy is saying that as long as we don’t let the fire go, we cannot avoid being burnt.

*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.

Self-grasping is the root of every single problem for others and ourselves. Therefore, in order to pacify and stop all the harms that we will experience in this life and all future lives to come and in order to do likewise for others, the text advises us to “give myself up to others, and cherish others as I do myself.”

Verse 8.137 says that once we have exchanged self with others, we must ascertain that we are now “under the ownership of others.” With this understanding in our mind, we then make the pledge to work for the benefit of others. We should live by that pledge. Once we have exchanged self and others, everything we do should be to work for others only and we should stop our negative actions.

~ *Arresting misapplication of the principle once one has exchanged*

Verse 8.138

I should not accomplish my purpose

With these eyes and so forth that are under the ownership of others.

I should not do anything with eyes and so forth for [others'] purpose

That is contrary to them.

Once we have surrendered and given ourselves to others, we belong to others. As such, even our ears, eyes, limbs, hands, legs and so forth belong to others. Our body should be used only for the benefit of others. We should restrain ourselves from working for our own purpose. Since we have dedicated ourselves to others, it is inappropriate to use our body only for our own selfish purposes. We should not stare or glare at others. We should not physically abuse or assault others with our hands and so forth.

This is the behaviour to be adopted after having exchanged self and others. First, we do the practice of exchanging self and others mentally. Once that is accomplished, we should do it on the practical level and practise without any faults or mistakes.

~ *Practicing unerringly*

Verse 8.139

Thus sentient beings should be taken as principal.

Whatever I behold upon my body,

I should appropriate and use

For the benefit of others.

For that reason, we should prioritize the needs and happiness of sentient beings before our own. Whatever possessions we have such as food, clothing and so forth, we use and enjoy them only for the purpose of accomplishing the happiness of others.

## **THE WAY TO PRACTICE AFTER HAVING REFLECTED ON THIS EXCHANGE**

*Brief presentation*

Verse 8.140

Taking someone inferior and so forth to be himself,

And taking himself to be the other,

[A bodhisattva] should meditate upon envy, competitiveness, and pride,

With a mind free of conceptualization.

You must try to pay attention on this section especially in the beginning. First, it comes up with a position that you need to get right. If you don't understand the first point, there is no way to understand the many verses that come after that. I am not exactly sure about this section myself. I have read this section a couple of times. At times, it seems OK. Then at other times, it seems to not be OK.

*Khen Rinpoche: I don't remember how I taught this topic in the first Basic Program. I'm wondering myself. When I read it now, it is still difficult.*

- When we meet people that we consider to be inferior or lower than us, we feel this sense of superiority, "I'm better than you." This is pride.
- When we meet somebody that we consider to be our peer, i.e., at the same level as ourselves, we have a sense of competitiveness in the negative way.
- When we meet people that we think are better than and superior to us, we feel jealous.

These are our normal reactions but these reactions are wrong and we have to abandon and eliminate them. Here, a method is taught to help us overcome these attitudes. They are:

- the meditation on jealousy
- the meditation on competitiveness
- the meditation on pride

*The exchange with those we consider to be our inferiors*

First, we exchange places with people that we feel superior to and look down on. We exchange places with them—they become us and we become them—and we meditate on jealousy. We imagine we are in the place of that lowly person that we look down on. We become the other.

Based on that meditation, we generate jealousy and we use that to try to eliminate our pride.

*Khen Rinpoche: You must get this concept. Otherwise, it gets very complicated. I don't quite get it myself. I read the text many times and I still don't quite get it myself.*

First, you exchange places with the person you feel superior to, i.e., the person you consider to be lower than yourself. You imagine that you take on the identity of that person and become that inferior person. When you do this with "a mind free of conceptualization," this means you make this exchange and hold on to it without any doubt in your mind.

After having exchanged roles, now you have become the inferior person and that inferior person has become you. So, your usual self has become 'other' and that inferior person has become oneself.

- The inferior person that we have become now is referred to as the 'old self.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NOTE: This lesson has to be read together with Lesson 15. In Lesson 15, Khen Rinpoche mentioned that some mistakes were made in identifying the 'old self' and 'new self' in Lesson 14. Here, Lesson 14 is

- The self that is now the ‘other’ is the ‘new self.’

Why are the terms, ‘old self’ and ‘new self’ used?

- The ‘old self’ refers to the self that existed prior to exchanging self and other. This ‘old’ self is now the inferior person who has become oneself.
- The ‘new self’ is the self that exists after having exchanged self and other. This is the self that has become the ‘other.’

Having made this exchange, we imagine how it would feel to be the inferior person.

Following this format, there will also be the exchange involving those we consider to be our peers against whom we compete. Likewise, we also make this exchange with those we consider superior to us.

We return to the first scenario: the exchange with the person you consider to be inferior to you, the person you usually look down upon.

- You become that person by assuming that person’s identity.
- Now in your position as the inferior person, you look at the ‘I’ that is now the ‘other’ and meditate on jealousy.
- **Here, the ‘old self’ generates jealousy towards the ‘new self.’** The purpose of having the ‘old self’ meditate on jealousy towards the ‘new self’ is to overcome our pride.

How this meditation on jealousy can help overcome one’s pride towards inferiors is something we need to think about.

#### *The exchange with those we consider to be our peers*

With regard to the person we consider to be our peer, who is just a little bit better than us, our normal reaction is that we want to compete with that person. So in this case, we also exchange ourselves with the person we considered to be our peer, equal or near equal.

- We take the identity of that person, becoming that person, i.e., we become the other.
- The ‘old self’ is now the person we consider to be our peer.

Then we meditate on competitiveness to overcome it.

*Khen Rinpoche: I am not sure what I am talking about! The text seems to say something like that. I still need to think about it by reading the text again. I don’t know if I am on the right track.*

#### *The exchange with those we consider to be our superiors*

Our attitude and reaction towards the person that we consider to be much better than us is one of jealousy usually. As before, we exchange our identity with that person. We become the superior person that we consider to have so many qualities. The usual ‘I’ becomes the other. **Then the ‘old self’ meditates on pride to overcome one’s jealousy.**

When I read the text, this is what I think the text is trying to say. I think this is the intent of this particular section of Chapter Eight. We need to think further about this. This is

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transcribed according to what was presented in class. The possible errors have been highlighted.

what I think and this is the conclusion. But you can give your suggestions if you have a better proposal. Of course your proposal must be supported by and be based on the words of the text. You cannot just come up with anything you like.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you have some idea of what I am talking about now? I must be very stupid. I read the text over three days and I am still not getting it. You must be clever and you can understand it from just hearing this presentation once! Maybe, I have no karma here. I had difficulties last time and this time round, I still have difficulties.*

*Extensive explanation*

~ *The way jealousy for those higher than oneself is cultivated*

The way to meditate on jealousy is covered by Verses 8.141 to 8.146.

Verse 8.141

He is honored, but we are not;  
We have not found [possessions] as he has.  
He is praised, but we are disparaged;  
He is happy, but we suffer.

Here, “he” is the ‘old self’ and “we” are the ‘new self.’ You must not mix this up. Whenever you see “he”, it refers to the ‘old self’ and “we” refers to the ‘new self.’

*Khen Rinpoche: You must get this point and concept first. Otherwise there is no point in reading further. If you still don't get it, then you must ask. If you understand this concept, then when you read the text, it makes some sense.*

Verse 8.142

We do the work  
While he abides in comfort.  
He is renowned as great in this world,  
But we as inferior with no good qualities.

Verse 8.143

We have no good qualities; what to do?  
All of us are to be endowed with good qualities;  
There are those in comparison to whom he is inferior,  
And there are those in comparison to whom we are supreme.

This is how we are taught to meditate on jealousy. It seems related to the eight worldly dharmas—the pursuit of praise, fame, gain and happiness and not wanting the opposites of these four.

There are different commentaries on this section and we need to relate what is said in the commentaries to the root text. First, however, we must get the starting points right. The starting points are the meditations on jealousy, competitiveness and pride. In each of these scenarios, one takes the place of a specific person, and the usual ‘I’ becomes the other. This must not be mixed up.

After you have switched identity with the other person, let's say, in the case of

meditating on jealousy:

- You have become the inferior person. You have become the new person.
- The self that has become the other is **the old person.**
- **After the exchange, the old person is jealous of the new person.**

While it is said that the point of this exchange is to overcome pride, how does this work? This is what you have to figure out. You have to think hard about this. Otherwise, it will be difficult.

I am not going to read through the verses because they can be really confusing. You have to keep in mind what the exchange is about and what purpose it is supposed to serve. Then you relate it to the verses and see how they prove that pride, competitiveness and jealousy can be overcome.

The meditation on competitiveness is covered by Verses 8.147 and 8.150.

The way to meditate on pride is covered by Verse 8.151 to 8.154 a, b.

In this meditation on pride, we exchange places with the person we are jealous of. We are only jealous of people who we regard to be better than us. We take their place. So there is an exchange of self and others. They become the self and the self becomes other.

In the three scenarios, we exchange identities. We take the identity of the other person. After we have taken the identity of the other person, are we the new person or the old person?

(Student's response is inaudible).

*Khen Rinpoche: So we become the new person.*

**The self that has become the other is the 'old self.'**

In the case of meditating on pride, you take on the identity of and become the superior person. This is the 'new self.' Then the 'new self' meditates on pride with the purpose of eliminating one's jealousy. It is said that the usual feelings of jealousy experienced by the 'old self' will be reduced in this way.

Keep this in mind. Go back, read the verses and see whether they make sense or not. We will see if we can have greater clarity in the next lesson. In order to have some clarity, you need to read the text first.

*Khen Rinpoche: This topic is quite difficult. I am confused myself. The more I think about it, the more confused I am. I wonder how I presented this in the last Basic Program. Did I do it the same way? I don't remember.*

*Question:* With reference to the first scenario where we exchange ourselves with someone we feel superior to, i.e., someone we see as our inferior, I am wondering if there is a unique purpose to doing this exchange? Why can't I just meditate directly on Verses 8.143, 8.144 and 8.145. They tell me very directly that my sense of inferiority is incorrect. Of course, the inferior person also has good qualities but what have I done to

help this person? I am just wondering why I cannot go directly to that incorrect sense of pride that I have in feeling superior to this person? Why do I have to go through this confusing mechanism of doing this exchange? There must be a unique reason why Shantideva is presenting it like that. I am wondering what that reason could be.

*Answer:* The problem is that we do not understand Shantideva. I think there must be some point to this. At the end of this exercise, there must be some impact on the mind. You have to figure out what that is supposed to be.

In some commentaries, the outline refers to meditating on these points to eliminate a specific fault. The verses you have mentioned are not meant to be meditated on directly. They are meant to be meditated on *after* you have done the exchange.

These are said to be the methods to eliminate our jealousy, pride, self-grasping and self-cherishing.

Here we are exchanging self and other. That means self becomes other and the other becomes oneself, i.e., we exchange places.

Ultimately, the purpose of those meditations is to eliminate our self-cherishing and to increase the thought to cherish others.

*Khen Rinpoche: So do your reading. Hopefully we can talk more about this in the next lesson. If you have a better idea, a clearer idea of how these verses work, come and share your understanding.*

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