

Transcript of the oral commentary by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on Dharmarakshita's *Wheel-Weapon Mind Training*

Root verses: Excerpt from *Peacock in the Poison Grove: Two Buddhist Texts on Training the Mind*, translation Geshe Lhundub Sopa with Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling. © Wisdom Publications with permission granted for use in the FPMT Basic Program by Wisdom Publications.

Lesson 2

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Eight Verses of Thought Transformation (cont'd): Verse 1: Generating a mind that cherishes all sentient beings. Verse 2: Considering oneself as the lowest of all. Verse 3: Practising mindfulness and introspection to counter our afflictions.

EIGHT VERSES OF THOUGHT TRANSFORMATION (CONT'D)

Verse 1: Generating a mind that cherishes all sentient beings

Verse 1

Determined to obtain the greatest possible benefit from all sentient beings, who are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel, I shall hold them most dear at all times.

The first verse of the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* gets us to widen our mental perspective, to generate a mind that takes into account the welfare and happiness of *all* sentient beings and to develop, from the beginning, this very courageous thought of cherishing all sentient beings.

Of course that can only arise on the basis of seeing why we should do this. We must be able to justify to ourselves the reasons for developing this very expansive perspective. The reason is stated in the first verse, "Determined to obtain the greatest possible benefit" When we see that we can achieve the highest goal by cherishing all sentient beings, naturally we will pledge to cherish them. Only then will we generate the thought, "I'm going to do this! I'm really going to develop this mind."

It is said that ideally for someone who wants to put this into practice in the form of a meditation, the meditation on these verses should be preceded by the following:

- Visualise clearly the objects of refuge and one's personal deity who is inseparable from one's root guru.
- Develop single-pointed devotion and faith in the guru-deity.
- One performs the seven-limb practice.
- Then one makes a wholehearted supplication by first visualising the flow of nectar from the guru-deity entering into oneself through one's crown, pervading one's entire being. This purifies all the obstacles that prevent one from cherishing all sentient beings.

- After that, still with the visualisation of the flow of nectar entering into one's crown, one visualises that one receives the blessings to be able to develop this wish to cherish all beings.
- Then one recites the first verse slowly and contemplates its meaning.

This verse says that all sentient beings are more precious than the wish-fulfilling jewel. We are told that all the happiness of this life, the happiness of all our future lives, the happiness of liberation from samsara and our achievement of full enlightenment are dependent on sentient beings. They are able to give us all these levels of happiness.

We have to check for ourselves and see whether this is the case by ascertaining and being convinced of the truth of this statement. It is only with that conviction, when we see for ourselves that this is really true—indeed it is the case that sentient beings can bestow on us all these different levels of happiness—that the wish wanting to cherish sentient beings from our own side will arise naturally. When we see the purpose and the benefits of cherishing others from our own side, then the wholehearted commitment to do so will arise. We will make the wholehearted promise to ourselves, “I will hold them most dear and cherish them at all times.”

Verse 2: Considering oneself as the lowest of all

Verse 2

When in the company of others, I shall always consider myself the lowest of all, and from the depths of my heart hold others dear and supreme.

The next verse tells us that when we interact with others, we should always consider ourselves “the lowest of all, and from the depths of my heart hold others dear and supreme.”

After generating the expansive mind due to reflecting well on Verse 1, how can we translate that into practice in our lives? Verse 2 tells us how. “When in the company of others,” i.e., in our interactions with others, it doesn't matter who the other party may be—it could be our own virtuous friend, the guru, or someone who is usually considered lower than us, like destitute people, beggars and so forth—from our own side, we should consider that person to be superior to us; we should consider ourselves to be lower than that person.

Verse 2 says that viewing and holding others as superior to us has to be sincere and come from the depths of our heart. Then we view others in that way with a respectful attitude. It is evident from our own experience that in our interactions with others, from our own side, if we really think that we are lower than the other person, probably there will be fewer difficulties in our relationship with that person.

There are a few things to think about here. When we find ourselves feeling egotistical or proud, at that moment, it is important to focus on our own mistakes and faults, and the shortcomings we have. For example, when we compare ourselves to a dog, we always think that the dog is lower than us. We believe, “I'm a higher being and am better in every way compared to that dog.”

Perhaps we can think about it in this way. In Lama Tsongkhapa's *In Praise of Dependent Arising*, he said that there were people who out of their ignorance criticised the Buddha. They cannot tolerate his explanation of the emptiness of inherent existence. Due to their ignorance, they cannot understand profound dependent arising.¹ Lama Tsongkhapa said that this "comes as no surprise," i.e., it is to be expected that people who do not have much faith in the Buddha will not accept what he taught.

But Lama Tsongkhapa found it very surprising that people who admired, respected and believed in the Buddha and who accepted his teachings including his teachings on dependent arising cannot accept the emptiness of inherent existence.²

It is not surprising when people who don't have faith in the Buddhadharma, who don't practise or who do not accept the Dharma make mistakes and commit negativities. That is to be expected. We pride ourselves in being Buddhists with faith in the Buddha and his teachings. We practise the Mahayana teachings. We may say all this yet we don't have much faith and practice to show for it. This is really surprising. If we compare ourselves to someone who is not a Buddhist, who does not have faith in the teachings and who is not practising, in that sense, we are lower than those non-Buddhists.

Going back to the example of a dog. Of course, a dog cannot practise Dharma. That is normal and to be expected. It is hardly surprising. But for those of us who claim to accept the Dharma, yet our conduct is completely contrary to our beliefs, then that is really surprising. In that sense, we can establish that, indeed in many ways, we are lower than a dog.

There are many things that we can think about. We may have heard many teachings and know the essential points of the practice, yet our conduct does not accord with the teachings. Or we have studied a lot of Dharma, yet we continue to commit non-virtue and hardly create any virtue in our entire life. Then that is a real pity and a great waste. In those terms, we are certainly worse than others. If we look at our own life history, having met and practised the Dharma for years but have nothing much to show for it in terms of attainments, then we certainly have no valid basis whatsoever for feeling superior to others.

These are the methods to see how we are not superior and are indeed lower than the other person by seeing all our mistakes, faults and shortcomings.

In order for us to respect the other party, we must see and acknowledge the other party's qualities. A person may be physically more attractive than us, wealthier than us and possess something desirable and of good quality that we do not have. She may be experiencing some good event in her life. Whatever good quality or good experience it may be, we should see that it is the result of that person's own karma.

¹ "That some, hostile to you,/ held as the slaves of ignorance,/ are unable to bear the sounds of no self-nature/ comes as no surprise." (Page 227, *The Splendour of an Autumn Moon—The Devotional Verse of Tsongkhapa*, translated and introduced by Gavin Kilty. © 2001 Gavin Kilty, Wisdom Publications.

² "That others, accepting dependent arising,/ the crown jewel of your teaching,/ are unable to tolerate the roar of emptiness/ does surprise me." (*Ibid.*, page 227).

For example, that person is richer than us because she is experiencing the result of having practised generosity in the past.

This is the training of the mind that we can do—focussing on the good qualities of others. When we see the good qualities that are evident to us, we have to realise that the person has them because they are the results of her own practice and good karma.

In the case of not seeing any good qualities from our side, at the very least, we can think that although the good qualities are not evident to us, it is possible that this person has *some* qualities that we are not seeing yet. This is the training of the mind.

Chandrakirti said in his *Supplement to the Middle Way* that for someone who is actively engaged in the practice of the perfection of generosity—i.e., someone who always wants to enhance his practice of giving—it is very possible that one of the recipients of his generosity could be a bodhisattva. If one of the recipients is really a bodhisattva, then he will accumulate much merit because of having given to a bodhisattva. The Buddha said that it was very difficult to judge with certainty who the other party might be. We can't truly tell who they really are, whether they are ordinary beings or not. It is not possible.

There are a number of historical accounts of high practitioners who have chosen to keep a low profile. One such example was Dromtonpa, a disciple of Lama Atisha, who was a practitioner of the bodhicitta practice of exchanging self and others. Dromtonpa himself had the aspect of a lay, not an ordained, person.

When people looked at Dromtonpa, they would have assumed that he was a very ordinary, simple and unassuming person who doesn't know anything. But Dromtonpa had many disciples. One of them was Geshe Chekawa.

There was a time when Dromtonpa was invited to teach at the place where his disciple, Geshe Chekawa, resided. In Tibet, when the lamas moved from one place to another, usually they would travel with a huge procession of horses, many attendants and helpers.

On his way to the teaching venue, Dromtonpa was walking alone without any attendants nor was he riding a horse. He was simply walking to the teaching venue. Geshe Chekawa's monastery was situated on a high ground. In order to reach it, he had to cross a pass that was going uphill.

Along the way, he met a lay tantric practitioner who was carrying many things. When the lay tantric practitioner saw Dromtonpa coming up, he asked Dromtonpa, "Can you help me to carry my things?"

Dromtonpa said, "Yes. Sure."

After walking for a while, the lay tantric practitioner decided to take off his boots. He asked Dromtonpa to carry them. Dromtonpa did so happily and carried the boots over his shoulder.

They walked up the slope gradually. As they got nearer to the monastery, the lay tantric practitioner saw monks lined up along the path leading to the monastery as if they were waiting for someone. The lay tantric practitioner wondered and asked Dromtonpa, “What is happening here?”

Dromtonpa then said, “I assume they are waiting for me.”

The lay tantric practitioner was so ashamed, he took all his belongings back from Dromtonpa, quickly gathered them and fled.

Because Dromtonpa was someone who always practised the instructions of exchanging self and others, he truly viewed himself as lower than others and he applied that knowledge into practice. As such, he was really happy to carry whatever he was asked by this lay person, be it his boots or his luggage. Dromtonpa did not experience any difficulties because he really saw himself to be lower than his travelling companion.

We study the three scriptural collections, the Tripitaka, for the purpose of subduing our pride. If we are able to consider ourselves lower than others, we stand to benefit because we will have less problems and difficulties and we will create the conditions for gaining good qualities.

It is very clear when we look at our own experience. This is exactly what has happened in our own life and in our relations with others. We consider ourselves to be more important and we prioritize ourselves above others, thinking, “I am better than him.” Then there are bound to be difficulties, challenges and disharmony in the relationship. This is very clear from our own experience.

This is the flavour of the teachings of the great Kadampa masters. They are, to use a modern expression, ‘in your face’, by showing us exactly what our problems are. They dig out all our faults and list them one by one. They show us, “This is the problem. This is the fault. You will experience all these problems because of having these faults.”

It is quite obvious that egoistical people have lots of problems in this life in their interactions with others. Those problems will extend beyond this life. The great Kadampa masters said that the disadvantages and problems that we are experiencing because of our pride will be even worse in our future lives in that they will result in rebirths in the lower realms. Even if we were born as humans, we will be born in poverty or in a lower caste and others will look down upon us.

Verse 3: Practising mindfulness and introspection to counter our afflictions

Verse 3

Vigilant, the moment a delusion appears in my mind, endangering
myself and others, I shall confront and avert it without delay

We have to consider our shortcomings and faults from many angles. We also have to look at the positive qualities of others from various angles. But even when we succeed in doing this, we may still experience difficulties in our practice because our

afflictions—ignorance, anger and attachment—are still arising very strongly.

Verse 3 is telling us what we should do when the afflictions arise in our mind. If we consider ourselves lower than others and the afflictions do not arise, then that is well and good. But what if the afflictions still arise even though we hold ourselves lower than others? What we should do then? Verse 3 is the answer.

We must be vigilant, i.e., practise introspection, in our conduct and check our mind all the time. In general, there are four kinds of conduct:

1. when we are engaged in activities
2. when we are travelling
3. when we are seated
4. when we are lying down

This verse is saying that whatever activities one may be engaged in—whether one is walking, sitting, lying down and so forth—we must rely on mindfulness and introspection (or vigilance) to check whether the afflictions are manifesting and whether we are following them.

When we talk about conduct, we are talking about the conduct of our body, speech and mind. Whatever may be happening with us physically, verbally or mentally, we have to rely on mindfulness and introspection to see whether these actions are due to the manifestation of our afflictions, the afflictions being the three mental poisons—ignorance, anger and attachment—jealousy, pride and so forth. These activities will include studying the Dharma, listening to the Dharma, reciting mantras, doing our daily prayers, prostrations or circumambulations, when we are in retreat and so forth.

The crucial point is that we have to be mindful and be vigilant always to check whether we are following our afflictions or whether our afflictions are manifesting. If we rely on mindfulness and introspection, we should be able to recognise the afflictions when they arise, deal with them and not follow after them. The verse is saying that we should rely on mindfulness and introspection to check for the arising of our afflictions. When we discover that our afflictions are manifesting, we should not wait but we should “confront and avert it without delay.”

Our problem is that we don't even recognise when the afflictions are arising. In order to be aware that afflictions are arising in our mind, we need to be accustomed to mindfulness and introspection for without them, when afflictions arise, we do not even know they have arisen. For example, we are usually not able to detect desire when it arises. Our desires snowball and only when they become very strong and gross do we suddenly feel their presence and only then, maybe, we will try to confront it by applying the antidote.

But when the affliction is manifesting so strongly, even if we were to try to overcome it, it is very difficult and challenging. Would it not be so much easier not to allow the affliction to arise in the first place? And even when it does arise, if we are able to detect it has arisen right from the very beginning due to having mindfulness and introspection, we will be able to deal with it there and then. Overcoming it would be

much easier and less challenging.

If we claim to be practitioners and really want to practise, then we have to cultivate mindfulness and introspection with respect to our conduct and activities constantly at all times. This is said to be extremely important.

What does life have in store for us if we do not recognise the afflictions when they arise but instead we just follow after them when they have arisen?

- First, we don't recognise that they have arisen.
- Even when we recognise they have arisen, we do not apply any antidote to counteract them.
- What will happen when we simply allow our desire, anger and so forth to arise? Here, the verse says, "endangering myself and others." The afflictions will harm us and others.
- Therefore, we have to confront and avert them right away.

Here, one is making a pledge to oneself, "I will confront and avert the afflictions without delay. I will practise mindfulness and introspection and I will apply the antidotes right away."

Due to our lack of mindfulness and introspection, we do not really see the arising of the afflictions. But when they do arise, in the beginning, they are relatively weaker in strength compared to when they are fully developed. That is why when afflictions arise, it is really difficult to spot them when we do not have mindfulness and introspection.

Because of not seeing the arising of the afflictions, they snowball and become very strong. When the afflictions become very strong and are manifesting in a powerful way, what do they do?

Earlier on, we had talked about the predispositions of the afflictions that leave an imprint on the mind. When the afflictions snowball to the point when they become very powerful, that is the time when a very strong imprint is left on our mind. What does this mean? It means we are leaving the potential on our mind to be afflicted in the same way again, for that desire or anger to arise strongly again in the future.

If we are not aware of the afflictions arising and we don't apply the antidotes to them right away, then the afflictions will snowball and become stronger and stronger. The stronger the affliction, the stronger the imprint left on our mind. That is why they are called imprints.

When a very strong imprint of the affliction is left on our mind, what does it do to us? It makes us so habituated with the affliction that all it takes, for example, for desire to arise is meeting a small desirable object in the future. Because of our familiarity with desire, we will be so attached to and have great desire for even small insignificant objects of desire.

Likewise, because of being so habituated with our anger, all we need is to meet with some slight difficulty or very small unpleasant condition. We will get very upset right

away.

So instead of letting ourselves follow after our afflictions and becoming more and more habituated with them, if from the beginning, we see them as faults and mistakes and confront them as much as possible, then these afflictions will not be so strong. As such, the imprint that is left on our mind will also be much weaker so much so that in the future, even if we do meet with, say, many objects of attachment, because of not following after our desires and attachment, we will not be attached to them so easily. And even if attachment should arise, it is weak and not as strong as it can be. Because our desire is not so strong in the first place, it is said that if we do meet with some small object of attachment, attachment may not even arise.

Shantideva emphasised in his *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* that our afflictions are our main enemies. He emphasised the importance of dealing the afflictions using mindfulness and introspection. We have studied that text already where so much was said about how terrible the afflictions are.³

Usually our concept of the enemy is that it is someone external. But what the teachings tell us is that that external enemy is nowhere nearly as dangerous as our internal enemy, the afflictions. An external enemy may be a person who harms us and may even take our life. But at the most, the enemy can only harm us for the duration of this one lifetime whereas our afflictions can harm us in all our lifetimes.⁴

The teachings tell us what we already know. The external enemy can be won over with gifts, by talking to them and so forth. We can even make friends with the external enemy. That is possible. However, if we were to befriend the enemy of our afflictions, the closer we are to them, then the more we will give in to them and in return, we will receive more harm from our afflictions.⁵

It is said that no matter how powerful our external enemy may be, they are nowhere near to being as powerful as our afflictions. The teachings tell us that even if every single person on this planet hates us and becomes our enemy, there is nothing he or she can do to throw us into the lower realms. They do not have the power to send us to the lowest of the hot hells, the relentless hell of Avici. But our afflictions can do that. They have the power to throw us into the lowest of the hot hells. As such, our afflictions are far more deadly than the external enemy.⁶

The teachings tell us that no matter how deadly or how powerful our external enemy

³ Chapter 4 on conscientiousness.

⁴ “All other enemies are incapable/ Of such a length of time/ As can my afflictions,/ The long-time enemy with neither beginning nor end.” (Verse 32, Chapter 4, Page 18, *Engaging in the Deeds of a Bodhisattva*, translated by Toh Sze Gee. ©Toh Sze Gee 2006, Revised 2014).

⁵ “If I agreeably honour and rely upon [others],/ All will enact benefit and happiness,/ But if I rely upon these afflictions/ In return I will be harmed by suffering.” (Verse 33, Chapter 4, *Ibid.*, page 18—19).

⁶ “Should even all the gods and demi-gods/ Rise up against me as my enemies, /They cannot lead me to nor place me in/ The fires of Relentless Torment.” (Verse 30, Chapter 4). “But this foe, the powerful afflictions,/ In an instant can cast me there,/ Which when met will cause not even the ashes/ Of Mount Meru to remain.” (Verse 31, Chapter 4, *Ibid.*, page 18).

may be and no matter how many enemies we may have, they can only harm our possessions or harm us physically. At the very most, what can happen is that they can take our life but that's about it. The external enemy can only do this much. He cannot harm us beyond this life.

But our afflictions can harm us in all our lifetimes. Our afflictions can throw us into the worst suffering, the sufferings of the lower realms.

When the conditions are right, we can expel our enemy to a faraway place or we can physically distance ourselves from that person. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, he may still come back; literally, the external enemy may still knock at our door.

Khen Rinpoche: So be careful!

The external enemy can come back but the internal enemy—our afflictions—can never come back to harm us provided we rely on mindfulness and introspection.⁷

If we don't think about this deeply, it is not apparent to us that our afflictions are so deadly and harmful. However, if we were to really reflect on this, gradually, we will come to see how powerful, deadly and harmful our afflictions are. Once we see that, we can see how the afflictions endanger ourselves.

If we, ourselves, are endangered by our afflictions, then we can infer that everyone else will also be endangered by their own afflictions. As such, as it says in the verse, "endangering myself and others."

Chandrakirti said in his *Supplement to the Middle Way* that even a person who has a very good physical demeanour and generally is pleasant-looking would become ugly when he is upset. As said in the teachings, having an unattractive physical appearance is the karmic result of a lack of patience, which is the result of anger. When we are upset, probably we will not look very good and our physical appearance is unlikely to please others or to cause them to feel happy looking at us.

Khen Rinpoche: Maybe for some people, when they get so angry, they just smile. I am not sure. An angry smile you say? Could be but you can see that it is not really a smile, right?

With respect to someone who is usually regarded as a good person, people will say, "This is a good person. He is a very kind person." But if that person gets angry, he is no longer considered to be a good person.

When we are upset and our anger is manifesting, we cannot think straight. Usually we are able to tell what is right, what is wrong, what is good to do and what is not good to do, i.e., we can discriminate between right and wrong. However, when our anger manifests, we lose our ability to discriminate, our ability of discernment and our sense of what is appropriate and what is not. All this could be due to very strong

⁷ "Ordinary enemies when expelled from one country/ Simply settle down in another and embrace it,/ And when their capability is recovered they then return;/ But the way of this enemy, my afflictions, is different." (Verse 45, Chapter 4, *Ibid.*, page 20).

anger or very strong desire.

You may be someone who is usually quite wise and steady, knowing how to sort things out. But when the afflictions are very strong and overwhelm you, at those times, you are no longer able to think straight and you lose all your good qualities.

We really have to know well the faults of our afflictions. We need to know how we harm ourselves by following them, how they harm others and how, in general, afflictions harm everyone

When we talk about samsara—circling from life to life due to our karma and afflictions—the primary cause is the afflictions. It is the afflictions that cause us to suffer from life to life. Circling from life to life is the source of all problems and suffering.

If we can really feel and see that, naturally, we will be mindful and exercise introspection at all times to guard ourselves against our afflictions as much as possible. In order to help us deal with our afflictions, a variety of methods were taught.

We can deal with the afflictions by:

- adopting the correct view
- the cultivation of meditation
- modifying our conduct, i.e., primarily, our physical and verbal conduct.

SUMMARY

Verse 2 is the advice to consider ourselves lower than others and to cherish and hold others as superior. Essentially, it is advice on how to work with our ego and pride.

Verse 3 advises that if you consider yourself to be a practitioner, then at all times, regardless of what we are doing—even when we are doing our daily prayers, recitations and so forth—we have to be mindful and vigilant, constantly checking our mind to see whether the afflictions are arising or not.

With regard to whatever we do, we have to be honest with ourselves and check whether these activities—our prayers and so forth—are really hurting our afflictions and becoming an antidote to the afflictions. It is emphasised very strongly in the teachings that we must be mindful and vigilant at all times, guarding our mind against our afflictions. This is extremely important.

If we don't work with our afflictions, we are not mindful and vigilant and we do not apply any antidotes, the teachings say that we are not a practitioner. We are not a real practitioner at all. We may look like a practitioner. We may have the form or appearance of a practitioner but in reality, we not a practitioner.

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