

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 16**10 May 2016**

Review. Chapter 8. Verses 8.154 c, d—8. 166. Verses 8.154 c, d—8.158: The way to practise after having reflected on this exchange—Extensive explanation. The effects of cultivation; Verses 8.159—8.166: The way to practice application of this attitude—The actual; Verses 8.159—8.160: Applying all of one’s entire collection of goodness to others; Verses 8.161—8.164: Devoting oneself to taking the lower position for the sake of others; Verses 8.165—8.166: A presentation of the way to practise application in brief.

Student 1: A few weeks ago, Khen Rinpoche asked us a question—does a bodhisattva who is staying in a cave and meditating on benefitting others actually benefit others or not? I didn’t understand the responses to that question. Is there benefit or not?

Khen Rinpoche: I thought you had another question. Does anybody have the answer to that question—whether a bodhisattva living in the cave is helping sentient beings or not? That is the question. Maybe somebody can stand up and explain.

Student 2: I think at the very least, maybe. But not immediately. Let’s say he is meditating in his cave. Definitely, that helps him to develop his bodhicitta. When he becomes enlightened, definitely, he will benefit sentient beings. In the long run, he will definitely benefit sentient beings.

Khen Rinpoche: The question is whether that is beneficial now, not in the long run? Now is he benefitting sentient beings? That is the question. Yes or no?

Student 2: I think it has to be yes.

Khen Rinpoche: If your answer is yes, then why is this so? The question is that he lives in an isolated cave. He doesn’t live with anyone. Is this bodhisattva helping sentient beings? That is the question at the moment.

Student 2: Let’s look at this in the context of what we have been studying. I think if he is meditating in that way, he will be trying to destroy his own self-cherishing. When he destroys his own self-cherishing, he doesn’t harm sentient beings. In that sense, he is benefitting sentient beings.

Khen Rinpoche: So your answer is that not harming sentient beings is benefitting them? Are you saying that?

Student 2: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: The person who is asleep for a hundred years, is he benefitting sentient

beings? I'm giving an example. If a person sleeps for a hundred years and never wakes up, is this person helping sentient beings? There is no bodhicitta, just total ignorance. He is in deep sleep for a hundred years. Is this person helping sentient beings like a bodhisattva?

Student 2: You have to say no. He is not.

Khen Rinpoche: He's not harming. Your reason is not harming equates to benefitting. He is sleeping for one hundred years and he doesn't harm anybody. So he is like the bodhisattva who benefits numberless sentient beings.

Student 2: I see the point you are making here.

Student 3: Can I say that if that bodhisattva is a superior bodhisattva, he is an object of refuge? He is benefitting sentient beings in this way. Also, by meditating in a cave doing Dharma practice, he is upholding the existence of the Dharma in this world. While he is meditating, he is causing the realizational Dharma to exist. In this way, the Buddha's teachings can continue to exist in the world.

Student 1: I do not believe it actually helps sentient beings. I think it helps the person who is meditating to diminish his self-cherishing. Unless this person goes out and teaches the Dharma, as long as he remains in his cave, it helps him but it doesn't help sentient beings. That's what I think.

Khen Rinpoche: Very good. He says the bodhisattva is not benefitting sentient beings.

Do you agree with that? He said the bodhisattva who is meditating in his cave is not helping sentient beings. In order to help sentient beings, he has to come out and give teachings. Do you agree? If you do not agree, then come up and say something.

Student 4: To me, he is a role model to be followed. That is a help in itself. If we know that someone who is a bodhisattva can meditate in a cave for many years, it is inspiring. That in itself already helps.

Khen Rinpoche: Good. Somebody else with a different idea? Student 1 says he is not benefitting others. Student 4 says the bodhisattva is benefitting because he is providing a good example for others to follow. This is already a help.

Student 1: I agree with Student 4. My assumption is that the person is in his cave and no one knows he is there!

Khen Rinpoche: What do you think? This is a good exercise. You must get involved.

Student 4: I don't know if there is any bodhisattva meditating in a cave right now but I know that it has happened in the past. I don't need to know that there is someone meditating to benefit all sentient beings and me right now. I know it has happened in the past so in my mind, there is still an example to be followed.

Khen Rinpoche: So his answer is you don't even have to know that there is somebody in the cave right now. Even without that, the past bodhisattvas are already helping us.

Student 5: If someone does something virtuous, he accumulates merit in the process. That merit doesn't ripen right away. Does that virtuous action still benefit him? All he is doing is accumulating the potential to benefit from it.

Similarly, when someone is meditating, he increases his potential and ability to help others. That is also a benefit just as we benefit ourselves when we perform virtue.

Khen Rinpoche: The question is, "How does that benefit others?"

Student 5: By increasing his ability to benefit others. In the same way, when we do something that accumulates virtuous karma, we benefit ourselves even though the karma has not ripened yet.

Khen Rinpoche: You benefit but how does your merit benefit others? That is the question. If you accumulate merit, of course, you get the benefit.

Student 5: I think for us to receive benefit from somebody else, that person must have the karma to benefit us. From our side, we must also have the karma to receive that benefit. So it takes two. If you are here but you are not meditating or trying to help somebody, that person will not receive any benefit from you. So from the side of the meditating bodhisattva, he is benefitting sentient beings.

Khen Rinpoche: The question is how that benefits? You need to explain further, "It benefits in this way or that way ..."

Student 5: If the Buddha, who is able to benefit all sentient beings, is not benefitting somebody because that person doesn't have the karma to receive the benefit right now, does the Buddha still benefit that person?

Khen Rinpoche: Does the Buddha benefit all sentient beings equally? This is a big question. If he benefits, how does he benefit?

Student 6: If you say he is a bodhisattva, after he has completed his meditation, he can dedicate it to sentient beings. The bodhisattva's prayers are very powerful. He will benefit sentient beings through his prayers and dedications.

Khen Rinpoche: The question is how does that work?

Student 6: He dedicates to sentient beings the merit he has accumulated.

Khen Rinpoche: Dedicating his merit—how does that help other sentient beings?

Student 6: That is inconceivable!

Khen Rinpoche: It is very interesting. Actually, we don't know anything. We think we know so much but actually, we don't know anything. We cannot even answer that question.

If somebody were to come up and argue with you, "The Buddha and the bodhisattvas do not benefit me. Can you prove to me how the bodhisattvas benefit me?"

You can't say, "It is inconceivable."

If I pretend I am very new, I don't know anything, and I ask this question, "The bodhisattva doesn't benefit me. He sits in the mountain, so where is the benefit? He is just cherishing himself. He talks so much about benefitting sentient beings but he is just sitting up there by himself, hiding there and running away from samsara. So what is the benefit? To benefit, he must come out and help people. He is just talk and no action." Then what answer are you going to give me?

I think I saw in the last Mandala magazine that Lama Yeshe said, "Attitude is more important than action." Have you seen that?

OK. We just leave it here. You find out whether there is benefit or not.

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We have finished the meditations on jealousy, competitiveness and pride in the context of exchanging self and others. What comes next in the outline is the result of the meditation on exchanging self and others. This has a few outlines. The first is thinking about the faults of self-cherishing.

### **THE WAY TO PRACTISE AFTER HAVING REFLECTED ON THIS EXCHANGE—EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION (CONT'D)**

*The effects of cultivation*

*~ Reflecting on the disadvantages of self-cherishing*

Verse 8.154 c, d

For hundreds [of lifetimes] in cyclic existence  
He caused harm to me.

Verse 8.155

Mind, because of desiring to enact your own purpose,  
Such great weariness you have gone through  
Over countless past eons  
Has only achieved suffering.

Since beginningless rebirths, following our self-cherishing, we have been looking for happiness just for ourselves. What we have achieved is samsara and nothing else. So here is a reminder to ourselves.

The result of having done a proper meditation on the earlier topics about exchanging self and others through the meditations on jealousy and so forth is that one should really see the faults of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others. That has to be one of the results of those meditations.

*~ The proof that the benefits of cherishing others are limitless*

Verse 8.156

Therefore I shall definitely engage myself

In the purpose of others.  
Since the words of the Muni are infallible,  
I shall behold its good qualities in the future.

One has to see for oneself that self-cherishing brings about suffering and problems in this life and all future lives to come, and cherishing others brings about happiness in this lifetime and all future lives to come. By seeing that, then one exchanges self and others.

Cherishing others will bring about happiness in this life and future lives. With that understanding, after having exchanged self and others, if one works enthusiastically for others in this and future lives, then one will experience all the positive results, including full enlightenment. This is already taught by the Buddha, whose speech is infallible.

It is mentioned in a commentary that after having exchanged self and others, one works for benefits of others. When one achieves the Mahayana path of seeing, it is guaranteed that definitely, one will achieve enlightenment. I remember it was said that when one achieves the path of seeing of the path that one is on—be it Hinayana or Mahayana— it is certain that one will achieve the enlightenment of that respective path.

~ *Explaining just the benefits and qualities*

Verse 8.157

If in the past you had practiced  
This act, a situation dissimilar to  
The happiness of fulfilment of a Buddha  
Could not have been possible.

This qualm may arise: You have worked for the benefit of sentient beings for a long time. Still, you do not see any results. What would be the answer to such a qualm?

The answer is that if you had meditated on exchanging self and others and worked for others in your past lives, you would have achieved or you will achieve enlightenment. You will not experience suffering now, including the suffering of the lower realms. The point is that if we had meditated on exchanging self and others, and was familiar with it in the past, we would have achieved every happiness all the way up to enlightenment. But we didn't. Instead, we engaged in all kinds of meaningless activities. This is why we are still here. Understanding this should spur us on to decide to meditate on exchanging self and others.

Another qualm that may come up is this: "There is no way I can exchange myself with others. I cannot familiarize myself with that kind of practice." The answer is to strive to cherish others.

~ *Instructions on making effort to cherish others*

Verse 8.158

Therefore, just as  
You held as "I"  
These drops of sperm and blood of others,  
Likewise familiarize with others.

This is similar to one of the points that was discussed earlier in the chapter. In response to the qualm that one cannot cherish others and is unable to exchange oneself with others, one's ability to do so is a matter of familiarity.

We have come to associate this body and mind as 'I' but what exactly are we holding on to? First, our parents' egg and sperm came together. With that as the basis, our consciousness entered the fertilized egg. That is not us but due to the power of familiarity, we have come to regard that as the 'I'. Likewise, through the power of familiarity, it is possible definitely to regard others as the 'I', the self, and to cherish that.

The section on exchanging self and others through thought is up to Verse 8.158.

The next outline is exchanging self and others through action.

### **THE WAY TO PRACTICE APPLICATION OF THIS ATTITUDE**

Next is the actual way of giving one's perfections to others.

*The actual*

~ *Applying all of one's entire collection of goodness to others*

Verse 8.159

Having thoroughly examined [the purpose] of others,

You shall steal

Whatever appears on your body

And use it for the benefit of others.

This particular section is exchanging self and others through action, whereas the previous section is about exchanging self and others in thought. So benefitting others is not just about doing something with our body and speech. There is also benefitting others in thought. Most people think that in order to benefit others, they have to do something physically or verbally. Otherwise, it is not considered benefitting others. It is clear that besides action, one can benefit others in thought. The question we should ask ourselves is how does that benefit others? For example, meditating on the good heart, bodhicitta, accumulating the collections of merit and then dedicating it to sentient beings. How do these actions of thought benefit sentient beings? This is what we have to examine and find out.

After having exchanged self and others, how can we translate that into practical action? We consider what we should do and should not do. In essence, it boils down to this: "I am not going to harm others. Whatever I have and whatever I own, I am going to dedicate them for others. I am going to give them away to others to benefit them."

"You shall steal/ Whatever appears on your body/ And use if for the benefit of others." The point is to renounce the idea of whatever possessions you have to be 'mine'. When you give up this idea that they are yours, it is very easy to give them to others and to dedicate them to others. The stronger our grasping, the stronger the thought that our possessions are 'mine'. Then it becomes more difficult to give anything away. But here, after having exchanged self and others in thought, you translate that into action by giving up whatever you own to benefit others.

## Verse 8.160

“I am delighted but others are sad,  
I am high but others are low,  
I benefit myself but others do not.”  
Why am I not jealous of myself?

Having realized the faults of cherishing oneself and the benefits of cherishing others, one has exchanged self and others. Once one has done that, one’s actions in daily life should not be the same as before. One’s usual attitude is to be jealous of others. After exchanging self and others, instead of being jealous of others, one directs that jealousy towards oneself.

- The verse says, “I am delighted but others are sad,/ I am high but others are low.” One has every possession but others do not.
- “I benefit myself but others do not.” One is able to benefit oneself by engaging in virtue but others are not able to do so.

After having exchanged self with others, this person sees that he is happy and able to engage in virtue while others are not, he is high and has power while others are lowly, and he has possessions while others are deprived. This person will feel great unease and discomfort because he has all the good things in life and he is able to do all the right things while sentient beings are deprived and are not able to engage in virtue. This trainee bodhisattva will think, “What is the point of me having all these things and being good when other sentient beings are not experiencing happiness?”

This is similar to the earlier meditation on jealousy whereby we switched places with the inferior person. One becomes the ‘new self’ when one becomes the inferior person. The original self is the ‘old self.’ Verse 8.160 is about meditating on jealousy towards oneself. The meaning and intent is similar to the earlier meditation that we have discussed.

Verse 8.160 considers the person who has exchanged self and others. When that person examines his own life, he recognizes that everything is going well for him. However, this is not the case for other sentient beings. He will definitely feel uneasy, thinking, “This is not right. It cannot be the case. How can I be the only one that is happy while other sentient beings are not?”

He feels that this state of affairs is completely inappropriate. “How can things remain like that?” With such an attitude, this trainee bodhisattva is very unlikely to be arrogant and look down on other sentient beings. This means that this meditation on jealousy can counteract pride.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you understand? You need to think about this. I think I have made it clear in the last lesson so I am not going to repeat myself.*

You really have to meditate on this topic. It was said earlier that the meditation on jealousy is to reduce pride. By exchanging places with an inferior person, we meditate as the ‘new self’ and direct our jealousy at the ‘old self.’ That meditation is supposed to reduce our arrogance but we have to see how that works. Without thinking about the

text and meditating on this topic, we would not be able to understand it.

The earlier meditations on jealousy, competitiveness and pride are meditations that takes oneself as the object of jealousy, competitiveness and pride. Through that, one comes to reduce one's arrogance, negative competitiveness and jealousy.

Next is the discussion on how one should take a lowly position in order to benefit others. In that discussion, it talks about checking and analyzing one's faults.

~ *Devoting oneself to [taking] the lower position for the sake of others*

Verse 8.161

I must separate myself from happiness  
And involve myself with the sufferings of others.  
“Why am I doing this?”  
At that time I should examine my faults.

Prior to exchanging self with others, we had neglected the welfare of others and not been bothered by their suffering. We were only interested in achieving happiness for ourselves.

After exchanging self with others, we dedicate our belongings, wealth and so forth to others. We give our happiness to others. As the verse says, “I must separate myself from happiness,” i.e., rather than keeping and enjoying these things ourselves, we dedicate them to others and we separate ourselves from the happiness that comes from enjoying them. In that way, others are also freed from the suffering of not having these things. Instead, we experience that suffering in their place, “And involve myself with the sufferings of others.”

If we understand the benefits of exchanging self and others and is putting that into practice, we are advised that we should not look at the faults of others. Whatever we may hear and see others doing, they should not become the conditions for us to criticize or judge others by looking at their faults. Instead, we should use those opportunities like a reflection in the mirror, to analyze and check our own faults. Instead of checking what others are doing, we should always check to see what we are up to, what our mind is thinking and planning to do, and our own physical and verbal actions. We distance ourselves from our own purposes and we should look at our own faults.

Verse 8.162

Although others may do something wrong,  
I shall transform it into a fault of my own;  
But should I do something even slightly wrong,  
I shall openly admit it to many people.

Verse 8.163 a, b

By further describing the renown of others,  
I should make it outshine my own.

Usually, when things go wrong, we always try to find the source of the problem outside and not within ourselves. It is always blamed on something or somebody outside. At the



same time, we cover up and hide our faults so that nobody sees them.

Whatever harm we have experienced, we should understand that it is our own fault. Instead of thinking that it is due to some situation or person, we have to understand that all the problems that we have experienced are due to our own fault. With determination, we face this, “This is my fault, my own doing. I deserve this.”

The point is that even if there is only one sentient being harming us, we should not see that as the fault of that sentient being but as our own fault. We should be prepared to accept the experience of that harm, “Even if I am harmed and experiencing that suffering, so be it.”

On the other hand, when we harm other sentient beings, even in a small way, instead of concealing that, we should take responsibility and proclaim, “I did it!” It is said that when we do something wrong, we should admit it openly to others. If that is the case for a small mistake, it goes without saying that if it is a serious wrong, we should admit it too.

It is said that we should openly admit our misdeed and confess it to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. We should confess, “What I did is totally wrong,” generate regret for having engaged in that misdeed and develop the attitude of restraint for the future.

Usually, we put others down and promote ourselves, “I did this. I did that. I am so good.” But this is inappropriate and wrong behaviour for the person who has exchanged self and others. The practitioner who has exchanged self and others should promote and praise the qualities of others.

Whatever good things we may have heard about others, it says here that we should add on to that praise “by further describing the renown of others.” Not only that. “I should make it outshine my own.” By praising the good qualities of others, we should make them so famous that their fame eclipse whatever fame or renown we may have.

Lama Atisha said that we should admit and declare openly all our faults. At the same time, we should never expose the faults of others. They are not our business. He also said that we should hide and conceal our own qualities and talk about the qualities of others instead. We shouldn’t be jealous of people who are doing better than us, who are higher in position, richer or more powerful, and we shouldn’t look down on those who are worse off than us.

Verse 8.163 c, d  
Just like the lowest of servants,  
I should employ myself for all purposes.

Verse 8.164  
I am naturally fault-ridden.  
I should not praise myself for a portion of an incidental good quality,  
I shall never let even a few people know  
Of my good qualities no matter how.

Verse 8.163 c, d is saying that we should work for the purpose of others while regarding ourselves to be the lowest of servants.

We may possess some small qualities arising from having learnt, reflected on and gaining some understanding of the Buddhadharma. We may have done some practices and retreats. Even if we develop some good qualities as a result of such activities, we should never praise ourselves. In fact, we should not let others know of these qualities but conceal them instead.

~ *A presentation of the way to practise application in brief*

Verse 8.165

In brief, may the harms that  
You have caused to others for my sake  
Descend upon me myself  
For the sake of sentient beings.

Verse 8.166

I should not be aggressive,  
Acting in a brutal way;  
Instead, like a newly married bride,  
I should stay bashful, timid, and restrained.

Verse 8.165 is like a prayer, “May all the harm I have inflicted on sentient beings since beginningless lifetimes, motivated by my desire for power, fame, reputation, wealth and so forth, together with the results of those harms, may all of these ripen upon me now.” By thinking, “May the results of those harms ripen upon myself, for the purpose of benefitting others,” it is said that this can be regarded as repaying the debt we owe to others.

Furthermore, we should not behave in an aggressive and arrogant manner. Instead, in all our actions of body, speech and mind, we should act like a newly married bride—bashful, timid and restrained. We should be respectful and always keep in mind the faults of self-cherishing.

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Question: This chapter talks so much about the faults of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others. Why is this topic in the chapter on meditation, *Teachings on Concentration*?

Answer: The main meditation here is the meditation on bodhicitta. The meditation on the practice of exchanging self and others is for the purpose of generating bodhicitta. As such, it is put under the chapter on meditation because this is the most important meditation. If anybody wants to meditate, there is no better topic than this.

We have already looked at the benefits of generating bodhicitta. There are so many benefits. It is said if we have a good heart and have bodhicitta, even in this life alone, we will be so happy. Definitely, there will be benefit in future lives. Meditating on bodhicitta leads to liberation and enlightenment. Basically, it covers everything.

It is so clear from our own life experience that we are easily disturbed by even a small little problem in life, be it a small pain, small harm or some mild discomfort. We cannot tolerate even the smallest difficulty because we think we are the most important person in the world. We cherish and hold on to this 'I' to be most important. Everything is done for this 'I'. The stronger that feeling, the more intolerable even the tiniest problem becomes. This is very obvious from our own experience.

If we were to develop a completely different worldview—regarding others to be more important than ourselves—I don't think we will have all the problems we are facing now.

As such, this becomes a very important meditation practice.

In particular, the subject matter of this entire text is the practice of bodhicitta. So if you want to meditate on bodhicitta, then meditate on exchanging self and others.

Question: With regard to this practice of exchanging self and others, the assumption is that the person has yet to generate bodhicitta and is using this method to generate it. So after meditating on exchanging self and others, is it possible to pinpoint when the meditator generates bodhicitta? How does this bodhicitta compare with the bodhicitta generated in Chapters Two and Three when the bodhisattva vows are taken?

Answer: The meditation on equalizing self and others followed by the meditation on exchanging self and others leads to the generation of a very strong compassion that will induce the wholehearted resolve. The wholehearted resolve—taking up the personal responsibility, thinking, "I will free all sentient beings from sufferings and achieve their happiness. I will do this by myself alone."—is also very powerful and leads to the generation of bodhicitta.

The first nine chapters of this text is divided into three stages:

- Chapter one is developing the bodhicitta that has yet to be generated and talks about the benefits of bodhicitta. Chapters Two and Three are related to adopting bodhicitta through a ritual.
- The next three chapters, Chapters Four—Six, are dedicated to maintaining the bodhicitta that has been generated and not allowing it to degenerate.
- The remaining chapters pertain to increasing the bodhicitta generated.

This is what is said but I am not sure whether this is connected to what you are asking.

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