

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 7

28 July 2015

Reviewing Verse 6. Verse 7: The real enemy—the self-cherishing attitude. Two essential reflections. Verse 8: The difference between ourselves and our afflictions. Verse 9: If selfishness should arise. Results of our self-cherishing. Verses 10—15: The practice of *tonglen*.

REVIEWING VERSE 6

Verse 6

Thus the bodhisattva roams like the peacock in the forest of cyclic existence, converting the afflictions, which are like a jungle of virulent poisons, into an elixir. Willingly embracing the afflictions, the hero shall conquer the poison.

The bodhisattvas, in particular, the bodhisattva superiors, do not primarily focus on abandoning the afflictions such as desire though they regard all afflictions as faults. Bodhisattva superiors can utilise desire as an aid to benefit sentient beings.

You must understand that there are some bodhisattva superiors who still have to take rebirth in cyclic existence. They do so willingly and their rebirths in cyclic existence happen due to the power of their prayers. They do not take rebirth in cyclic existence due to the force of karma and afflictions.

You must not understand this to mean that the bodhisattva superiors are happy to take rebirth in cyclic existence because of a liking for cyclic existence. Nor does it mean that they take rebirth in cyclic existence due to the force of karma and afflictions. In fact, bodhisattvas have great disenchantment with cyclic existence. The renunciation possessed by the bodhisattvas is said to be much stronger than that possessed by the Hinayanists.

The statement that the bodhisattvas take rebirth in cyclic existence happily means that they do so willingly due to the power of their prayers in order to benefit sentient beings. That is how you must understand this statement.

Bodhisattva superiors know fully and see all the faults of desire and attachment. But nevertheless these bodhisattvas are beings who only focus on helping others. Their

only goal and only interest are to benefit others. For the bodhisattva superiors, their desire and attachment do not harm them. In fact, they are able to utilise their desire and attachment as an aid to benefit sentient beings.

In the Hinayana, there are no exceptions when it comes to abandoning the ten non-virtues. The focus is on abandoning the ten non-virtues and it is absolutely not permitted to engage in non-virtues of the body and speech.

In the Mahayana teachings however, the Buddha made certain exceptions with regard to the three non-virtues of the body and the four non-virtues of speech. There are situations in which the three non-virtues of the body and the four of speech are permitted for certain qualified individuals.

In the context of the Mahayana sutra teachings, no exceptions are given for generating the three non-virtues of the mind. I don't remember the particular text from where I got this information but I seem to remember that this was mentioned in a text.

As long as one still possesses the self-cherishing attitude, no exceptions are made that permit one to engage in the non-virtues of the body and speech. How could these actions be beneficial? These actions will harm even oneself so one can forget about benefitting others.

However, in the case of someone who has completely abandoned the self-cherishing attitude—whose focus is on benefitting others—then an exception is made to engage in some of the bodily and verbal non-virtues if there is benefit to others. It seems that the exception is made or permission is granted on the basis of whether one has self-cherishing or not.

There is an account in the teachings of how the Buddha in one of his past lives killed a person on a ship. At that time, the Buddha-to-be saw that this person was going to kill everyone, about 500 people, on board the ship. Motivated by great compassion for that person, the Buddha-to-be decided to kill that person before he could commit the murder. He saw that if that person were to commit the murder, he would have to be reborn in the lower realms and suffer for a very long time.

The Buddha-to-be thought, "If I have to bear the negative result of killing that person, so be it." He sacrificed himself. Motivated by great compassion, he decided to kill that person. Of course, he has no self-cherishing. He killed that person, completely motivated by his concern for that person. It is said in the teachings that that act in fact helped speed up his accumulation of merit. He was liberated from samsara even more quickly than if he hadn't killed that person.

The point to understand is that if a person has completely abandoned and does not have any self-cherishing at all and his focus is only on working for the benefit of others, this special person has the permission to commit some of physical and verbal non-virtues. But for people who have not abandoned their self-cherishing, then no such permission is granted.

The last line of Verse 6 says, “Willingly embracing the afflictions, the hero shall conquer the poison.” These bodhisattva superiors are able to utilise the objects of enjoyment because they are not harmed by them. In fact, by utilising the objects of enjoyment, the bodhisattva superiors are able to finish their accumulation of merit. They are able to utilise the objects of enjoyment because they are not influenced or controlled by desire as they are always aware of the faults of desire and attachment. As such, they are able to use the objects of enjoyment to benefit others and to finish their accumulation of merit.

THE REAL ENEMY—THE SELF-CHERISHING ATTITUDE

Verse 7

The ego-clinging of the helpless wanderer in cyclic existence is the messenger of the devil. Distance yourself from the savor of selfishness and hedonism, and willingly embrace hardship for the sake of others.

In this context, “the ego-clinging” refers to the self-cherishing attitude that causes one to circle in cyclic existence.

In general, the apprehension of the self is the root of circling in samsara. Even the hearers and solitary realisers have to abandon the apprehension of a self.

In the phrase, “the messenger of the devil,” the commentary explains that “the devil” is self-cherishing and “the messenger” is self-grasping or the apprehension of a self. So we should distance ourselves from self-cherishing and self-grasping that make us look for happiness in samsara, and instead work for the welfare of others. In particular, we should voluntarily embrace the hardships that come along in the process of working for others.

The essential point to understand and realise is the disadvantages of following our self-cherishing attitude. In other words, what do we stand to lose if we were to follow our self-cherishing attitude?

It is said in the mind training teachings that the self-cherishing attitude is the source of all our problems. For example, the seven-point mind training starts with the statement, “Put all the blame on one.” The “one” is basically the self-cherishing attitude.

The teachings tell us that if we analyse carefully, we will be able to see that it is our self-cherishing attitude that is behind all the suffering that we have experienced since beginningless time up to the present moment. We regard cherishing others as the enemy or something that is not beneficial whereas we regard our selfishness, our self-cherishing, as our loved one.

The teachings tell us that since beginningless lifetimes, we have been regarding sentient beings that are actually the source of happiness as the enemy. We have been regarding our self-cherishing attitude that is the real enemy to be the most important thing in our life, like a loved one or someone precious to us.

Even in the context of this life, it is quite clear that our unhappiness and our problems come from our self-cherishing attitude. Let's say somebody criticises us or says something unpleasant about us. Of course, we don't like it and we suffer. When we hear those words, we are so disturbed. But why are we disturbed in the first place when we hear such remarks or criticism? It is clear that we are disturbed because of our self-cherishing.

Whether it is some sickness, pain or even spirit harm, if we analyse and think about it, the root cause of these undesirable experiences is our own selfishness, our own self-cherishing.

It is very clear that even as a Buddhist, with respect to whatever vows or commitments we have taken—whether it is the vows of a lay person or the bodhisattva vows—the reason we are not able to keep them properly and our actions do not become Dharma is due again to our self-cherishing.

So our self-cherishing leads to all our problems in this life. If we were to analyse and think beyond this life, the reason we end up in the lower realms or, even if we don't go there, the reason we remain in samsara, experiencing all the different samsaric problems and difficulties, all originate from our own selfishness.

If we think about all the problems that we had experienced as human beings—disharmony between people, fighting, quarrelling and disagreements—they can all be attributed to our selfishness.

It is also very clear that because of our self-cherishing attitude, it makes us regard ourselves to be more important than others. In fact, we see ourselves as the most important person of all. Because of that, we work so hard for the most important person on earth, i.e., ourselves. With that attitude, we strive to make money for this most important person—"I want this. I want that. I want to be famous. I want to have a good reputation." In order to achieve all these things, there is nothing we will not do—we cheat, we compete with others in a negative way, we disregard others and we look down on them. Our self-cherishing attitude is responsible for all of this.

Sometimes, we are jealous of others who are materially better off than us, i.e., they have more of the good things in life. We envy them and become jealous. Why? Again, it is because of our self-cherishing!

If our self-cherishing is very strong, all it takes is for somebody to point out a small fault in us or for someone to say something very insignificant but unpleasant for us to get very upset. Again, this is due to our self-cherishing!

From our own experience, it is very clear that the stronger our ego and our selfishness, the more difficult it is for us to get along with others be it in an organisation, a community, among friends, relatives or family. Because we hold ourselves to be the most important person, all it takes is something quite insignificant but nevertheless unpleasant to occur. Instantly, we don't like it because the 'I' is so strong. Everybody will appear as our enemy and we will find fault with everybody. Then we will have difficulties living with anybody. This is very clear.

All the disharmony, unhappiness and difficulties in relationships—between parents and their children, partners, friends, people within a community, even between a guru and his disciples—ultimately comes from self-cherishing.

In the sayings of the Kadampa masters, it is mentioned, “... until we see ourselves as the enemy.” What this means is that until we see our own self-cherishing as the enemy, no matter who we take as our guru, even though conventionally speaking, they are very good teachers, they will not be able to benefit us. The point is to recognise our self-cherishing as the enemy for when we can recognise this, the possibility for positive change can arise.

Just as the seven-point mind training instructions say, “Put all the blame on one.” We should put all the blame on to our self-cherishing attitude. The teachings tell us that the self-cherishing attitude, our selfishness, is responsible for all the problems we have in this life. It will also send us to the hell realms, the realms of the hungry ghosts and animals and cause us problems in all our future lives.

This is what the teachings say but we have to see for ourselves whether this is true or not. We have to think about this and analyse further. So to think about this for ourselves is a very important step.

TWO ESSENTIAL REFLECTIONS

If our self-cherishing attitude has all these faults and disadvantages, then cherishing others must have an opposite result. Even in this life, if we were to have the thought of benefitting and cherishing others, we would have less problems and more happiness. Likewise, that must be the case for our future lives where we will also have less problems and more happiness. A good rebirth in the future as a human or a celestial being will come from cherishing others. Likewise, the happiness of liberation and full enlightenment come from cherishing others.

It is mentioned in the mind training teachings and also in the lam-rim that we have to consider the faults and disadvantages of self-cherishing from various angles. We also have to consider the profit to be gained from and the advantages of cherishing others from all angles. These two reflections are essential. We must think deeply about them. It is only on the basis of seeing the faults of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others that the practice of *tonglen*—giving others our happiness and taking on their suffering—make sense.

The rest of this text is basically talking about this practice of giving our happiness to others and taking on their suffering. This will not make any sense at all if we have not sorted out for ourselves the problems we will face if we were to disagree that self-cherishing is harmful and if we were to believe that cherishing others does not make sense and is not so important.

The first verse of the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* says that sentient beings are more precious than wish-fulfilling jewels, and by recognising that, may we always hold them as supreme at all times.

Lama Atisha said that we regard the object of refuge to be very important and precious. When we think of the Buddha, we say that the Buddha is so precious. We also think of our meditational deities as very precious. But as Lama Atisha points out, in fact, sentient beings are more precious. At the very least, sentient beings are definitely equally precious because our meditational deities and the buddhas that we take refuge in all come from sentient beings.

The teachings point out to us that we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we make requests to the meditational deities and we rely on the gurus. All these are done for the purpose of achieving enlightenment for sentient beings. Therefore, the teachings tell us that if we can take care of others and cherish them, then the attainment of enlightenment will also be granted to us. The teachings say that if we cherish others, we will also accomplish all the aims of this life, as well as all the aims of future lives. In other words, everything can be achieved.

The teachings state that if we generate love and compassion for sentient beings, the merit of such an attitude surpasses the merit generated from making the usual offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. In fact, generating love and compassion for sentient beings is said to be the supreme offering.

In essence, we must think deeply over and over again until we have ascertained that our self-cherishing is indeed the source of all our problems. Likewise, we also have to think very deeply over and over again until we are utterly convinced that the mind that cherishes others is the main cause of every success and happiness.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OUR AFFLICTIONS AND US

Verse 8

May the suffering of all beings, who, like myself, are driven by their karma and their habituation to the afflictions, be heaped upon me, the hedonist.

We circle in cyclic existence mainly due to our self-cherishing. We also accumulate karma because of our self-cherishing. We circle in cyclic existence due to our karma and our habituation or familiarity with our afflictions.

The verse is exhorting us to take on “the suffering of all beings” and direct them at our self-cherishing rendering it powerless, i.e., to destroy our self-cherishing.

Here we should understand the discussion we had in the previous lesson. There is a difference between our afflictions and us. There is a distinction between our self-cherishing and us. The target here is our self-cherishing so we are not destroying ourselves. We are destroying our self-cherishing. That is the first thing that we need to understand.

But in order to even entertain the thought of taking on the suffering of others and directing them at our self-cherishing, first, we must be convinced that our self-cherishing is a problem.

When we have these two understandings, then the verse urges, “May the suffering of all beings, ... be heaped upon me,” i.e., may it be directed at our self-cherishing.

We must understand the distinction between our faults, our afflictions, our self-cherishing and us. Sometimes we regard these two as an inseparable whole, which is not the case. Our purpose is not to destroy ourselves but rather to destroy our self-cherishing. If we were to think that we are inseparable from our afflictions and that our self-cherishing and we are the same thing, then we are going to meet with a lot of problems.

Since we have studied the *Tathagata Essence*, we know that the nature of the mind is clear light and that our defilements are adventitious. We should be able to see the distinction between our self-cherishing and us. Since the nature of the mind is clear light and the afflictions have never resided within the nature of the mind, as such, we are not our afflictions.

If we think about the ‘I’, what is the ‘I’ imputed in dependence on? It is the mind’s factor of luminosity and awareness. We do not impute the ‘I’ in dependence on the afflictions but rather we impute the ‘I’ in dependence upon the mind’s factor of luminosity and awareness. Probing further, in essence, the ‘I’ is imputed in dependence upon our mind’s emptiness of true existence.

From the sutric point of view, when we talk about the objective great seal or objective Mahamudra, that is none other than the mind’s emptiness of true existence.

- This objective Mahamudra—the mind’s emptiness of true existence—is also the Mahamudra of the basis.
- The Mahamudra of the path is the mind that realises the mind’s emptiness of true existence.
- The resultant Mahamudra is the resultant wisdom, the dharmakaya, i.e., the resultant wisdom that realises the mind’s emptiness of true existence.
 - From the objective point of view, the resultant Mahamudra is the natural purity that is the nature body.
 - From the subjective point of view, i.e., from the perspective of the mind realising it, that would be the wisdom truth body.

IF SELFISHNESS SHOULD ARISE

Verse 9a

When I become enmeshed in selfishness, I will offer my own happiness to living beings so as to counteract it.

It is quite impossible for bodhisattvas to be selfish, i.e., to have self-cherishing. The bodhisattvas always think about the faults of selfishness and they understand them fully.

Even if we were to allow for that possibility, what do the bodhisattvas do when that happens? The bodhisattvas would offer all his happiness to others in order to counteract their selfishness. The practice of *tonglen* is described as the practice whereby the bodhisattvas take on all the suffering and problems of sentient beings

onto themselves. To weaken and destroy their own self-cherishing attitude, they give and dedicate their happiness to others.

RESULTS OF OUR SELF-CHERISHING

Verse 9b

In the same way, should a companion be ungrateful to me, I will be content in knowing that this is in retribution for my own inconstancy.

This situation mentioned in Verse 9 is similar to the one in the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*. When somebody that we have benefitted harms us in return, the teachings tell us that we should feel happy because this is the result of our own self-cherishing. Because of that, it is now coming back to us. With that recognition, we should feel happy and be satisfied with the harm we are experiencing.

Usually, we feel good when we see our enemies suffer. When something bad happens to the people we dislike, we feel we have achieved something and are satisfied. It is similar here but the difference is that it is our own self-cherishing attitude that is harmed. If we have already ascertained that our self-cherishing attitude is indeed the source of our problems, when we see our self-cherishing attitude being harmed, we should be satisfied and happy.

In this example, when somebody is ungrateful despite our having benefitted or helped him in some way, if we can acknowledge that that is the result of our own doing due to our self-cherishing, then we can use that as a reminder to ourselves, “In the future, I will not follow my self-cherishing. I’m in this situation now because of my own doing due to my self-cherishing. As such, I will not follow after my self-cherishing from now on.” We need to understand that the harm and the problems that we experience are the results of our own self-cherishing.

Verse 10

When my body falls prey to terrible sickness, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for injuring the bodies of living beings. From now on, I shall take all sickness upon myself.

When our body “falls prey to terrible sickness” or some physical pain, we have to remind ourselves that this is the result of having harmed others physically, imprisoning them, putting them in captivity and so forth. We have to remind ourselves that this is the ripening result of our own negative karma.

THE PRACTICE OF TONGLEN

In the practice of giving and taking, when something like this happens to us—such as falling very sick physically—we make requests to the buddhas and the meditational deities for them to grant their blessings for us to be able to take on the similar suffering of others, their sicknesses and all their problems and for us to experience them ourselves. Taking on their sufferings, we direct them at the suffering we, ourselves, are already experiencing.

One must not forget the purpose behind such visualisations. As we have seen earlier, all our problems, including sicknesses, are the results of our own self-cherishing attitude. First, we have to acknowledge and accept that. Once we see that, the practice of giving and taking is an exercise to develop the courage to destroy our self-cherishing. That is why we request such blessings from the buddhas and meditational deities. The whole point is to destroy our self-cherishing.

The practice of *tonglen*, giving and taking, is as follows:

- as we breathe out, we visualise dedicating all our happiness, virtue and all positive things to sentient beings in the form of white light.
- as we breathe in, we breathe in all their suffering, problems and causes of their problems and so forth in the form of black smoke and direct that at our self-cherishing attitude.

This practice is also related to the practice of exchanging self and others.

Ripening of our negative karma

Let's say this practice is not possible for us at the present time. What we can think is this, "Whatever problems and sicknesses I'm experiencing are the results of my negative karma. It is the wheel of sharp weapons of my negative karma returning to haunt me." By accepting that this is the result of our own negative karma, at least we try to remain undisturbed and not to be so affected by the problems. When people fall sick, often they will say, "Why me? Why do I get sick? I am so careful and I take such good care of my health. I do this and I do that. How come I still get sick?" So that is the answer.

If we have the faith of conviction in karma, when a problem like sickness arises, we can see it is the ripening effect of our own negative karma. Then the mind doesn't get so disturbed. This is the difference of being a real Buddhist. At the very least, we have some faith in karma. If we think, "This is my negative karma ripening. I am purifying my negativities. One negativity down, so to speak," then at least we won't get so disturbed.

If we don't think of karma and we don't have faith in karma, it doesn't matter whether we call ourselves Buddhist or not, there is no difference. Even if we call ourselves Buddhist but if we don't think of karma, we are still disturbed and upset.

Whether it is a sickness or a particular suffering or problem, once it has happened, it is done. There is nothing much we can do about it. The problem will not go away since it has happened.

But there is a huge difference in having a positive mind-set in that if we can think that it is the ripening result of our negative karma, at least, we will not feel so disturbed and give ourselves more problems, or we may not even be disturbed at all. There is some mental peace.

On top of that, if we can do what this text says—"May I use this experience to experience all the sufferings of sentient beings. May this be the substitute for the suffering of sentient beings"—that is even better and we can achieve much more happiness.

Verse 11

When my mind falls prey to suffering, it is surely the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for troubling the minds of others. From now on, I shall willingly take all suffering upon myself.

When our mind “falls prey to suffering”—somebody is disturbing us or we simply feel uncomfortable or mentally upset for no good reason—we must think that this is the ripening result of having disturbed the minds of our gurus in the past, having disturbed the minds of our parents and having disturbed the minds of our friends.

Whatever the case may be, we use the experience to take on the suffering of others.

There are many verses here. Essentially, they are all designed for meditation on giving and taking. With each verse, one makes request to the guru-deity to be able to take on the sufferings of others and dedicate our happiness to them. We think about the meaning of the verse. Then with the visualisation of giving and taking, we engage in the practice.

Verse 12

When I am tormented by extreme hunger and thirst, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for swindling, stealing, and acting miserly. From now on, I shall willingly take all hunger and thirst upon myself.

Verse 13

When I am powerless and suffer enslavement, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for despising my inferiors and enslaving them. From now on I shall make slaves of my body and my life for the sake of others.

Verse 14

When insulting remarks assault my ears, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for my verbal offenses of slander and so forth. From now on I shall condemn my own verbal faults.

Verse 15

When I am reborn into an impure land, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for always cultivating impure vision. From now on, I shall cultivate only pure vision.

The meaning of these verses is not difficult to understand. The most important thing is to think over and over again about the faults of self-cherishing and how our self-cherishing is the source of all our problems. We have to accept in our heart that this is so. Likewise, we have to think about the gain, profit and benefit of cherishing others from all angles and to really see how that is so. This is the most important thing.

All the verses here talk about specific sufferings and the causes for those sufferings. Of course they are all negative karmas but they are specific negative karmas. We see

what their causes are, we accept them for what they are and if we do not want to experience them again in the future, we just have to make a promise to ourselves not to do those actions again in the future. This is essentially what all these verses are about.

Since we don't have much time, we will just read and go through the text quickly. Do your own reading and if you have any questions from your reading, you can bring them up in class.

Question: Last week, you mentioned that bodhisattva superiors utilise attachment and take rebirth as universal monarchs. Some of them have fathered many children to benefit sentient beings. How do having many children benefit sentient beings? I was thinking that if some of the children turn out to be bad children, that would do more harm to sentient beings.

Answer: If you can't produce a thousand children, then maybe ten would be fantastic!

Do you know the story of Asanga and Vasubhandu? They were brothers and their mother was a nun. Of course, she didn't give birth to them as a nun. She gave back her vows.

Children don't turn out well because, in the first place, their parents made them because of their self-cherishing.

For those bodhisattvas who don't have self-cherishing, I guess it is a different case. Great beings like the bodhisattvas have very expansive minds to benefit sentient beings. Also they can make very powerful prayers so that in a way the conditions for them to produce children will be beneficial. They probably have some control over such conditions and can make them happen.

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Patricia Ng & Julia Koh; edited by Cecilia Tsong.