

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi

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(Khen Rinpoche teaches this lesson in English)

Once I was playing a game and after I didn't do well, there was a message from the game, "If you don't succeed, try and try again." If you want to study Buddhist philosophy, of course, it is not easy but if you really have the wish to study, then you too need to try and try again.

Not everyone can understand the subject in the same way. Everyone is different: different intelligence, different karma, different mind, different body, and different dressing. So no one can be the same. But if you put in the effort, somehow you will learn a little bit of Buddhist philosophy.

With regard to learning Buddhist philosophy, I want to mention again, compared to the merit from doing 100,000 prostrations and making extensive offerings to all the holy objects, I think the merit from putting in effort and making some time to study Buddhist philosophy will be equal to that, if not more.

Logically speaking, I think you gain more merit by studying or reading the Buddhist teachings especially the philosophical subjects. I think you create much more merit than doing 100,000 prostrations and making extensive offerings. By studying, you leave positive imprints on your mind. In this way you will be able to meet the Buddhadharmas from life to life. You will be able to practise and meditate. In this way, you will also be able to achieve liberation. So I think studying, putting in effort into reading, and taking part in discussions are extremely important. As I mentioned before, you have to memorise some of the words of these philosophical texts.

When you think about what everyone is doing in this life, whether it be doing practice or doing business, if you really look deeply, who are they doing it for? Everyone is doing it for the self, the person. So there is a self, a person. Because of that, we do different things to make this self happy. Definitely the self is there. It exists. If there is no self, we won't be doing all these things. It all boils down to the fact that there is a self. Because of that, there is a person. Because of that, we do all sorts of things to please this self.

So with regard to thinking about the person, the self or the "I," you are not a philosopher. You are just an ordinary person so you won't think so much about the self. You do things for the self but you don't think about what kind of self is

there. Normally you won't check that out. If your mind is not affected by tenets, then of course you won't think so much about the self.

But now we are talking about the tenets, so now you need to think more deeply about this. A self, a person, or an "I" exists. There is the self, the person, or "I" who achieves liberation. There is a self, a person, or "I" who is in samsara. Who is this person? What does this person look like? How does this person exist? In tenets, different philosophers think differently about how the person exists. These philosophers can be Buddhists or they can be non-Buddhists. But even Buddhist philosophers put forth different tenets. There are different views with regard to explaining the self.

When we talked about non-Buddhists, there can be many different types of non-Buddhists. Some non-Buddhist philosophers do not believe in past and future lives. They believe that there is just one life. Why do they believe this? There are reasons for this. These non-Buddhists believe that the consciousness is produced by the body, i.e., the physical body produces the mind or consciousness.

Let us take the example of a butter lamp and the light of the lamp. To them, the mind is like the light of the lamp and the body is the butter lamp.

Another example: a drawing or painting carved on a rock. The mind is like the drawing that is carved on the rock. The body is the rock.

The non-Buddhists' belief is like that. Therefore, when one dies, the mind also dies. The mind does not continue on because it depends on the body. When the body dies, the mind also dies. Everything disappears and nothing continues on. Like the drawing on the rock, when the rock disappears, the drawing that is carved on the rock can no longer be seen. Therefore they believe that there is no future life.

It is the same when you think about this scientifically. All the minds and whatever kind of feelings you may have are produced by the brain. When the brain is dead, all the minds also die. It all depends on the brain.

In ancient times, some non-Buddhists also believed that when one dies, everything else dies. There are no past and future lives, just this one life. So be happy and enjoy it while you are alive. Some non-Buddhists believe that.

Some non-Buddhist philosophers also believed that everything came about suddenly without cause. There are no causes and conditions for things to happen. They just happen suddenly. These non-Buddhist philosophers gave different examples of this. One example is the sun rising suddenly. That happens without a cause. Another example is the fact that water always flows downwards. There is no cause for that. The sharpness of a thorn also came about without cause.

They gave many such examples where causes were not needed for certain things to happen. They mentioned that people who engaged in a lot of violence and killing can have long lives. There is no cause for that. Also people who are stingy and miserly can be rich. The examples they gave showed that there are no causes. They do think a lot to be able to give such examples. While some non-Buddhists may believe in future lives, they do not believe in causes.

Then some non-Buddhists believe in future lives but they do not believe in liberation. The reason for this is that when they meditate on calm-abiding, they are able to reduce the delusions so that they do not manifest. As they meditate longer, they are able to reach the form and formless realms and attain the peak of samsara. At the peak of samsara, it seems as if there are no more delusions in the mind. They believe therefore that they have achieved liberation at that time. But in reality they have not achieved liberation. At the time of death, they are able to see where they are going to be reborn in the next life, such as in the animal realm, the hell realm, and so forth. Immediately they develop the strong view that there is no liberation, that it does not exist. Some of them who were rich at the time of death could see that they were going to be born poor. They asserted that there were no cause for that to happen.

There are so many different philosophers with their different views, outlooks, and different beliefs.

For Buddhists, I guess the most important thing is how to prove that there are future lives, to be able to have confidence in this in the mind. This topic is not easy. The Buddhist logic is that the mind is not produced by the body. The body is not the substantial cause for the mind. For the non-Buddhists they assert that the body is the cause for producing the mind, but the Buddhists says the body is not the substantial cause but is only a condition for the mind to be produced. The physical body cannot be the substantial cause for the mind.

Dharmakirti, an Indian pandit and Buddhist philosopher, debated with the non-Buddhists over this issue of the body being the substantial cause for the mind. He said that if the body is the substantial cause for the mind, it follows then that a dead body should have a mind. But that is not the case.

Dharmakirti also said that one's wisdom and compassion do not depend totally on the body. If wisdom and compassion are totally dependent on the body, then the wisdom of a strong man will be much greater. If a person is weak, his wisdom then must also be weak as his wisdom and compassion are dependent on the body. Dharmakirti said that this is not true. He said that one's level of compassion or intelligence does not depend on whether one's body is strong or weak. If your body is getting stronger, it does not mean that your wisdom is also getting better and that you are becoming more intelligent. If you are getting weaker, that does not mean that you have less compassion or that you are also becoming less intelligent. In this way, Dharmakirti says that one's wisdom and compassion do not totally depend on the body.

Dharmakirti then mentioned that the substantial cause of the mind must be of a similar cause, i.e., a mind must be produced by another mind. The body cannot produce the mind, i.e., it cannot be the substantial cause for the mind. The mind must be produced by another consciousness.

In this way, by using this logic, Dharmakirti proved that there are past lives. The first moment of consciousness of this life must come from the past life. It must be produced by a substantial cause and a similar cause. It cannot come from the body as a physical form cannot produce the mind. It must be a similar cause. He said it must be something else. In this way, he proved that some kind of mind of the past should be there. Otherwise, it is impossible to exist. There must be another cause and it must come from the past life.

That is why Buddhists assert that there is no beginning to the mind. It has to come from another mind. Therefore for Buddhists, the mind has no beginning and our lives have no beginning. When you think about it, it is the same for every impermanent phenomenon. I think there is no beginning but instead there is some kind of continuation because the phenomenon has to be produced by a cause. Therefore everything has no beginning. Do you agree?

There is no beginning because it has to come from some kind of substantial cause. In this way, there is no beginning to all impermanent phenomena, such as the mind. You have to think about this. The mind has no beginning and no end. The same goes for the person, the self, or the “I.” It also has no beginning or end.

Some non-Buddhists do not believe in past and future lives. But some non-Buddhists do believe in past and future lives. The big question now for such non-Buddhists and Buddhists who believe in past and future lives is what really moves from life to life.

The person, the self, or the “I” experiences all the happiness or suffering. Something has to continue on to the next life. The non-Buddhist philosophers and almost everyone who believe in past and future lives believe that there is some kind of person, self, or “I” that continues on. Normally this is called the soul. The Christians, Muslims, and Hindus believe in some kind of soul. They accept that something has to move from life to life. I do not know exactly what they mean by that. Maybe it is like a person, a self, or maybe it is the mind.

They think a lot about what is a soul or a self and what kind of self that would be. They say the five aggregates cannot be one entity with the self but must be something totally separate from the five aggregates. The person, the self, the “I,” or the soul cannot be of one entity with the body but must be totally separated from the five aggregates.

For example, the soul has to be a separate entity from the aggregate of form, the body. The reason they believe that is because the aggregate of form will disappear when one dies. The self does not disappear but the form will totally disappear during cremation when the body becomes ashes. The self cannot disappear but it has to continue on. For this reason, they say the soul cannot be of one entity with the body but must be totally separate from the body.

They also say that the self must be permanent because it never changes. It is the same thing that continues on. The self never changes. It is the same soul that moves on from life to life. It is permanent, i.e., it doesn't change.

They also mentioned that the self or the person is single (or unitary), i.e., it does not have any parts. They mentioned that the self pervades every phenomenon and is everywhere. The self must be single and independent. Here, independent means not depending on causes and conditions. To them, the soul, the self, or the person should be like that. To account for past and future lives, the non-Buddhists have to posit something that moves from life to life. What kind of self will that be? That self is permanent, single, and independent:

- When we say it is permanent, it means it does not change from moment to moment.
- The self does not have any parts. That is why it is called single.
- Being independent, it does not depend on causes and conditions.

I think most of the non-Buddhists who believe in past and future lives accept that a self that is permanent, single, and independent exists. They thought a lot about what goes on from life to life and they conclude that it must be like that. In reality, whether that is true or not is another matter. They think that is the only way. Their conclusions are like that.

Now we talk about Buddhist philosophy. All Buddhists accept past and future lives. When we say the self, the person, or the “I,” we accept that the self exists. When we say in Buddhist terms that there is no self, no person, that there is selflessness, we have to understand what that means. Here when we talk about the GES, we are talking about the coarse selflessness of person. It is in the chart.

SELF OF PERSON AND PHENOMENA

SCHOOL	COARSE SELF OF PERSONS	SUBTLE SELF OF PERSONS	COARSE SELF OF PHENOMENA	SUBTLE SELF OF PHENOMENA
Great Exposition school	A permanent, single and independent person	A self-sufficient person	None	None
Sutra school	A permanent, single and independent person	A self-sufficient person	None	None
Mind Only school	A permanent, single and independent person	A self-sufficient person	None	Object and subject as different entities; Phenomena as naturally bases of engagement / referent of names
Yogic Autonomy Middle Way school	A permanent, single and independent person	A self-sufficient person	Object and subject as different entities	Truly existent phenomena
Sutra Autonomy Middle Way school	A permanent, single and independent person	A self-sufficient person	None	Truly existent phenomena
Consequence Middle Way school	A self-sufficient person	An inherently existent person	None	Inherently existent phenomena other than persons

A permanent, single, and independent person does not exist. The non-Buddhists believe in such a self but all Buddhist philosophers say that this kind of self does not exist. The coarse self of persons is the same for the GES, the SS, the MOS, and the AMWS. They all say that kind of person does not exist. First you have to understand how the non-Buddhists posit the self that goes from life to life and their reasons for doing so. All the Buddhist tenets say that kind of self does not exist.

At the very beginning I had mentioned the four Buddhist seals. The four seals are:

1. All compounded phenomena are impermanent.
2. All contaminated phenomena are miserable (or in the nature of suffering).
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.
4. Nirvana is peace.

Why do Buddhists believe that kind of self cannot be permanent? Why doesn't a permanent self exist? Why doesn't a single self exist? Why doesn't an independent self exist? We have to prove that kind of self does not exist.

When you refer to the first seal - all compounded phenomena are impermanent - when you talk about impermanence, there is the coarse level of understanding of impermanence and the subtle level of understanding of impermanence. When we say impermanence, it means there is momentary change, i.e., change in every second due to causes and conditions. That is impermanence.

Now we talk about the second seal, all contaminated things are in the nature of suffering. The whole idea is this: Impermanence means there is momentary change. All the contaminated aggregates change due to causes and conditions. What are the causes and conditions that cause them to come about? Contaminated phenomena come from karma and delusions.

Gang zag in Tibetan is person in English. The etymology of *gang zag* is this: “*gang*” means full of delusions and “*zag*” means overflowing. That means we are full of delusions. Not only that. The delusions are overflowing! This word is interesting. It is good to learn the meaning of *gang zag*.

When we say, contaminated phenomena, it means that they are produced or caused by karma and delusions and that they are in the nature of suffering.

The third seal is that all phenomena are empty and selfless. The Buddha said all contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering. If they are in the nature of suffering, is there anything we can do about it? The Buddha said yes, it is possible because all phenomena are empty and selfless.

How is this so? If we think more deeply about this, all our suffering and pain come from attachment and anger. These are wrong consciousnesses and are not valid minds. A wrong consciousness apprehends, sees, and believes in the object in the wrong way. Because of that, it causes pain and suffering.

Again when you look more deeply into how anger and attachment arise, it boils down to believing in an independent self or self-grasping. Believing in such an independent “I,” anger and attachment arise, and then suffering arises from that. It all boils down to self-grasping, believing that the independent “I” is there. Based on that, all suffering arises.

The Buddha said that all phenomena are empty and selfless, so nothing exists independently. The self does not exist independently but the self-grasping sees and grasps at an independent “I.” Not only that, it believes 100% that the independent self is there. We need to analyse whether that mind is a valid mind or a wrong mind.

The mind that believes in the independent self, is it a valid mind or a wrong mind? When we analyse this, the mind that believes in the independent “I” is a wrong consciousness. What it believes in is totally opposite to how the self exists. In reality there is no independent “I” but the mind totally believes the independent “I” is there. So it is a wrong consciousness.

There is an antidote for this wrong mind, a mind that understands that there is no such independent “I.” That mind becomes an antidote to the mind that believes the independent “I” exists. When we understand that there is no such independent “I” or person, then we are able to reduce the self-grasping mind. When we are able to weaken that mind, logically, it is possible to totally reduce this mind. Therefore liberation is possible when you understand that.

That is why there is the fourth seal: nirvana is peace. Nirvana is possible. Here we have removed all our delusions as well as the root of the delusions, the self-grasping. When you are able to understand that and you are able to remove all the delusions, then you will be able to understand that nirvana is peace. When you don't have delusions, you don't have attachment and anger. That is when peace in the mind starts.

When you talk about nirvana, it is not a city somewhere. Nirvana is in your heart. You don't have to go to another country to find it. You have to understand that nirvana is peace.

Samsara is not far away. It is in your mind until you are released from your delusions and karma. Your body is like a pillar and your mind is like a person who is tied to the pillar with the rope of karma and delusions. The mind is tied to the body by karma and delusions. When you die, another body comes and again your mind goes there, tied to the body by karma and delusions. Your body and mind are always bound together by karma and delusions. The mind never lets go of the body. That is why suffering starts. When you are not bound by karma and delusions, your mind is free. You may have your body but when your mind is free and is not bound by karma and delusions, you will be free of pain and suffering. You are liberated from karma and delusions.

We have to understand the kind of wrong mind we have and how many wrong minds we have. Most of them believe that everything we see is right, what we believe is right, we are the best and whatever we say is right. One is like the Buddha. Everything is correct. "100% of what I see is right."

Let us talk about permanence and how we see things. We see something that is impermanent to be permanent. We believe that. We say it is impermanent but, in reality, in our mind, we believe the impermanent to be permanent. So we have this wrong mind.

For example, the Swee Kim (name of student) we saw yesterday and the Swee Kim we see today when we come to class, we see him as exactly the same person. There is no change. Not only do we see him in that way, we totally believe that it is the same person, i.e., today's Swee Kim and yesterday's Swee Kim are exactly the same. We believe that Swee Kim is permanent.

We believe the person we saw ten years ago and the person we see now to be the same person. We believe it is the same person even though he has grown older. But, in reality, yesterday's Swee Kim is already gone and does not exist today.

When you divide up time, when the 24 hours of yesterday are finished, yesterday's Swee Kim is gone and today's Swee Kim starts. It is a totally different Swee Kim. It is not the same Swee Kim at all. Here I am talking about how we believe he is exactly the same person but in reality, it is not the same person.

In the same way, we never think of the rocky mountain to be impermanent. We always think that it is permanent, that it will last forever, and we grasp at that. When we think of this world, we also believe that. After billions of years, this world has to disappear but we don't see it in that way. We think it will always be there and that it is permanent.

When we think more deeply, this morning's Swee Kim and this afternoon's Swee Kim are different, but we believe they are totally the same. We can talk about the Swee Kim of an hour, then we can go deeper to the Swee Kim of the seconds and so forth. They are not the same but we believe they are the same. There is momentary change in every second so it is not the same Swee Kim at all but we do not understand that. In reality Swee Kim is impermanent but we believe he is permanent, the same, and always there.

When a person passes away, you say it is the end. This is the coarse and not the subtle understanding of impermanence. Yesterday's Swee Kim does not exist today. That is the coarse level of understanding of impermanence, but we do not understand impermanence even at this coarse level. If we can see that he is not the same person, that he keeps on changing and is a different person, when we really understand that, then it will reduce our attachment and anger. We will be able to reduce everything once we understand that. There will be no self-grasping.

With anger, you believe that the person who harmed you two days ago to be the same person when you see him again the next day. You see him as exactly the same person who harmed you. To you, the yesterday's person and the today's person who harmed you is the same person. You never think the person has changed and is a different person. When you understand that the person who harmed you is gone today and is no longer there, that he is a totally different person and not the same person at all, when you understand that coarse level of impermanence, then you will be able to remove your anger and attachment.

In reality, the Swee Kim of yesterday does not exist today and today's Swee Kim will not exist tomorrow. Yesterday's Swee Kim was labeled at that time, yesterday. When that time is gone, that Swee Kim does not exist anymore. Does that make sense? Not understanding that, we believe Swee Kim to be exactly the same person.

We are not talking about emptiness here. We are talking about impermanence. We are not even talking about subtle impermanence. We are talking about coarse impermanence. When we understand that level of coarse impermanence, we will be able to reduce our anger and attachment. Here I am saying that we have this kind of belief in permanence that in reality is impermanence. We all have this kind of belief in permanence. That is why what we believe is not true.

We now talk about something that is by nature unclean but we believe it to be 100% clean; for example, our own bodies. If we think about the causes and conditions for how our bodies come about and how they exist, in reality, what we have is unclean. But how does our mind see our own body? We see our body as totally clean. When we see the bodies of others that, in reality, are the same kind of body, their bodies are not as clean as your body. You always believe, "I am cleaner."

A long time ago, I mentioned comparing your own faeces with that of others. In reality they are no different because when you eat exactly the same things, the same things should come out but the mind looks at it differently. "My poo is not so disgusting whereas other people's poo is disgusting." This is how our mind works when related to oneself. If you really look at the body, you always think that your body is clean. Our mind believes what we see but in reality it is not true at all.

When we were at Lorong 15 (the old premises of the centre), I remembered asking someone, “When you see your own poo, why do you think that your poo is not so smelly?” Someone replied, “It is self-cherishing.” This is how our mind works. So many wrong kinds of thinking and wrong beliefs. In reality, that is not true.

When you think about the person, immediately you believe that the body is one’s self. In reality the body is not the self and is not the “I” but we believe the body is the “I.” For example, believing the body is the “I,” when your body hits a pillar, immediately you believe that your body is the person hitting the pillar, “I hit the pillar.” You believe the body is one’s self.

Likewise with happy feelings, suffering feelings, or unpleasant feelings. You feel that the feeling itself is the person. When you understand something, you say, “I understand something.” It is the same with discrimination. When you discriminate some object, you think, “I discriminate the object.” We have this kind of wrong belief. In reality each of the five aggregates - form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness - is not the person but we believe it to be so.

When we die, the consciousness moves on to the next life. Then we think the consciousness is the person, the self, or the “I,” but in reality it is not the person, the self, or “I.” But we believe that is the self.

We have many kinds of wrong consciousnesses within our mind based on the independent “I.” Here we talk about the coarse and subtle levels of selflessness, the selflessness of persons, and the selflessness of phenomena. There are many different levels of wrong consciousnesses within us. What we see and what we believe are not necessarily 100% true. When we understand the four Buddhist seals, we are able to understand that we have so many wrong minds and wrong beliefs.

When we understand that our mind is not 100% pure, not correct, not valid, when we are able to understand this topic, then there will be a difference when we practice. For instance, the practice of guru devotion. Rinpoche mentioned many times that we should practice guru devotion for three months. When you understand that your mind is totally not pure and that we have so many wrong minds, it will help in our practice of guru devotion and can be applied in meditation.

The conclusion is that we have to understand:

- Why some non-Buddhists do not believe in future lives, but only this life, and their reasons for doing so.
- For non-Buddhists who believe in past and future lives, what kind of self moves from life to life? We have to understand that. The non-Buddhists who believe in past and future lives say that it is the permanent, single, and independent person that goes from life to life.
- According to Buddhist philosophy, all the Buddhist tenets say that the permanent, single, and independent person or self, does not exist.
- What is the problem if it is permanent? What is the problem if it is independent? What is the problem if it is single? We have to find out and prove that kind of self does not exist.

We have to get some idea: first, the beliefs of the non-Buddhists and how they

are not accepted by Buddhists. That is the whole idea of studying the tenets.
So the coarse selflessness of the person is the non-existence of the permanent,
single, and independent person.

I stop here. I hope you understand.

Did you get some idea?

This is a review of the last class.

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