

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 4

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Eight Verses of Thought Transformation (cont'd): Reviewing Verses 5 & 6. Verse 7: The practice of tonglen. Verse 8: The practice of wisdom.

EIGHT VERSES OF THOUGHT TRANSFORMATION (CONT'D)

Reviewing Verses 5 & 6

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.

In the situations when we are experiencing such mistreatment from others who are motivated by their jealousy, this verse is saying that our mind should remain undisturbed and we should train in accepting the loss or defeat. This advice is meant for the practice of patience. The benefit we will get from this practice of patience greatly exceeds the merit that is accumulated from the practice of generosity and the practice of ethical discipline. Likewise, the same applies to the purification of our negativities when we practise patience here.

However, if our mind becomes disturbed and we are unable to abide in patience in such situations, our hatred will destroy our merit. As mentioned by Shantideva in his *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*

There is no negativity like hatred,
And no fortitude like patience. ¹

In such situations, this verse advises us to accept defeat and take on the loss. We can relate this to karma. Since we will never experience the result of an action that we had not created in the past, as such, there is purpose to accepting this loss.

¹ Verse 2, Chapter 6, Page 32, *Engaging in the Deeds of a Bodhisattva*, translated by Toh Sze Gee. ©Toh Sze Gee 2006, Revised 2014.

Verse 6

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

The person mentioned in Verse 6 is either someone we have helped greatly or in whom we have placed a lot of expectations and great hopes. When these people harm or take advantage of us, we are advised to regard them as our guru.

Generally speaking, with respect to such people, when they harm us or do something that we dislike, we find it more intolerable and more difficult to accept them. Compared to someone who we have not helped much or someone in whom we do not have much expectation, it does not bother us so much when they harm us.

Conventionally speaking, most people would consider it totally unacceptable if someone whom they have helped greatly or in whom they have placed great expectations and hopes were to cause them harm. However, the advice here is intended for a serious and dedicated practitioner of bodhicitta and mind training. For such a practitioner, the advice is to regard such people as their gurus.

~ The practice of patience

The practice of patience is done when we are upset and angry. In order to practise patience, we need the conditions for that practice, i.e., we need an object of patience. An opportunity to practise patience can only arise when we are harmed by another person. That person who is harming us becomes an essential condition for the practice of patience. As such, we should look upon that person as a teacher or guru.

~ Our expectation of reward

Often when we extend our help to others, we do so with some expectations on our part. We have some expectations of how things should turn out after we have helped that person. But it is taught in the teachings that the practice of bodhicitta and the practice of the perfections of generosity, ethical discipline and so forth—whatever help we may extend to others—should be carried out without expecting anything in return. We should not even expect to accumulate merit or good karma or want to experience the positive effects from the ripening of that karma.

However, our problem is that when we help others, we do have all sorts of expectations. The greater the expectations, the greater the pain we feel when our expectations are not met. In the first place, if we had extended our help sincerely without any expectations, even if we were to be harmed by those we are helping, the pain will not be so great. Yes, there may be some pain but there isn't the pain that comes when things do not turn out in a certain way.

In the context of Mahayana mind training, bodhicitta, it is said that whatever practice we do, it should not be done with the expectation of any reward or even the ripening of good karma in the future.

I think not expecting any reward or good karma is in the context of something that has to do with the samsaric experience.

For example, consider the mind-set of the persons of small capacity. They accumulate merit and abandon non-virtue. They also practise generosity. But deep down, all these practices are done with the expectation of something in return. For instance, with regard to practising generosity, one hopes to be rich in the future. As such, the person of small capacity engages in the practice of generosity with the hope of gaining wealth and prosperity in future lives. They engage in the practice of patience with the hope perhaps of getting a pleasant physical appearance and a good body in the future. Although these practices that relate to looking for happiness in future lives are Dharma, nevertheless, they are done with expectations. The results are just a rebirth as a human or a celestial being in samsara, i.e., it is still an experience that is included in cyclic existence.

If we compare those who practise charity looking for something in this life versus someone who practises charity looking for happiness in future lives, there are expectations in both instances but the expectations are a bit different. I would think that those people who give looking for something in this life will face more difficulties and more unhappiness.

I don't think the person of medium capacity and the person of great capacity are looking for any kind of reward or ripening of good karma. The person of medium capacity is not looking for samsaric happiness but rather liberation from cyclic existence. As such, we could say that perhaps they don't have the expectation of reward or the ripening of good karma.

Likewise, the person of great capacity is looking for enlightenment to help others. I don't think we would say that the person of great capacity has the expectation of reward either.

It is said in the teachings that in the practice of mind training, bodhicitta or whatever practice one does, one should not be doing them with any expectation of reward, ripening of good karma and so forth. For such practitioners, when they are harmed by people whom they have benefitted greatly, they are advised to look at such people as teachers who are reminding them of the need to practise without expecting any reward.

When we extend our help to someone, that person becomes our friend. But when that person harms us, immediately, he becomes the enemy. It is evident that friends can become enemies. This is the fault of samsara. The teachings talk about how samsara is uncertain in that due to certain conditions, friends can become enemies.

We return to Verse 6. In the situation where we are harmed by someone who we have benefitted, we can look at the person as a teacher, teaching us this particular fault of cyclic existence, its uncertainty. This person is also a teacher of patience, showing us how we should not have any expectations of reward.

~ How karma applies here

Likewise, think about how karma applies in this situation as well. If we did not create the cause in the past, there is no way that we will experience its result. The reason we experience people returning harm for the benefit we have shown them is due to our own action of harming that person in the past. In that sense, it is appropriate to receive harm in return as the result of what we have done in the past.

It is clear that we experience problems and suffering because of our own negativities. Otherwise, there is no reason to experience such difficulties. Let us take as an example the superiors who have abandoned negativities. It is said that they never experience problems because they have already abandoned the causes of suffering.

Because of having accumulated negativities in the past, we are now experiencing being harmed by someone. It is only the result of our own negativities that is causing that person to dislike us or to have malice towards us. This person who is harming us accumulates negative karma as well. If we think about this, essentially we are responsible for that person's accumulation of negative karma. Therefore, all the more, it is inappropriate for us to be upset and angry.

The Kadampa masters tell us that the best response when someone we have benefitted harms us to meditate on compassion. The teachings tell us that in such situations, when we experience abuse, slander, harm or hurt from others, we should even make this prayer, "May those beings have the fortune to achieve enlightenment because of having done these things to me."

~ The guru or the virtuous friend

In general, we regard the virtuous friend, the guru who gives us our vows, oral transmissions, teachings, advice and so forth as kind. Generally speaking, it is considered not very appropriate to disregard their teachings and their advice. We can receive vows from the teachers, but if we don't keep those vows, then we are not going to achieve anything. When we receive teachings from the virtuous friend, if we don't practise those teachings, then we are not going to achieve anything either. Likewise, when we face the enemy, who is the teacher of patience, if we do not practise patience, then nothing will be achieved.

What exactly is a virtuous friend or guru? Essentially, he must be someone who is effective for our mind in that through his teachings and his guidance, our mind is actually transformed and changes. The person who can do that to us is a virtuous friend or guru.

In reality, our guru has to be someone who does not give us any 'face' and can tell us directly where we have gone wrong and when we are wrong. He has to be someone we can accept when he tells us to our face, "You are just wrong!" Then that relationship will be effective. Of course, for that to happen in the first place, there must be a good and stable relationship between the guru and the disciple. There has to be devotion and faith from the side of the disciple. Otherwise, if the relationship and connection is not stable and strong and there is no faith, then when the teacher

tells the disciple what is wrong with him, instead of benefit, there is only harm and more problems.

Many of you know the story of how Marpa treated Milarepa. Milarepa was able to bear so much hardship and his mind was so transformed from his relationship with his teacher Marpa. But in this day and age, for those who are in the role of teachers, most of the time, they have to behave in a politically correct way, i.e., they have to say those things that the listeners like to hear. The teachers have to act in accordance with the wishes of the listeners and the audience. As such, there isn't any progress on either side. Both the teacher and student do not progress. The positions and the roles of the teacher and disciple become so blurred sometimes I wonder who is the actual teacher.

The great yogi Padampa Sangye said, "The scolding by the guru is like the recitation of a wrathful mantra." Of course, this advice is meant for those who have devotion and faith. When the guru scolds us even in front of other people, whether we have committed a mistake or not, if we have faith, then we will be able to regard that scolding as a wrathful mantra. We think highly of wrathful mantras. We have no issue in adopting them and happily reciting them.

Actually, the guru scolding us is one of the best antidotes and remedies to our ego. In the first place, what is the reason that we cannot tolerate being scolded by the guru or someone else? It is our ego. Because of our pride, we just cannot accept it.

It is said, "A scolding is like a wrathful mantra and a beating is like receiving an initiation." If one has the idea that being beaten is like receiving an initiation, then one will have no issue with it and bear the beating happily because generally speaking, one likes to receive initiations!

Being beaten by the virtuous friend is said to purify a lot of negativities. This advice is for those who have faith. If there is an obstacle to be pacified, this is what will pacify our obstacles. If there is one thing that can bless us, this is the very thing that can bless us. So when we are being beaten or scolded, these are the real blessings because they are the remedies to our ego and pride. When our mind is transformed and changes for the better, when there are these antidotes and remedies to our ego and afflictions, then it is said that these are the real blessings.

These are the advices for practitioners—those who really want to practise, those who know how to think and those who know how to practise. Essentially, it has to do with adopting a different mental perspective. If we know how to think with regard to our practice, it is said that it is possible to put up with scoldings, beatings, seeing the enemy as a teacher and so forth.

The teachings tell us that wherever we go or whoever we relate to, whether the person is a friend or enemy, if we can regard them as our teachers, we will always be able to stay happy all the time. All this is possible if we practise. It is a matter of training.

This is similar to what is said in the *Lama Chöpa* (or guru puja). Verse 96 says,

Even if the environment and beings are filled with the fruits of
negativity,
And unwished for sufferings pour down like rain,
I seek your blessings to take these miserable conditions as a path
By seeing them as causes to exhaust the results of my negative
karma.

In this way, we will be able to transform all the obstacles and unfavourable conditions into positive conditions that will contribute to our enlightenment. In short, whatever good or bad things may happen to us, they are all the results of our own karma. If we can remember and accept this, I guess we will always be calm and happy.

~ *Distinguishing between the person and his afflictions*

As I mentioned in the previous lesson, Aryadeva said in his *Four Hundred Stanzas* about making a distinction between the person and his afflictions. I think making this distinction is very important. Likewise, Chandrakirti said that when we are experiencing harm from someone, we should attribute the problem to the person's afflictions and not to the person himself. We should not get upset with the person. The teachings say we should not confront and oppose the person but rather we should confront and oppose that person's afflictions. We should have affection for the person but oppose his afflictions.

Likewise, we do not see that we are our pride. In reality, our pride and we are different things. When we are harmed by someone in the form of scolding, verbal abuse and so forth, we find it so very difficult to tolerate because we feel that she is attacking us. We tend to **conflate** the two—our ego and ourselves—into one.

But if we can entertain the view that that person's abuse is directed at our ego and not us personally, it makes the abuse more tolerable and easier to handle. The reality is that our afflictions, especially our anger, pride and ego are our real enemies. When someone is harming our afflictions such as our pride, shouldn't we be happy instead? This is the reality. We should be happy and thankful. But of course that is not how we think.

If we reflect well and see that there is indeed a difference between our afflictions and us, it is possible to think that that person's abuse and harm is directed at our ego, our pride and our afflictions rather than seeing the abuse as a personal attack. If we see the purpose behind making such a distinction, it will make a difference. But this is difficult for us to accept.

We should think deeply about this and be honest with ourselves. We call ourselves practitioners and we say we accept karma, but even when we experience a small problem, we cannot handle it. We don't want to deal with it and find the problem intolerable. This is a very obvious sign that we are not practising Dharma at all.

It doesn't matter how many prayers we recite a day, the sadhanas we do or the number of OM MANI PADME HUMS we recite every day of our life. When something small happens, if we cannot tolerate and put up with it, this is a clear sign that we are not practising the Dharma.

When someone stares at us in an unfriendly way, criticises us or says something unpleasant to us, we cannot tolerate even that. When we think about all the Dharma practices that we have done all this while, there is nothing to show for it. We have to reflect on this. Practising the Dharma means changing the mind for the better and subduing the mind. The result of practising Dharma is that our mind should be calmer, more relaxed and virtuous regardless of the situation, whether we are happy, sad or experiencing suffering.

I don't remember exactly who said this. Perhaps it was Guntang Rinpoche who said, "One looks like a Dharma practitioner when things are going well. One keeps up the appearance of doing one's prayers and practices. One has the appearance of someone who is practising the Dharma. However, when something bad happens, one cannot tolerate it and do not know how to deal with it. Immediately, the appearance of a practitioner is gone." The teachings tell us that if we want to be a Dharma practitioner or we are a Dharma practitioner, we should not become like this. If we want to be a Dharma practitioner or are a Dharma practitioner, we have to be an actual Dharma practitioner and not just look like one.

Unfortunately, we only have the form of a practitioner. We do prayers and so forth and we look like we are practising or we think we are practising when things are going well. But when something bad happens in our life and we encounter some difficulties and challenges, we don't know how to deal with them. We don't know how to react or we react in a negative way. We cannot put up with the difficulties or we refuse to accept them. This is a sign that we have *never* practised the Dharma. Therefore, the teachings tell us to keep this in mind—we should really try to become an actual practitioner and not just look like a practitioner.

There are many such practical and realistic advices on Dharma practice from the great Kadampa masters of the past. The teachings of the Kadampa masters are very straightforward, very practical and realistic. We should regard these teachings, advices and instructions as introductions to our faults. They tell us directly and immediately what is wrong with us and what we need to do. They are telling us that we need to get rid of these faults. We should regard whatever teachings that we learn and practise in that way—as clear indications of our faults and what we need to do to overcome them. Whatever we learn and practise must transform our mind for the better. In particular, they must result in our afflictions becoming weaker over time.

Verse 7: The secret practice of tonglen

Verse 7

In short, both directly and indirectly, do I offer every happiness and benefit to all my mothers. I shall secretly take upon myself all their harmful actions and suffering.

If there is any benefit that we can offer both directly and indirectly to others, we should do so and take upon ourselves all their sufferings. This shows the practice of *tonglen*, the practice of giving and taking. There is a mind training prayer that goes like this, “When I experience problems and suffering, may my experience of all these sufferings dry up the ocean of suffering of all sentient beings.”

When we experience happiness and the benefit of good things, they are the results of having accumulated merit in the past. We dedicate all this happiness to all sentient beings, wishing that they may also experience such happiness. If we actually have these helpful mental attitudes, then when we meet with the destitute and the poor, we will happily give them food, clothing and other necessities. Our mental attitude will manifest itself in such practical actions. Even in situations when it is not possible to do something directly on a practical level, we can still do this practice secretly. Here, “secretly” means to do it at a mental level, i.e., even if we cannot actually give, mentally, we can dedicate and give. This is done in the mind that nobody can see. This is one explanation of the word, “secret.”

It is said in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas Deeds* that the practice of exchanging self and others is to be done in secret.² In the first place, why is the practice of exchanging self and others secret? Because such a practice of exchanging self and others cannot fit the mind of the hearers and solitary realisers. Even amongst the bodhisattvas, there are bodhisattvas who have dull faculties and sharp faculties. It is said that the practice of exchanging self and others cannot fit even the minds of the bodhisattvas of dull faculties. The practice of exchanging self and others is meant for the bodhisattvas of sharp faculties.

Verse 8: The practice of wisdom

Verse 8

Undeiled by the stains of the superstitions of the eight worldly concerns, may I, by perceiving all phenomena as illusory, be released from the bondage of attachment.

This verse shows the practice of wisdom. It is said that we should dedicate the merit after any practice we do. This dedication has to be sealed with emptiness.

When we talk about the eight worldly dharmas (or the eight worldly concerns), there are three forms of the eight worldly concerns:

1. The eight black worldly dharmas
2. The eight white worldly dharmas
3. The eight mixed worldly dharmas

Whatever we do in life and in particular, whatever practice we may engage in, they should not be done with the motivation of and be stained by the eight worldly concerns. The eight worldly concerns that we usually talk about refer to the eight

² “Whoever wishes to quickly protect/ Himself and others/ Should practice that holy secret —/ The exchanging of self for others.” Verse 120, Chapter 8, *Ibid.*, Pages 65-66.

black worldly dharmas that simply refer to the motivation of attachment to the happiness of this life:

- Everyone is happy to be happy and unhappy when they are suffering.
- Everyone is happy to be praised and no one likes to be criticised.
- Everyone likes a good reputation and dislike a bad reputation.
- Everyone takes delight in gathering wealth and material possessions and is unhappy when such things are lost or cannot be acquired.

These are our worldly concerns and whatever we do in life is mixed with these eight worldly concerns. Even if it is a so-called Dharma practice but when it is motivated by these eight worldly concerns, then that practice will never become a Dharma practice.

It is not that we don't need happiness, material gain, praise and good reputation. It is not about rejecting these things. In fact, there is a case for wanting praise, good reputation, material gain and just to be happy. The point is not to be so emotionally attached to and involved with them to the point where the mind becomes disturbed by these things.

If we are very emotionally attached to and involved with these worldly concerns, we build up a lot of expectations, hopes and fears. The greater our attachment to these concerns, the greater our fears, expectations and hopes. Driven by our expectations, fears and worries, we become hypocritical in our behaviour. We have to pretend to act and speak in certain ways. For example, we pretend to smile when we don't feel like smiling or we say nice things to people that we do not really mean. We do all this because we want something. Because of our attachment to gain, praise and reputation, we behave in such a hypocritical manner, saying things we do not mean. When people know what we are up to, they will gradually lose their trust in us. All this comes from our very strong desire for fame, praise and fortune.

We need material possessions, we need to be happy, it is all right to be praised and have a good reputation, but when we become very emotionally attached to such concerns, these become the conditions for us to meet with many problems and a lot of fear, anxiety, hopes, worries and so forth.

This happens to all of us, even so-called practitioners. Because of the attachment to praise and reputation, they put up a false front and act holy. There are some teachers who put on an act of pretending to be holy. Even some meditators, deep down, are looking for praise. Even though they are not really meditating, they put on this front as if they can sit and meditate very well, because they want people to regard them as good meditators.

So whatever we do, whether it is meditation, studying or practising, we have to check ourselves to make sure that our so-called practice of Dharma actually becomes Dharma and not just look like Dharma.

I can't say much about the eight white worldly dharmas and the eight mixed worldly dharmas.

Khen Rinpoche: Does anybody know? If I find something on them, I will let you know.

“By perceiving all phenomena as illusory, be released from the bondage of attachment”: Whenever we dedicate our merit, we should seal the dedication with emptiness. When doing practices such as generosity and so forth, we can bring to mind that the agent (i.e., ourselves), the object and the action itself are all illusory.

“Attachment” is the grasping that refers to the apprehension of true existence. By perceiving everything to be illusory, we can be freed from the bondage of the apprehension of true existence.

This completes the presentation of the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*. These *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* are very short and concise but very effective. It is very good to memorise this text and treat it as a daily prayer. If we can recite this text every day from memory and reflect on it as we recite I think this would be the most effective daily prayer.

You can say it is the best sadhana as the words are not difficult to understand. We may recite so many prayers and sadhanas in our daily lives but if we think about it, at our level, what real practical benefit can they offer us in our daily lives?

I’m not saying that you should stop whatever prayers and sadhanas you are already reciting. I think I mentioned before that someone had asked me, “Can I stop doing some of my prayers because I have too many to do?” I gave you all the answer, right? As I mentioned before, if you are not reflecting or meditating anyway, then it is better to at least recite some prayers rather than not recite any prayers. However, in the case of someone who is really reflecting and meditating consistently on the teachings, such as this particular prayer, even if he were to miss or doesn’t do some of his other prayers, I don’t see that as a serious problem. But if you are not reflecting or meditating consistently and you also end up not doing your daily recitations, then I think that is also really pointless.

This prayer is short and is not difficult to understand but it is difficult to put into practice. If we can memorise this teaching and reflect on it daily, then there is a real practical benefit especially when we meet with challenges and difficulties and times when we are upset. When someone who we have to interact with closely on a regular basis such as a close friend says something nasty or unpleasant to us, immediately that person becomes an enemy. In such a situation, it is helpful if we can bring to mind these verses. The eight verses are telling us to be patient and to view everyone as precious and dear, as a loved one or friend.

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