

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 3

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Eight Verses of Thought Transformation (cont'd): Reviewing Verse 3. Practising mindfulness and introspection to counter our afflictions. Applying the three approaches. Correlating them with the three higher trainings. Verse 4: The practice with bad-natured people. Verse 5: Offering the victory to others. Verse 6: Seeing the harm-doer as the holy guru.

EIGHT VERSES OF THOUGHT TRANSFORMATION (CONT'D)

Reviewing Verse 3

Verse 3

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

Verse 3 speaks of the need to continually rely on mindfulness and introspection so that the moment we find an affliction arising and manifesting in our mind, we should be able to notice it and then attempt to stop it. We need to see for ourselves the faults and disadvantages of our afflictions. As I said in the previous lesson, we need to think about how harmful our afflictions are from many different angles. We also need to see how they harm ourselves and others. As Verse 3 says, "Vigilant, the moment a delusion appears in my mind, endangering myself and others, I shall confront and avert it without delay" on the basis of relying on our mindfulness and introspection.

In his *Supplement to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti spoke of the disadvantages and faults of anger. When we are upset, we lose the ability to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. He was referring to anger but this particular fault applies equally to other afflictions such as desire. This is quite evident because we all have experienced the disadvantages of our afflictions ourselves. When we are upset or when very strong desire is manifesting in our heart, we somehow lose the ability to think straight and we cannot really distinguish between what is good and what is bad. Our ability to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful, what is right and what is wrong, is greatly diminished.

As a result, all the decisions we make and the actions we take in that state are hardly fruitful and they won't turn out well. We have experienced that many times in the past. We should remember all those mistakes we have made in the past. By recollecting these past experiences, whenever we find ourselves coming under the

influence of these strong afflictions again, we should then remember immediately, “If I were to continue in this same way, thinking in the same way by following my afflictions, the result will not be any different from what I have already experienced in the past.”

The antidotes that we use to counteract our afflictions are weak because we are still beginners but there are ways for us, beginners, to deal with our afflictions by modifying our external and verbal behaviour. “Vigilant, the moment a delusion appears in my mind” means that we should be mindful with respect to our physical and verbal actions. We have to watch our mind to see exactly what it is up to. There are many advices in the teachings pertaining to watching our physical and verbal conduct. For instance, in the teachings, there is the advice of restraining our senses where we are advised not to gaze or look at those objects that may cause us to generate desire.

~ *The practice of ethics*

The practice of ethics (or ethical discipline) is very important for us, beginners. Ethics is primarily about restraining the non-virtues of our body and speech such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, offensive speech and meaningless speech. So prior to engaging in such activities with our body or speech, we should examine whether those actions will harm someone or whether those actions will cause our afflictions to arise and increase.

By relying on mindfulness and introspection, if we find that the action we are about to engage in physically or verbally may lead to harming someone else or lead to the increase of our afflictions, it is said that we must turn away *immediately* from that action and distance ourselves from the object of that action. This is how we, as beginners, can work with our afflictions by modifying our behaviour and conduct.

For example, in the instructions for developing meditative serenity (or calm abiding), one of the prerequisites is to stay in an isolated place away from the hustle and bustle of life. This is a crucial prerequisite for developing calm abiding. Otherwise, we will not be living a simple quiet life, which will tend to lead to many distractions as the mind is easily distracted. It is very difficult to achieve any kind of concentration when the mind is constantly distracted. As such, one should live in an isolated place with a simple life, not a busy one, away from hustle and bustle and distractions. Since there are fewer distractions, it is much easier to develop calm abiding.

There are a number of causes and conditions for the arising of afflictions. In his *Abidharmakosha*, Vasubandhu said that when the following three conditions come together, afflictions will arise:

1. Being near the objects that contribute to the generation of afflictions
2. Having incorrect attention
3. Not acting to abandon the afflictions

~ *Modifying our conduct*

As beginners, we can start working with our afflictions by modifying our conduct. Primarily, this means distancing ourselves as much as possible from the objects that contribute to the arising of our afflictions and to turn away from these objects.

But that alone will not stop the afflictions from arising. Simply distancing ourselves from such objects will not help us to remove the afflictions. As such, we also have to rely on meditation. It is said in the teachings that different afflictions have their own different antidotes. For example, the meditation on ugliness is prescribed as an antidote for attachment and the meditation on love is prescribed as an antidote for anger.

~ *Meditating on the practices of the person of small capacity*

The practices of the person of small capacity are essentially the antidotes to the afflictions. Such a person is striving to discipline his mind by working with the afflictions. All of you have already heard this before since all of you already know the lam-rim. Right from the beginning of the lam-rim, everything is for working with the afflictions and reducing the afflictions.

The lam-rim starts with the topic of correctly devoting to the virtuous friend. It is said in the lam-rim that one of the benefits of correctly devoting to the virtuous friend is that it will naturally reduce mistakes in our conduct and our afflictions will then decline. So if we have the correct faith and truly know how to devote to the virtuous friend, one of the benefits is that our mind will become more subdued and disciplined.

In the section on correctly devoting to our virtuous friend, nine attitudes are taught. For example, in relation to our virtuous friend or guru, from our own side, we should regard ourselves as a servant to the master and behave like an obedient dog.

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.

Verse 2 is the advice to consider ourselves lower than others. This practice first starts with our virtuous friend. We consider ourselves lower than the virtuous friend or the spiritual master in order to reduce our self-cherishing and pride. So right from the very beginning, this practice starts with the virtuous friend.

In the practice of the person of small capacity, there is the meditation on our own impermanence and impending death. It is said in the lam-rim that one of the disadvantages of not remembering death and impermanence is that we don't remember the Dharma. This means that our mind is always following after some affliction. But if we meditate well on our own mortality and impermanence, naturally, many of our mental disturbances and afflictions will naturally subside.

Similarly, if we have a good practice of going for refuge to the Three Jewels, many of our afflictions will be stopped.

If we meditate well on karma and its effects and we find definite conviction in karma and its effect through that meditation, then naturally many of our mental disturbances or afflictions will also subside.

So if we understand well how to proceed with the practices of a person of small capacity—especially if we are able to reflect and meditate well on those points—then many of our afflictions can be stopped.

~ Meditating on the practices of the person of medium capacity

When we meditate on the practices of the person of medium capacity, of course, the positive effects will be even greater, especially if we reflect on the four noble truths and the twelve links of dependent origination.

There is much discussion here as to how all our problems can be traced back to our afflictions. The afflictions are the source of all our problems. There is also much discussion on the faults of the afflictions and so forth.

The practices of the person of medium capacity are essentially the three higher trainings. If the person is able to reflect well on these points and cultivate the antidotes, this will deal with so many of that person's afflictions.

~ Meditating on the practices of the person of great capacity

The practices of a person of great capacity essentially relate to destroying his own self-cherishing. This is done by considering first, from every possible angle, how self-cherishing is harmful and how extremely beneficial cherishing others is. If that person is able to work with his own self-cherishing and weaken it, then so many afflictions can be dealt with.

The whole point of training the mind and meditating on all these topics that are found in the practices of the person of small capacity, the person of medium capacity and the person of the great capacity is for disciplining the mind and working with the afflictions.

- So there is the approach of dealing with our afflictions by modifying our conduct.
- Then in this context there are these meditations on the entire lam-rim that comprise of the path that is shared with the person of small capacity, that path that is shared with the person of medium capacity and the path of the person of great capacity.
- The last approach to dealing with the afflictions is through the view.

~ Dealing with the afflictions through the view

Here, we look at the nature of the afflictions themselves by understanding and realising how the afflictions themselves are empty of existing inherently. For example, we take our ignorance—our grasping at true existence—as the object of analysis. We have to see for ourselves that what our ignorance is grasping at, i.e., true existence, has never existed. If we can realise that the object that our ignorance believes in has never existed, not only will we deal with the afflictions but we will be able to uproot them, i.e., destroy them completely from the root.

~ Correlating the three approaches with the three higher trainings

We can also correlate the three approaches of dealing with the afflictions—conduct, meditation and the view—with the three higher training.

1. The higher training in ethical discipline correlates with conduct, i.e., dealing with the afflictions through modifying our conduct. That is essentially what ethical discipline is.
2. When one has a good stable practice of ethical discipline, then one has a much higher chance of succeeding in one's practice of concentration, i.e., the second higher training. The main obstacles to developing single-pointedness of mind are mental excitement and laxity. But when one has a good practice of ethical discipline, one would have already removed many distractions and causes for excitement and mental laxity. As such, it makes the job of achieving concentration much easier.
3. Through the force of that concentration, many of the afflictions do not manifest but this doesn't mean that they have been removed. As such, there is the practice of the higher training in wisdom. Therefore, it is said that the wisdom realising selflessness is essential without which there is no way to remove the afflictions completely from their root.

With the generation and development of the wisdom realising selflessness, the various levels of defilements are abandoned gradually. When one directly realises selflessness, one starts to abandon the path of seeing abandonments that we had learnt in the previous module. One then moves on to abandoning the path of meditation abandonments. Through continual familiarisation with that wisdom, there will come a point when the process of removing the knowledge obscurations will start.

In whatever we do, whether we are walking, travelling, sitting down, lying down or going about doing whatever we are doing, we have to rely continually on mindfulness and introspection to check whether we are coming under the control and influence of our afflictions. By depending on mindfulness and introspection, the moment we notice the arising of an affliction, the teachings tell us that we should apply the antidote right away.

Verse 4: The practice with bad-natured people

Verse 4

Whenever I see beings who are wicked in nature and overwhelmed
by violent negative actions and suffering, I shall hold such rare ones
dear, as if I had found a precious treasure.

Those who are "wicked in nature" refer to those who are bad-natured. In spite of what you do or say, they will never change. This verse also refers to people who are always involved in very strong non-virtues, such as killing. These bad-natured sentient beings are always engaging in non-virtues and they experience a lot of suffering and pain, such as very strong illnesses.

The practitioners of bodhicitta are so happy when they meet with the conditions that enable their bodhicitta to increase more and more, just as a hungry person is overjoyed when he finds food or a poor person is overjoyed when he becomes very rich. They are *so* happy. Likewise, the practitioners of bodhicitta become very happy, like a poor person who suddenly finds a very precious jewel, when they meet with people of bad-nature who are always engaging in non-virtue or people who are really suffering.

When these practitioners see such bad-natured sentient beings, they generate very strong compassion as they reflect on the suffering that these people will have to experience in the future as a result of their current actions. Likewise, when the practitioners of bodhicitta find people who are suffering greatly, being very sick and so forth, they feel as if they have found a precious jewel.

Verse 5: Offering the victory to others

Verse 5

When, out of envy, others mistreat me with abuse, insults, or the like, I shall accept defeat and offer the victory to others.

This is how a practitioner of bodhicitta reacts when he is in such a situation.

This verse is conveying the situation when others out of jealousy scold us directly or indirectly behind our back even though we are not at fault and have not done anything wrong. Yet we are still criticised directly or indirectly. So this mistreatment is, in the conventional sense, unjustified.

This verse is telling us that in the face of such unjustified mistreatment, the first thing is not to put up any defence by trying to prove our innocence but to remain calm and mentally undisturbed. With that state of mind, the verse continues, “I shall accept defeat and offer the victory to others.”

The teachings say that the practice of generosity and the practice of ethical discipline are very important. The teachings tell us that the reason for doing these practices is mainly to accumulate merit and to purify our negativities.

The teachings say that in the situation laid out in Verse 5—where others, motivated by their jealousy, accuse us of doing something we did not do, accuse us of having certain faults, criticise us directly or bad-mouth us behind our back—we should be patient, mentally undisturbed, accept it and offer the victory to others. It is said that the benefit of doing so will greatly exceed the benefit we gain from the practices of generosity and ethical discipline. The purification that we experience will be greater than the purification that comes from practising generosity and ethical discipline. Likewise, the accumulation of merit will also be far greater.

There must be the causes and conditions in order to be able to engage in the practice of patience. In order to practise patience, we need an object for cultivating patience. Generally speaking, we would need someone who is upset with us, who is opposed to us or who dislike us. Such an object of patience is necessary.

Since that is a condition for the development of patience, that person should be worshipped in the way we would worship the Dharma. Shantideva said as much in his *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.¹

¹ “Thus, since patience is produced/ In dependence upon a very hateful mind/ He is a cause of patience/ Whereby he is worth of veneration just like the sacred Dharma.” (Verse 111, Chapter 6, Page 43, *Engaging in the Deeds of a Bodhisattva*, translated by Toh Sze Gee. ©Toh Sze Gee 2006, Revised 2014).

It is helpful to think of how we will never meet with the result of an action that we have never done. This is impossible. It is helpful to remember this when we are trying to cultivate patience.

Returning to the scenario of being accused by others of something we truly had not done in this life. Since it is not possible to meet with the effect of an action that we have not done, therefore, this means that we are experiencing the result of an action that we had done some time in the past or in one of our past lives. If we reflect well on karma and its effects, although we may not have done anything in this life, we must have done something in our past lives. This is the reason we are experiencing the ripening effect in this life.

But how do most people deal with this situation? Conventionally speaking, when one is falsely accused of something that one did not do and is innocent of, most people would say that it is wrong to put up with such an accusation. One is justified in correcting that mistake and one is even justified in being upset. Only a foolish person will practise patience when one is actually innocent. How can one practise patience? It is wrong, just plain wrong.

Is this not how we think?

Khen Rinpoche: Am I correct? So what is to be done?

Student: Rinpoche, if one thinks that the other person is making a mistake by wrongly accusing and insulting oneself, don't you think one should correct him out of a sense of compassion rather than let him continue making such a mistake? Otherwise, one will only be encouraging him.

Khen Rinpoche: In such a situation, in the first place, why do we want to justify ourselves? Because the mind is not happy and is already disturbed. That is why we need to justify ourselves. We are thinking, "I didn't do anything wrong. I am correct."

Because the mind is already disturbed that is why we need to justify ourselves and in due course, anger will arise. As I mentioned earlier, the text is saying that when the mind is undisturbed, only then is there room for discussion and clarification.

We react because we are mentally disturbed. Whatever we say to justify ourselves will be out of anger. From our side, we will definitely say something. In the first place, the other party must have a reason for saying what he said rightly or wrongly, even if he is motivated by jealousy. When we try to justify ourselves, this person is not going to sit by and accept it quietly. He too will further justify his accusations. And when he replies to our justification, then we get even more upset with that further justification. Then a heated exchange of words will ensue.

In the end, we do not benefit and neither does the other party. It only makes the situation more and more heated. This is what we have experienced before. It is always like this. The exchange of "I didn't do it" and "Yes, you did it." It doesn't matter whether it is true or untrue. It will only make the problem bigger.

When someone insults or criticise us, we don't like it. We then hold on to that person's behaviour and that becomes a cause for us to be upset with that person. Her behaviour makes us feel justified for feeling upset and because of that behaviour, we attack her.

In his *Four Hundred Stanzas*, Aryadeva said that we have to make a distinction between the actor and the action. He also pointed out that the Buddha said that we should regard that person's affliction as the enemy and not the person.

An example is a patient who is possessed by a spirit. When he is brought to a doctor who is aware that there is a spirit possessing him, it doesn't matter what he may do to the doctor. The doctor will never get upset with him. This is because the doctor understands that it is not the patient but rather, the spirit who is controlling him is making all the noises and the disturbances. Likewise, the Buddha said that we should not view the person as the enemy but rather, the enemy is the affliction of the person.

We must also distinguish between the actor and the action. We should never be upset with the person but what we need to oppose is his anger. Accordingly, the person should never ever be an object of anger for us. The person should only be an object of patience and an object of compassion. Then with an undisturbed mind and with sincere affection and concern, we can address the problem itself, not the person. We should address the problem with the person by saying, "Perhaps it is this and not that." As such, the person is only an object of patience, an object of compassion and not our opponent. Therefore, that person becomes the object to whom we offer the victory.

Essentially, Verse 5 is the advice on the practice of patience. For someone who considers herself to be a practitioner, then this is what she should do. Such a practice goes against what is normally accepted in the world. In the world, the norm is that when we are criticised or insulted, we must not keep quiet. We are supposed to retaliate and fight back. In conventional terms, it is completely justifiable that when we know we are not wrong, we are compelled to fight back to redress the wrong.

We see this in the world today. There is always fighting and the problems become bigger and bigger. When we meet with such situations, it is very difficult for us to accept and practise what is advised in this verse. It is very difficult to put up with the situation described. However, if we are able to practise according to this verse, then it becomes very beneficial.

Verse 6: Seeing the harm-doer as the holy guru

Verse 6 also talks about the practice of patience. What is mentioned in this verse is even more difficult to practise than Verse 5!

Verse 6

When someone whom I have benefited and in whom I have great hopes gives me terrible harm, I shall regard that person as my holy Guru.

The approach is similar to what was discussed earlier. If we are real practitioners, then we have to remember the workings of karma and its effects. When we experience the situations mentioned in this verse, we have to remember that we are experiencing the effect of an action that we ourselves have done, if not in this life then definitely sometime in the past. If we can view those unpleasant experiences as the purification of our negativities, perhaps we may even be able to experience those situations joyfully.

Instead of being patient, if we retaliate, we will cause the other party to accumulate more negativities as a result of which he may go to the lower realms. If that happens, it is as if we are the ones who are sending that person to the lower realms. So we can practise patience here by thinking about karma and its effects and by thinking of the qualities of the other party by recalling how cherishing others is the basis of all good qualities.

When we experience or encounter difficulties with others, it is very helpful to make a distinction between the person, his afflictions and his self-cherishing, just as we make a distinction between ourselves and our afflictions, “I am me. My afflictions are not me. I am not my afflictions.” In reality, we are not our self-grasping. Indeed we are different. We talk about, “me and my self-grasping.”

When someone criticises, scolds us or does something that we don’t like, we can see those actions as attacks on our self-grasping and not directed against us personally. The person is criticising our self-grasping, not us. We need to think in this way, “That person is attacking my self-grasping. He is harming my self-grasping, not me.”

When we really understand this point, then when we experience the difficulties directed at us—whether it is criticism, an attack and so forth—we will see them as attacks on our afflictions, our ego and not ourselves. We will be able to see that the other party is attacking our real enemy. When we realise this, we would even want to say, “Thank you!” to the other person because he is really doing us a great service in attacking our real enemy, our afflictions.

The real enemy that we need to oppose is our self-cherishing. Therefore, the person who opposes and attacks our self-cherishing is not our enemy.

As I mentioned in the first class, all of these points are straightforward. They are evidently common sense, sensible and very easily to understand. Yet they are very difficult to practise so we have to strive to work at them.

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