

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 18**18 May 2016**

Summary of Chapter Eight.

We have finished Chapter Eight and looked at this chapter in some detail. I thought to summarize the chapter in the next hour or so. What I am going to tell you is material you have already heard. It is more beneficial to do it this way rather than for me to give you an overview of the chapter right at the beginning.

Please try to pay attention for the next hour or so. Today is not the time for you to look at the text. There is no need to look at your text but rather, just pay attention to what I am going to say.

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**SUMMARY**

Right at the beginning of Chapter Eight, there is the explanation about the importance of actualizing calm abiding. One of the main reasons for actualizing calm abiding is that if we don't have concentration and come under the control of distractions, letting the mind to do whatever it wants, it will lead to us accumulating a lot of non-virtues.

The manifestation of many erroneous conceptions come about due to the imprints of those erroneous conceptions. In order to eliminate them, we have to eliminate the source of those erroneous conceptions, their imprints. What allows us to do this is special insight. In order to actualize special insight, that realization has to be preceded by the attainment of calm abiding. As such, it is very important for us to actualize calm abiding.

You may ask, "What is the benefit of actualizing calm abiding?" Once we have achieved calm abiding, many of the afflictions are not able to manifest, i.e., the realization of calm abiding stops the manifestations of many afflictions. Why is that important?

- If we are able to stop the afflictions from manifesting, at least for that time, we will not have the conditions that will activate the imprints that were left on the mental continuum through the accumulation of various karma in the past. If the karmic imprints are not nourished, they will not ripen.
- Also when the afflictions are not manifesting, we will not be accumulating new karma.

These are some of the benefits of actualizing calm abiding.

We also need to know what we stand to lose, what will be the state of our mind, in the absence of calm abiding. We need to know what the disadvantages of letting our mind

fall under the control of distractions are. If we continue to let the mind be distracted—letting the mind come under the control of the afflictions, be it anger, attachment and so forth—those afflictions will only become stronger and stronger. Due to that, we will accumulate fresh karma for many more rebirths in samsara. The stronger the afflictions, there will be more and more conditions for the karmic imprints we have accumulated in the past to be nourished and activated.

We have to see for ourselves the importance and the benefits of attaining calm abiding. We need to generate the thought, “Calm abiding is really important and I need to attain it.”

In order to attain calm abiding, we have to abandon the discordant factors, obstacles or unfavourable conditions that stand in our way. We must eliminate them.

One of the discordant factors that impede the attainment of calm abiding is living a busy life, i.e., having a liking for the hustle and bustle of life. If we don't abandon the hustle and bustle of life, there is no way we can achieve calm abiding.

Why do people like the hustle and bustle of life so much? Why are they attracted to this kind of lifestyle? Basically, it is due to attachment. Since attachment is the cause for liking a busy life, first, we need to understand the faults of attachment. As such, these faults are discussed in the text.

In the text, the discussion on attachment takes two forms:

1. First, there is the discussion of attachment to another person, i.e., attachment to a sentient being or sentient beings.
2. Then, there is the discussion of attachment to worldly things, such as material gain, respect, reputation and so forth.

So we can be attached to both people and things.

First, we need to reflect on the faults or disadvantages of having attachment and desire for sentient beings. We are attached to sentient beings who we see as pleasant, beautiful and attractive. But we will not find sustained happiness from that attachment. It is not the case that by following our attachment to the person we are attracted to, we will get happiness in return, including the happiness that extends beyond this life. Unfortunately, this is not the result.

In fact, the more we follow the attachment we have for others, the result is only more and more suffering for ourselves, i.e., we get further and further away from happiness. The greater the attachment, the greater is the amount of pain, suffering and negativities we will accumulate. Instead of getting happiness in return for our attachment and desire, we get more and more negative karma, problems and suffering.

If you were to ask, “By following my attachment, from life to life, will I get to meet again and again with what I consider pleasant and attractive?” The answer is no. In fact, you will only get further and further away from your object of attachment.

By following attachment, our mind becomes distracted. We become less contented because the stronger the attachment, the lesser the contentment. This is obvious from

our own experience.

When we follow our attachment to others, we can forget about liberation. There is no way liberation can be achieved as long as we follow our attachment to people. Even when we have developed some sense of renunciation, based on seeing the suffering of samsara, that positive thought is overwhelmed completely by our attachment. Whatever disenchantment or renunciation we may have generated will be overwhelmed by our attachment.

Following attachment and our desire for people and objects make our precious human rebirth empty and useless. Having this precious human rebirth that is a suitable basis for achieving everlasting happiness and the peace of liberation is rendered meaningless.

Following the discussion regarding the faults of having attachment for sentient beings is the discussion about the ways to abandon such attachment and desire. We have to think about how, at the time of death:

- Nothing is of benefit to us except our virtue and practice of the Dharma.
- The people surrounding us—our friends, relatives, loved ones, attendants, entourage and supporters—are useless.
- Our possessions are also useless to us.
- Even this body that we cherished so much is useless and does not benefit us.

We have to do the nine-point meditation on death and impermanence.

We also have to see that there is no benefit in associating with normal worldly people, referred to as “childish” people in the text. In fact, such association only brings harm and problems because it stirs up all kinds of emotions in us, such as attachment, and makes us create negative karma. So the first step is to isolate ourselves from such harmful people by living in isolation, a place far away from those conditions that will stir up attachment in our mind.

Then the text goes on to talk about the faults of having attachment to material gain, respect, reputation, praise and so forth.

What are the faults of having attachment to such things? Even if we were to acquire everything we seek—wealth, power, reputation and so forth—this acquisition becomes the condition for generating arrogance. We begin to think very highly of ourselves and this causes us to look down on others. This leads to the accumulation of the karma for rebirth in the lower realms.

Furthermore, being attached to material gain, power and respect and so forth have no limits. We can't stop it. The more we have, the more we want. Our attachment and craving only grow stronger and stronger. In the process, we accumulate more and more powerful non-virtue that will throw us to the lower realms in the end.

The purpose of thinking extensively about the many faults of desire and attachment is to motivate us to abandon associating with ordinary childish people and to live in isolation. Someone who has thought deeply about this will see for himself the futility of this ‘normal’ life. He will generate the strong feeling of wanting to do something positive with his life. These are the people who should live in isolation.

If living in isolation is so important, what kind of place should we choose if we wish to live in isolation? There is a description of the qualities of a suitable place.

- It should be a place where we can have easy access to the necessities of life, such as clothing, food and so forth.
- The environment should not cause us to develop illnesses. For instance, some types of soil may be harmful to our health and living there will make us sick.
- If we should have a companion with us while living in isolation, that companion should share our enthusiasm and interest in practice. His views should accord with our own so that harmony is maintained.
- There should not be much human traffic in the area such that during the day, we will hear a lot of chatter and noise.
- It should also be a place where there aren't sounds such as flowing rivers, waterfalls or howling winds.
- It should be a place where we will not be eaten by wild animals.

*Khen Rinpoche: Otherwise, before you have developed calm abiding, you are already gone!*

Finding a suitable place to live in physical isolation is the external preparation. But what is equally if not more important is the internal preparation one should make. The person planning to live in isolation must:

- have few desires
- be contented with a simple life
- have abandoned engaging in all kinds of work and being very busy
- have some control over his mind, i.e., desire and attachment are not big problems for him already
- be abiding in ethical discipline

The lam-rim tells us how important it is to gather all these favourable conditions as they are crucial for the attainment of calm abiding. Otherwise, without all these prerequisites, it is said that no matter how long we may try to achieve calm abiding, we will never be successful.

On the other hand, if we are successful in living in isolation, what are the benefits? One benefit is that we will have little cause for sorrow when we are alive and at the time of death. Whether we are alive or at the time of death, we won't have people around us giving us problems, making us worry or feel sorrow.

Another benefit of living in isolation is that our practice of virtue will be stable. There is always room for improvement and we now have the chance to improve the quality of our practice as there is no disturbance. When we live in isolation, there is so much opportunity to recollect, let's say, our objects of refuge—the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—all the time. There are no worldly matters to occupy our mind.

Then the text goes on to talk about abandoning the erroneous conceptions.

There is the discussion on giving up attachment to the body. I think this is referring to abandoning attachment to our own body. In this discussion, there is the explanation of how the body is by nature filthy, impure and dirty. Why is this so? For example, think of

what comes out from our orifices. Those substances are all filthy and dirty. If the by-products of the body are like that, then the body itself must also be filthy, impure and dirty. By examining how the body is the source for these filthy, impure substances, we can understand that the body itself is impure.

Another way of understanding that our body is dirty and impure is by looking at the cause of our body. Where did our body come from? Our body comes from our mother's womb and is the result of the egg and sperm of our parents. The text elaborates with some examples. I don't think I need to go through those examples now.

While living in isolation and distancing ourselves from attachment and desire, the practitioner is advised to meditate to achieve calm abiding. This chapter of the text goes on to talk about the meditations on equalizing and then exchanging self and others. Therefore, these have to be the uncommon ways of attaining calm abiding.

Just as there is an uncommon way, there is also a common way. What does common mean here? There are different ways in which we can interpret the meaning of common or shared. Calm abiding is a shared quality of both non-Buddhists and Buddhists, i.e., calm abiding can also be achieved by non-Buddhists. As such, it is a shared or common quality among non-Buddhists and Buddhists. In general, calm abiding is also a shared quality of all the different Buddhist vehicles (or yanas). Whatever Buddhist yana we are talking about, we need to cultivate calm abiding.

In the context here, uncommon calm abiding refers to the meditations on equalizing and then exchanging self and others. I think they are called uncommon because these practices are unshared or uncommon features of the Mahayana.

Another explanation for uncommon is that this is an uncommon way of meditating on calm abiding. According to my personal opinion, this uncommon way of developing calm abiding has to do with meditating on equalizing and exchanging self and others. It is uncommon in the sense that, even among bodhisattvas, these are practices that are not shared with bodhisattvas of dull faculties. In other words, these are the uncommon practices of the bodhisattvas of sharp faculties.

So with regard to this uncommon way of cultivating calm abiding, the text says, first, meditate on equalizing self and others. Only after that does one meditate on exchanging self and others.

In discussing the practice of equalizing self and others, right from the beginning, the text talks about why it is entirely appropriate or reasonable to meditate on this. The three reasons are:

1. Self and others are equal in the sense that both do not want any suffering but only want happiness.
2. Both are equal in the sense of being selfless.
3. If it is suffering, whether it is our suffering or the suffering of others, it has to be removed.

In the discussion of these three points, many objections were raised, such as, "What is the connection between others and myself? I don't care. There is no connection between

us.” So there is this qualm questioning the connection between others and ourselves.

There is also a qualm that this practice of equalizing self and others will lead to more suffering for oneself. However, the conclusion is that equalizing self and others and generating the wish to remove the suffering of others will not increase our own suffering. In fact, it will lead to the elimination of our own suffering.

- The text also tells us that a person who sees the point and who is dedicated and able to work for others, this person does not feel any difficulty at all.
- In fact, the person who works for others will experience unparalleled joy, a happiness that cannot be found through other means.
- This person who has trained his mind in this way and cultivated this world view, through his dedication to others, will see his own arrogance and pride diminish.
- This person who is completely dedicated to others does not look for any return nor does he hope for any praise or reward, even the reward of the positive ripening effects of the good karma he has accumulated. That is never his motivation.

The text explains that the practice of **equalising** self and others is entirely achievable if we put our mind to it. It is only a matter of habituation and familiarity. An example is given to show how it is achievable. For example, we have come to associate the self with our body but our body doesn't really belong to us. Our body comes from our parents' egg and sperm, i.e., the egg and sperm belonged to our parents. But through habituation, clinging to that which is not the self to be the self, we have come to associate our body as the self, thinking, “This is me.”

Likewise, although others are not us, by familiarizing ourselves with all the different reasons that are stated earlier, we can come to regard others as the self. Of course, once we can regard others as the self, we will be able to cherish them.

After we have equalised others and ourselves, how do we exchange self and others?

- First, we have to train ourselves to cherish others.
- We also have to train ourselves to abandon our self-cherishing.

What do we stand to gain if we are accustomed to putting others first and cherishing others over ourselves?

- The text states that our arrogance and pride will diminish.
- We will not be looking for any reward, praise, reputation or merit.
- When we are accustomed to cherishing others, we are not going to harm them.
- Instead of heaping praise on and always taking the credit for ourselves, we will direct all praise and credit to others.
- We will also be able to see ourselves as the possession of others, to be employed in only working for their benefit.
- By exchanging self and others, we will achieve enlightenment.

Next is the explanation of the faults of self-cherishing and how self-cherishing is the source of all our worries and fears. Due to our self-cherishing, we regard ourselves as more important, higher and better than others. Looking down on others only means that we are creating the karma to be reborn in a low caste or as a servant. Also, when

we regard ourselves to be more important than others, we use others for our own purposes, making them toil for us or do tasks that we don't want to do ourselves. Again, this creates the karma for us to be the slave or servant to others in the future. If one's self-cherishing is very strong, even if one has great wealth and power, one will not be a happy person due to one's self-cherishing.

In short, whether our lives are full of problems or full of happiness, now or in the future, it all boils down to how we think. It is said that all happiness comes from just one genuine thought of cherishing others. Conversely, all problems come by following the thought of self-cherishing, the thought of cherishing ourselves.

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.

This verse summarizes the state of our lives. How our lives will turn out depends on which thought we choose to follow.

In this chapter, self-grasping is likened to a “great ghost” because from that erroneous or mistaken thought comes all the problems in our lives. Every single problem, worry, fear, pain, suffering and unhappiness, even spirit harms, comes from self-grasping. As such, it is really the great ghost. Since it is the root of all our problems, it must be destroyed. We must practise and behave in a correct, not erroneous, way. For example, instead of being attached to and hoarding our possessions, we practise generosity, giving them away and dedicating them to others.

So far, this is how we practise exchanging self and others in thought. In the practice of exchanging self and others, there is the description of how we exchange ourselves with others by putting ourselves, so to speak, in the shoes of three different people.

Besides practising exchanging self and others in thought, there is also the practice of exchanging self and others in action. One way is to dedicate and give away our possessions to others.

In the process of benefitting others, we must adopt a lower position than the beneficiary of our good deeds. Having exchanged ourselves and others, when we find ourselves at fault, even if the fault is quite insignificant, we should acknowledge that we are at fault. As it says in the text, “Should I do something even slightly wrong,/ I shall openly admit it to many people.” (Verse 8.162).

Since developing a single-pointedness of mind is important in achieving calm abiding, therefore, one must rely on mindfulness to overcome any excitement or laxity that may occur in the process of developing such single-pointedness.

In the process of equalising and then exchanging self and others, it is possible that the mind may be distracted and return to its old ways of cherishing oneself and losing interest in benefitting others. This means one is straying from the object of the

meditation. In order to bring our mind back to the object of the practice, we have to depend on mindfulness. Since there is the need to remind ourselves of the benefits of working for others and the faults of self-cherishing, this is why towards the last part of Chapter Eight, there is the discussion on the benefits of working for others once again. There is also the reminder of the faults, for example, of being attached to the body.

The text tells us that in order to achieve calm abiding, we have to work hard. This is when the chapter ends, Gyaltzab Je's reminds us that in order to achieve calm abiding, we have to work hard and joyously persevere. We must put effort into focussing our mind single-pointedly on the chosen virtuous object of observation.

The chapter on joyous effort, i.e., the opposite of laziness, preceded this chapter on concentration. There are a few possibilities mentioned in the lam-rim as to why we don't joyously persevere in virtue.

There are people who see the point of practice and realize they have all the conditions to do so. They know they need to practise and that they can do it. Yet they do not practise. Why is this so? One reason is that they think that there is still time so they procrastinate. The other reason is that they follow their attachment. Even though they see the point and they know they have all the conditions to practise, yet they choose to follow their desire and attachment. This is why they don't practise exchanging self and others.

We know we should be doing this. We see that we can do it because we have all the conditions, yet we don't do it because we don't want to do it. We choose not to do the practice today because we plan to do it in the future. If procrastination is our problem, the solution is to think about death and impermanence, in particular, how the time of death is uncertain.

We should be asking ourselves "Where will I go if I were to die suddenly?" When we realize how it is most likely that we will be going to the lower realms, that will stop those thoughts of procrastination. When there is the thought to engage in virtue, we should act on it immediately. It is said that when we practise the Dharma, we should be like a crazy person because crazy people do whatever comes to mind. So, if the thought to practise Dharma arises, we should act on it immediately. Don't wait.

*Khen Rinpoche: You have to understand what I mean when I say you should behave like a crazy person. I am not saying that when you practise, suddenly, you will become crazy. I am not saying that.*

*When the thought arises, "I want to do prostrations," then do them immediately. Don't think, "Maybe, I will do them tomorrow." Not like that. This is what I mean when I say you should behave like a crazy person. When a crazy person wants to eat, immediately, he will eat something. He doesn't think that he would eat the next day.*

In Chapter Eight, there is much discussion and great emphasis on abandoning attachment by telling us how bad it is. This is something we really have to think about. It is very important that we do this.



The other topics that you have to really think about are the faults of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others. Are you convinced? By thinking about the faults of your own self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others, the end result is a very strong aspiration that wants to overcome your self-cherishing and dedicate yourself to others. This is the end result you are aiming for. In order to get that end result, you must be thoroughly convinced of the faults of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others.

First, we must develop a very stable power of aspiration, a real wish to want to overcome our self-cherishing. This can only come from feeling deep in our heart all the faults of self-cherishing and seeing the benefits of cherishing others. With these as the foundation, then we meditate on exchanging self and others, and dedicate ourselves to the practice.

Even if we do engage in the practice, nothing is going to happen if we do the practice only occasionally, i.e., we meditate one day and not meditate the next few days, depending on whether we are feeling happy or not. Consistency in our meditation is extremely important. We must engage in the practice without a break. This is why the second power is the power of steadfastness.

You also need to have this sense of not having enough of the practice of exchanging self and others. This is the power of joy. You take so much delight and happiness in it. It is as if you were insatiable. You never think, "I have done enough of this practice of exchanging self and others for the day."

In the course of this stable, consistent and dedicated practice, there will be times when we become physically and/or mentally exhausted. At those times, it is important to take a short rest. After a short rest however, we should apply ourselves again to the practice. This is the power of relinquishment.

*Khen Rinpoche: You must know the sequence of these four powers. Don't apply the power of relinquishment in the beginning!*

One can teach Chapter Eight in about one hour. It can also be done in ten minutes. As I said before, it is important that we study the text in more detail. This is not a one-off class like an introductory class. It is not as if we come together only once a month. So what we are doing here has to be different from those who attend these one-off talks. This is why it is so important to read the text, examine the words in detail and think about them. Once you have completed the topic or subject in that manner, then you attempt to summarize what you have studied. Then it is more beneficial.

It is the same with reciting sadhanas or doing your prayers and daily practices. In fact, you must start with the longest version of the sadhana. Only when you are completely familiar with the long sadhana and have everything at your fingertips, then you can depend on the extremely short sadhana or text. Actually, this is how it should be done whether it pertains to your studies or practice. But most of us are not like that. From the very beginning, when we know nothing, we choose the shortest sadhana or prayer and take refuge in that.

*Khen Rinpoche: In the end, you end up with nothing.*

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EXAM FOR MODULE 8

(The exam paper was distributed in class).

Exam paper format:

SECTION A

Choose one of the two options:

1. I have read *all* the verses in Chapter Eight (10 marks).

OR

2. I have read and reflected on *all* the verses in Chapter Eight. You will need to spend a minimum of 10 hours in order to qualify. (50 marks)

SECTION B (50 marks)

Select ten verses from Chapter Eight that you find beneficial for your mind. Explain the meaning of the verses you have chosen by looking at them from two different perspectives.

Deadline for submission: 23 June 2016.

How to approach this exam

Please note that the purpose of this examination is to facilitate your learning and studies. This is the only purpose. As I have said many times before, you must read the root text that you are studying. I have also mentioned to you a few times that you should read Chapter Eight.

Of course, there are different ways of interpreting that instruction. You can read Chapter Eight, for example, in the way you recite the *Golden Light Sutra*. You can finish that in a few hours. This is not the point. However, if you choose this option during this coming month and you only succeed in doing that, then you will only get 10 marks.

This exam is by way of an honour system. You must be truthful. When you submit your answer on 23 June, you have to declare which option you have chosen.

Perhaps, there is another option. If you didn't even manage to read all the verses, then you will get zero mark, i.e., you will not even get 10 marks .

Option 1 in Section A is not difficult. You just have to read all the verses in Chapter Eight. You can do that in 10 minutes. Then at least you get 10 marks.

If you choose Option 2 in Section A—reading every verse in Chapter Eight and reflecting on their meaning—then it is up to you how much time you want to spend on them. The minimum requirement is 10 hours in total. You have 1 month to do this. Otherwise, you don't qualify for these 50 marks.

It is either 50 marks or 0 mark. If you read all the verses and spend the minimum of 10 hours reflecting on them, then just declare your choice as Option 2 in Section A.

You have to choose only one option in Section A. Don't choose both options. If you choose two options, you are not going to get 60 marks. You will get either 10 marks, 50 marks or 0 mark—Section A: Option 1 is 10 marks; Option 2 is 50 marks; 0 mark if you don't do either one of these options.

Section B is worth 50 marks. You have to select 10 verses from Chapter Eight that strike a chord with you, i.e., the verses you feel benefits you. You then explain the meaning of those 10 verses that you have selected in the way that you are asked in the exam paper. Two examples are given to guide you. What we are asking for are two different perspectives. For example, if you choose verses that pertain to the need to cultivate calm abiding, you can explore the verses in this way—what is the problem if you don't have calm abiding and if you do have calm abiding, what do you get out of it?

(Student's question is inaudible).

Khen Rinpoche: I didn't say that you must sit on the meditation cushion. Did I say that? Meditate means you can sit on your toilet bowl! You can also reflect when you are lying down.

(Student's question is inaudible).

Yes, that is correct. The 10 hours refer to a combination of reading and thinking about the verses. I just set this time. For those who can do it, that is good. Those of you who can't do it, then you just let me know, "I can't do it because I have no time." Anyway, this is just an exercise. You have one month. Try your best. I hope this will help you. I need to push you all a little bit. Otherwise, you are not working hard enough.

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

