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.

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The practice of refuge. Explaining the title of the text. Definitive & interpretative Yamantaka.

There are two systems for cultivating the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta:

- 1. the sevenfold cause and effect instructions for those of duller faculties
- 2. exchanging self and others for those of sharp faculties

The text that we are going to look at is the *Wheel-Weapon Mind Training* that comes under the system of exchanging self and others. The lineage for this tradition comes through Lama Serlingpa who transmitted it to Lama Atisha.

Khen Rinpoche: You have the text with you? Where? In your iPad? Wow! I think I need to put my texts in the iPad too. But I cannot imagine reading my texts on the iPad. It is really complicated. I tried to read some of my texts there but this going back and forth (gestures by swiping finger) ... My own texts are much easier for me. Anyway, maybe you are used to it so it is easier for you too.

Homage to the Three Jewels.

The text starts by paying homage to the Three Jewels. This is the practice of going for refuge to the Three Jewels. It is said that whatever activities we undertake, we should start that activity with the practice of refuge. Therefore, it becomes very important to know what refuge is

THE PRACTICE OF REFUGE

What exactly is refuge? In order to have refuge, in order to be able to entrust ourselves to the Three Jewels, first we must have a very strong fear of suffering. For instance, it could be the strong fear of the suffering that we will experience in the lower realms. Then we also need a very strong conviction that the Three Jewels can protect us from that suffering. The faith that is engendered through these two factors is refuge.

Essentially this is a faith that is engendered by knowledge, a faith that arises through knowing. In order to have refuge, on the one hand, we need a real fear of suffering, be it the suffering of the lower realms or the suffering of cyclic existence (samsara). We

also need the conviction that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the capacity and power to protect us from the suffering of the lower realms and cyclic existence.

In order to produce that kind of conviction, that definite knowledge within ourselves, we must know what are the Three Jewels and their qualities. As such, in the previous module (on the *Tathagata Essence*) we have looked at what are the three objects of refuge, the qualities they possess and so forth. In order for real refuge to arise in our heart, there must be this conviction and certainty that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the power to protect us from the suffering of the lower realms and cyclic existence.

As I have often mentioned, one of the reasons for studying and learning about these different aspects of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is to help us develop refuge in our heart. For example, one of the reasons why we study the *Tathagata Essence* in the previous module is to get a better idea of what the Three Jewels, our objects of refuge, are.

The topic of the tathagata essence is very important. Even if the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha possess the power and capacity to free us from our suffering, if from our side, we do not possess what it takes to be able to actualise the Three Jewels, i.e., we lack the crucial ingredients that make it possible for us to become the Three Jewels ourselves, then the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are simply that. That is why understanding what the tathagata essence is is very important. On the basis of understanding that, we can see for ourselves that we *can* actualise the state of the Three Jewels. Then the aspiration to actualise the Three Jewels can arise in us.

The refuge of the person of small capacity

What is posited as the entity of refuge? It is the faith of conviction in the Three Jewels' capacity and power to protect us from the suffering of the lower realms and cyclic existence. When we reflect on the suffering that we ourselves will have to endure in the hell realms, as a hungry ghost or as an animal, we will develop fear. If we are convinced that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha can protect us from that fear, then we will have the refuge of a person of small capacity.

We must know this. If somebody were to ask you, "What is the refuge of the person of small capacity?" you must be able to answer this question. In the case of the refuge of a person of small capacity, the object of refuge that he entrusts himself to is the same—the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. What qualifies that person's refuge as a refuge of a person of small capacity comes from his own side. The difference doesn't come from the side of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. In this case, the difference comes from the practitioner's type of fear.

Let's say we come down with a very serious illness. Usually, we will be quite frightened by this. Motivated by that fear, if we then entrust ourselves to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, does that become refuge?

Let's say we are very confident that the Buddha can definitely protect us from this terrible sickness in this life. Is that refuge or not? Is that virtue?

Isn't this our kind of refuge, our kind of practice? We are practical and realistic people and for us, it is difficult for us to conceive of future suffering. "I have a problem now. Buddha, please protect me." When we seek Buddha's protection for such things, is that not refuge? Is that not virtue?

Sometime people are so stressed when they cannot find a job. Then they take refuge so that they can find a job. Is that refuge? Is that not virtue?

Can you all answer the second question: Is it virtue? Is it Dharma? Is this kind of refuge a cause of suffering or a cause of happiness?

Student: Yes and no. It is refuge but it can be non-virtuous depending on the motivation. For instance, I can ask Buddha for a good job and I find a good job. But I can use that extra money to sell drugs, a non-virtuous action. So for me there is this non-virtuous refuge.

I have this mental hurdle I cannot cross. To me asking the Buddha for something with a contaminated motivation is non-virtue although I know refuge is supposed to be a virtuous action. So to me, if I want something, I work for it rather than ask the Buddha for it.

For refuge to be virtuous, the motivation must be correct. For example, with the salary I get from the job Buddha gave me, I can study and practise the Dharma and do a lot of good works, e.g., offering to the Kopan earthquake fund.

Khen Rinpoche: We can see that we really need to sit down and think about what exactly refuge is. We also have to look within ourselves and examine whether we have refuge or not. We have to really think about this.

We are not obliged to take refuge. The question then is, "Why should I entrust myself to the care of the Three Jewels? What's the purpose of doing this? What's in it for me?" We really need to ask ourselves the question, "What if I don't entrust myself to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and I don't take refuge in them. What will happen then?"

There must be a reason for going for refuge. There must be a purpose for entrusting ourselves to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and taking refuge in them. Otherwise, if we say we go for refuge, yet we cannot account to others or ourselves why we are doing so, then our refuge is only at the level of mere words.

We say that we believe in the Buddha. We take refuge in the Buddha. We entrust ourselves to the Buddha. We take refuge in the Buddha because we want to be free of sicknesses and we want to have a smooth and successful life. If we were to say that, then this question arises, "Why do you need the Buddha to do that for you? You can pray to the worldly gods." There are so many worldly gods out there such as nagas, landlord spirits and so forth. They have the power to grant us some of our wishes and solve some of our problems. So if they can help us, then that is enough. Why do we want to choose the Buddha? Is it because we think that he is more powerful? Isn't this what we think?

If we say that we take refuge in the Buddha because we want to be free of a certain sickness, won't it be better if we direct our single-pointed faith towards the doctor and take refuge in him instead? This is what we are supposed to do. By believing in the doctor and following his advice, we can also recover. So there is no need to take refuge in the Buddha.

Do you see what I'm driving at?

These reasons alone are not sufficient to explain why we choose the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as our objects of refuge. We really have to think hard about this. At the very least, the reason for us to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha must be a real fear of the suffering that we will experience in the lower realms when we are reborn there.

In order for that fear to arise, first, we must have an understanding of and some conviction in the workings of karma and its effects. We must be convinced that definitely we will experience the results of the actions that we have done. Only on the basis of that conviction will we think about all the negativities we have accumulated in this and past lives and how they are certain to ripen as experiences in the lower realms. Only then will real fear arise. So there are many things to sort out from our side.

We must also have the conviction that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha possess the power to protect us from the fear of the suffering in the lower realms. In order to have that conviction, again, we must think about many things. How do we come to such a conclusion? Why can we believe that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha actually possess the power to protect us from those sufferings? So these are the minimum requirements to qualify as refuge. This is the refuge of a person of small capacity.

The refuge of the person of medium capacity

For a person of medium capacity, that person's fear is the fear of the suffering of cyclic existence. He has the faith of conviction that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha can protect him from that fear. This is the refuge of a person of middling capacity. In order for such refuge to arise, one must have a very good understanding of the four noble truths.

The refuge of the person of great capacity

The refuge of a person of great capacity is a mind that:

- is unable to bear the suffering that sentient beings are experiencing in samsara
- wishes to free all sentient beings from that suffering

Motivated by that, this person entrusts himself with the faith of conviction to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

In order to have the refuge of a person of medium capacity, one must definitely have renunciation, the determination to be free or the mind of definite emergence. Such an attitude is indispensable.

It is also necessary in the practice of refuge of a person of great capacity. In fact, the renunciation of the person of great capacity must be even stronger than the renunciation of a person of medium capacity. A person of great capacity is not only determined to free himself from suffering but he truly wants all sentient beings to be free from suffering too. In that sense, for the sake of sentient beings, that person's renunciation or attitude of definite emergence is even stronger than a person of medium capacity.

The quality of refuge is determined by the quality of the mind The Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) is divided into two:

- 1. the Paramitayana (Perfection Vehicle)
- 2. the Mantrayana (Mantra Vehicle)

Practitioners of Mahayana Paramitayana or Mantrayana are the same in having the mind that is unable to bear the suffering of all sentient beings. Both practitioners go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with that kind of mind.

While both are the same in not being able to bear the suffering of all sentient beings, the practitioner of Mantrayana has greater compassion in that he is unable to bear that sentient beings have to wait so long for her to achieve enlightenment. She cannot bear the fact that she has to accumulate the collections (of merit and wisdom) over such a long period of time, i.e., three countless great eons.

The practitioners of Mantrayana cannot bear to take so long to achieve enlightenment. They want to achieve enlightenment more quickly and faster than that. In fact, some of them think, "I want to achieve enlightenment in one lifetime in this particular body." It is with that kind of attitude that they go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

So now we can see that the refuge of the person of small capacity, the person of medium capacity and the person of great capacity—and within that, the practitioner of the Perfection Vehicle and the practitioner of the Mantra Vehicle—are the same in entrusting themselves to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. But their mind of refuge is different. That difference comes from their own side and their reasons for taking refuge. The quality of the refuge of these practitioners becomes increasingly profound as they move up the hierarchy. Their attitude of renunciation and their inability to bear the particular suffering explained above become increasingly more powerful.

We can see from this explanation that whether enlightenment is fast or not depends primarily on the level of the practitioner's mind. If the mind is more powerful, stronger, more courageous, with a more expansive perspective, then that person can achieve enlightenment more quickly. This is why the mantra path is so much quicker. But that speed doesn't come from the outside. It comes from the level of the person's mind.

Within Mantrayana, there are four classes of tantra. The three lower classes of tantra do talk about achieving enlightenment in one life within one body but that necessitates the practice and achievement of immortality. With that realisation, one

is then able to extend one's lifespan for a long time. Then during that long life, one achieves enlightenment.

Highest yoga tantra also talks about achieving enlightenment in one life within one body. What it refers to is the potential to achieve enlightenment in one lifetime during this degenerate age in this one body. So it is more profound and an even quicker path. Again, the difference in the speed of achieving enlightenment is due to the level of the practitioner's mind. The more developed and more advanced the mind, the quicker will be the result.

SUMMARY

You need to take note of the different levels of refuge:

- 1. the refuge of the person of small capacity
- 2. the refuge of the person of medium capacity
- 3. the refuge of the person of great capacity

Then within the refuge of the person of great capacity, there is also the refuge of the person of the Mantra Vehicle, the Mantrayana.

These different levels of refuge come about primarily because of the differences in the level of the mind of the person who is going for refuge.

Another factor to take note of is the importance of the attitude of renunciation, i.e., the determination to be free or the mind of definite emergence. That is needed for the refuge of the person of medium capacity, the person of great capacity and even for the person of the Mantrayana. One should know that although the attitude of renunciation is needed for those three levels of refuge, the strength and the quality of the renunciation also differ.

If we understand that there are these different levels of refuge, then whatever we do, when we take refuge right from the beginning, we have some idea of where we stand and where we are heading.

In the first place, do we have refuge? If we do have refuge, what level of refuge do we have? From there, we will know that in order to reach our desired destination, what kind of causes we need to create based on what we have discussed briefly so far.

Whatever practice we do, especially prayers and rituals, they always start with refuge. We have to keep this in mind as it is very important. Every time we do something, we should go for refuge. We must bring to mind why we are doing so.

Sometimes when we are asked, "What is the refuge of the person of small capacity, the person of medium capacity and the person of great capacity?" we get stuck and are not able to give an immediate answer. You must ensure that you can answer if you are asked such a question.

EXPLAINING THE TITLE OF THE TEXT

The full title of this text is *The Wheel-Weapon That Strikes at the Enemy's Vital Spot*.

In the ordinary sense, the word "enemy" refers to the external enemy, the one who is causing us problems. However, the "enemy" that is mentioned in this title is our own self-cherishing attitude. It is said that our self-cherishing attitude has been our enemy in the past, causing us all the problems and suffering. It is also causing us problems and suffering now and it will also cause us problems and suffering in the future. So right from the beginning, we have to delineate carefully and accurately what the enemy is. It is our self-cherishing attitude.

Let's say we want to annihilate this enemy. We need a reasonably powerful weapon. All the verses that make up the rest of this text are likened to the wheel of sharp weapon that is used to annihilate this self-cherishing attitude.

In the case of a skilled professional, for example, someone skilled in repairing machinery, he knows very well how a particular machine works and functions. When that machine has problems, because of his expertise and knowledge, this skilled professional is able to pinpoint the problem very quickly and fix it right away.

Likewise, all the verses that make up this text correctly and quickly identify how our self-cherishing attitude is the source of our problems and how it is of no benefit to us. In this way, it helps the practitioner to uproot the self-cherishing attitude.

The text says that in order to defeat the enemy, we have to know the enemy well. If we know our enemy well, we will know exactly how to defeat the enemy.

DEFINITIVE & INTERPRETATIVE YAMANTAKA

I bow down to the Great Wrathful One, Yamantaka.

This is related to tantra. Yamantaka is the opponent or the antidote to Yama. This is what Yamantaka means. There are the definitive Yamantaka and the interpretive Yamantaka:

- The definitive Yamantaka is the non-dual wisdom of bliss and emptiness.
- This non-dual bliss and emptiness that takes on the aspect of a peaceful or wrathful deity is the interpretative Yamantaka.

You will find a similar explanation in sutra. In the sutric tradition, we talk about the inner guru or virtuous friend and the outer guru:

- The inner guru is our own positive mental qualities such as having a good heart or a positive virtuous mind.
- The outer guru is the person who shows us the way to actualise our inner qualities.

In the same way, we can talk about an inner refuge and outer refuge.

- The inner refuge (or inner protection) is our virtuous thoughts or virtuous state of mind.
- The outer refuge (or outer protection) is the usual objects of refuge that are external.

Yamantaka displays a very wrathful aspect and his wrath is always continually directed at the self-cherishing attitude in the continuum of all sentient beings. If we were asked, "Why is there a buddha in this wrathful aspect?" the only answer must be this: His wrath is directed at the afflictions of all sentient beings, in particular, the self-cherishing in the continua of all sentient beings.

- The wrathful one, Yamantaka, can refer to the ordinary bodhisattvas who are wrathful towards the self-cherishing attitude.
- "The Great Wrathful One" can refer to the bodhisattva superiors.
- The ultimate (or final) "Great Wrathful One" can only exist on the buddha ground. In the context here, the ultimate "Great Wrathful One" is Yamantaka in both his definitive and interpretive aspects. It is this Yamantaka to whom we pay homage.

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*Question:* It is mentioned that in the Mantrayana path one is able to achieve enlightenment within one lifetime in a single body during these degenerate times. We are always told the story of Milarepa, of how he met his guru and how hard he practised.

When they say this in the tantric tradition, are they talking about someone who starts from ground zero and achieves enlightenment in one single lifetime? To me, I suspect that Milarepa must have tremendous imprints from the past to be able to generate that level of guru devotion and the mental determination to endure all that he had to put up with. So to me, it doesn't seem that he achieved enlightenment in a single lifetime.

There will always be a lifetime during which one will achieve full enlightenment. But I don't think Milarepa achieved enlightenment in the duration of a single lifetime.

*Khen Rinpoche*: Let us set that aside for the time being. First, you think about this.

From the first day you met your guru, if you had practised exactly according to his advice, i.e., you practiced every single thing that he told you to, do you think you can achieve enlightenment in this lifetime?

OK. I will make the question easier. From the first day you had met your virtuous friend, if you practised exactly as he had advised, do you think you can perceive emptiness directly in this lifetime?

Student: Yes.

*Khen Rinpoche*: If you say yes, does that not mean that in this lifetime, you will definitely achieve the path of seeing? From the viewpoint of highest yoga tantra, if you had practised exactly according to the guru's advice, is it not the case that definitely, you can achieve the illusory body in this lifetime?

If you say that you can achieve the illusory body, it is confirmed that you will achieve enlightenment in this very lifetime. So have I not answered your question?

Student: Yes, I completely agree had I practiced exactly according to what my guru advises. But the issue is that, for me, even to be able to meet the guru, even to be able to have the ability and determination to practise *exactly* according to his advice, those conditions do not come from this lifetime.

My connection with my guru does not come from this lifetime alone. In that sense, the ability to achieve enlightenment does not happen in a single lifetime but obviously, there must be a lifetime in which I will achieve enlightenment.

Khen Rinpoche: The question here is do you think you can achieve enlightenment? I am asking you.

*Student*: Khen Rinpoche, it is too late for me. I can't do it but for someone else, it is possible. Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: You said yes so then that is it.

*Student*: But my point is that it did not happen in one lifetime?

*Khen Rinpoche*: You are referring to all the good karma you have from the past, right?

Student: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: Is it not the case that you yourself have tremendous karma like Milarepa? If you say yes, that means you have so much good karma from your past. So, in that sense, there is no difference between you and Milarepa!

Student: The tantric position is that one can achieve enlightenment in one lifetime during this degenerate age. This gives a beginner the impression that someone from ground zero—someone with no imprints, nothing, you know—can achieve enlightenment in a single lifetime. The example we are often given is the experience of Milarepa, but he was not enlightened in a single lifetime in that sense because he must have tremendous imprints from the past.

*Khen Rinpoche*: My point here is this—if you practised, you will achieve enlightenment in one lifetime, right?

*Student:* Yes, but not me personally. Unless a miracle happens.

*Khen Rinpoche*: You say that you can achieve enlightenment in one lifetime. But it follows that you do not achieve enlightenment in one lifetime because you asserted that you had worked very hard in all your past lives. So, it does not come from this lifetime. So, you are not going to achieve enlightenment in one lifetime. So, it is the same as Milarepa.

*Student:* Yes, not achieving enlightenment in one lifetime.

*Khen Rinpoche: You already accepted you can do it. Then why do you say....?* 

Student: Maybe I am not communicating my idea correctly. Can someone help me? Hey guys, do you know what I am talking about? OK. Everyone is nodding his or her head!

Khen Rinpoche: OK. You go and sit down.

In order to practise the path, first, we must have some level of intelligence and wisdom as the necessary basis for practice without which there is no way to achieve any realisations. But having something or lacking something in the first place is the result of what we had done or not done in the past. It is always related to the past.

But we all possess the human life of the eight freedoms and ten endowments. This is necessarily the result of much hard work on our part in the past. In order to gain a human life of freedoms and endowments, the foundation is pure ethical discipline complemented by the practice of the perfection of generosity and stainless prayers. So we must have accumulated a lot of merit in the past and that is why we have this human life of freedoms and endowments. Doesn't it mean that we worked very hard in the past?

Khen Rinpoche: This means that there is no difference. We are the same as Milarepa. Do you agree?

You have everything that Milarepa had. You have some level of intelligence and wisdom, this human body and you have the external condition of the virtuous friend.

Khen Rinpoche: Maybe you haven't met Marpa. I think only that is missing. I am joking.

You have everything you need to achieve enlightenment in one lifetime. What is better than a human life of freedoms and endowments? The lam-rim never mentions anything that is better than that. Is it not the best condition?

In the first place, there is no reason to ask the question of whether we can or cannot achieve enlightenment in one lifetime. Everything is set up for us. If we practise, we can definitely see emptiness directly in this life. We can definitely generate bodhicitta. We can definitely achieve the generation stage and the completion stage of highest yoga tantra and then achieve unification, full enlightenment, in one lifetime.

There is no problem as everything is already set up. It is not difficult and we can definitely achieve enlightenment in one lifetime. Why not?

Are you saying that there is something more precious than the precious human rebirth? Why can you not achieve enlightenment in one lifetime? What is missing?

Khen Rinpoche: What are you missing? Effort? Can you make it? You are too tired?

If one practises with joyous perseverance, there is nothing to stop the achievement of enlightenment. There are different levels of refuge. So there is nothing to stop one from developing the mind that is unable to bear the suffering of all sentient beings

and wants to achieve enlightenment quickly. With that mind, one enters the tantric path. So there is nothing to stop the achievement of enlightenment.

We need to have that determination. With that determination, nothing blocks the attainment of full enlightenment. Do you see the point, where the crux of the matter lies? It is relatively much easier to defeat the inner enemy than defeating the outer enemy if you know where the crux of the matter lies and you know exactly what to do.

When we talk about Milarepa, we don't have to worry about what he did in the past. In the same way, we do not have to worry about what we did in the past. The point is that if everything is complete and all the conditions are set up in this life, there is nothing to stop the attainment of enlightenment.

If we were asked, "If you work hard, will you be able to develop bodhicitta?" we will really have nothing to say except yes.

If we work hard enough, can we achieve calm-abiding? We have to say yes.

There is no valid reason for saying, "I cannot do it" or "I will not be able to achieve it." Therefore if one is asked, "Is enlightenment achievable in one lifetime in one body?" then the answer has to be yes.

What if we shorten the time frame to one day. Can enlightenment be achieved in one day?

Khen Rinpoche: You know what I am talking about.

By having the eight freedoms and ten endowments that characterise our human life, if we practised correctly, then the answer has to be yes, it can be achieved in one day.

There is no need to mention how hard we had already worked in the past or how much merit we had already accumulated in past lives to get to where we are now. There is no need to talk about all of that. It is a given.

We all have the good fortune to have access to Dharma teachings. We always have that freedom and opportunity to listen to the teachings and to learn the Dharma. These are the ripening results of the hard work that we had put in in our past lives. We are experiencing the fruits of the ripening of our merit.

Even if we were to compare ourselves with Milarepa, whatever we have now is the same as what Milarepa had. He was a human being and we are human beings. The conditions are there. He achieved enlightenment because he worked hard. So if we work hard, then there is no valid reason to say that we will not achieve enlightenment. All of us are still stuck here and not getting anywhere because we always think that practitioners like Milarepa were better than us or that he did this and that in his past lives!

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REQUIREMENTS FOR BASIC PROGRAM FINAL EXAM

Khen Rinpoche: At the very beginning of this cycle of BP classes, I had mentioned that those who want to take the final exam must take each of the module exams. Also, I did mention that you must attend at least eighty percent of the classes. These are the requirements for taking the final exam.

I mentioned all this at the very beginning of these classes. I think this is the third time that I am telling you all this. That is why I need your exam papers back for my records.

The exam for this module is challenging in terms of giving marks. There are some people who wrote a lot. Some people wrote less. But even if you wrote only two lines, pass your exam paper back. I need to keep a record for those who wish to take the final exam.

If you really do not want to take the final exam, then whether you sit for each module exam is up to you. Whether you hand up your exam paper or not is up to you. Coming to classes is up to you also. If you want to learn, you can come and listen. You don't have to feel stressed.

But according to the FPMT, the rules for the final exam are that you must complete all the module exams and you must also attend eighty percent of the classes. After that, you must do a three-year retreat! No, not three years. Three months. I think the requirement for the Master Program was supposed to be a three-year retreat. Then it was shortened to one year. For the Basic Program, it is three months.

So I am reminding you again. If you really want to participate in the final exam, then you must fulfil these requirements. Otherwise, never mind. You can come and listen in class. You can give your answers during the exams. If you don't want to sit for exams, also never mind. So you can take it easy.

But as I mentioned before, sometimes you need to push yourself. Otherwise, you never get anywhere. Sometimes, sitting for exams is important. Only then do you push yourself a little bit.

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