

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 10

11 August 2015

The root text: Verses 21—27. Verse 21: Lack of success. Verse 22: Duplicity towards the Dharma. Verse 23: Belittling shame and modesty. Verse 24: Disharmony among followers. Verse 25: Harboring evil thoughts. Verse 26: Stealing others' wealth. Verse 27: Transgressing one's samaya.

LACK OF SUCCESS

Verse 21

When I am deeply troubled over my lack of success, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for hindering the work of the holy ones. From now on I shall renounce all hindering.

“Lack of success” here can mean different things. We can look at it in terms of lack of success in Dharma practice. One may claim to be practising Dharma or want to practise Dharma and actually go about doing so. But somehow one's Dharma practice doesn't really become a practice and one may just end up accumulating negativities. As a result of that, the mind is disturbed. So this is a kind of lack of success.

In terms of worldly activities, for example, if you want to do business in order to acquire wealth, but things don't turn out the way you want or planned, then that is a lack of success.

In terms of Dharma practice, lack of success could mean that one's mind is becoming harder instead of becoming more subdued and more disciplined. I don't think one starts practising Dharma with the intention of making a loss, do we? Yet somehow, even though we are engaging in Dharma practice, the mind is not subdued. Perhaps, one may get involved in even more negativities. When that happens, this is lack of success. Then one has to remember that this is the ripening effect of the negativities accumulated in the past.

When one encounters such lack of success, one may wonder, “What is the reason for this?” Verse 21 says, “It is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for hindering the work of the holy ones.” So it is the result of causing obstacles to holy beings. When they were giving teachings, one had caused interruptions or problems for them. When people were engaging in virtue, such as doing their daily recitations,

studies or meditations, one had interrupted their practice and caused problems for them. If one had caused obstacles for their practice, then one becomes a condition for them to turn towards non-virtue. These kinds of negative karma will ripen in the experience of oneself lacking success in one's undertakings.

There are people who blame the Dharma for their lack of success, such as when they encounter problems. They think, "The Dharma doesn't benefit me. It is the fault of the Dharma." We must remember that it is not the fault of the Dharma, but rather it is our own fault because we had accumulated the cause in the past for our lack of success.

It is the spirit of mind training instructions not to look for the problem or the fault outside. All mind training instructions say that whatever problems we are experiencing, the culprit is us, and nobody else. The fault lies with us. Instead of looking outside for the cause of the problem, we should reflect on the workings of karma and its effect and realise that we, ourselves, are at fault. Whatever problem we might be experiencing, we created the cause of the problem.

Based on the understanding of the workings of cause and effect, we should set the determination to give up causing obstacles to others when they are engaging in virtue. On top of refraining from causing obstacles to others in their practice of virtue, ideally we should rejoice sincerely from the heart and praise their practice of virtue. Based on this understanding, we make a pledge to renounce hindering others' practice of virtue and to live by our pledge. If we live by our pledge, we actually accumulate the merit that will become the cause for our own success in the future.

DUPLICITY TOWARDS THE DHARMA

Verse 22

When my guru is displeased with me no matter what I do, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for acting duplicitously toward the holy Dharma. From now on I shall reduce my duplicity toward the Dharma.

Sometimes due to one's lack of skilfulness, one may end up doing things that displease the virtuous friend. When the guru is displeased, one gets upset, worried or depressed. When one's mind is disturbed, one may end up having wrong views, negative thoughts and lose one's faith in and devotion towards the virtuous friend. When this happens, one has to remember not to point the finger at the virtuous friend. According to this verse, the cause for this situation is because in the past, we had acted "duplicitously toward the holy Dharma."

What does duplicity here mean? For example, in the presence of others, one puts on the appearance to give others the impression that one is holy, peaceful, calm and subdued. But when one is not in the presence of others, one acts in a completely different way, with bad conduct, engaging in negativities and so forth.

For example, your guru tells you to abandon certain activities and engage in some other activities. You promise the guru, "Yes, I will do it". But you don't do it. After you

have made the promise, when your guru is not around, you behave in ways that contradict the promise you had made. Instead of abandoning what you should abandon and cultivating what you should cultivate, you engage in non-virtue and negativities. That is acting with duplicity.

When the karma ripens, as mentioned in this verse, it doesn't matter what you do, the guru will be displeased.

Realising this, you should make a promise not to act duplicitously towards the Dharma henceforth. The teachings are telling you that it is important not to act with duplicity, i.e., what you look like from the outside must accord with who you really are on the inside.

The example used is of a piece of fruit. A fruit may look ripe on the outside but it should also be ripe on the inside. If it is ripe both inside and out, then that is good. But even if it doesn't look ripe on the outside but it is actually ripe inside, it is still perfectly alright. As a practitioner, if one has substance, that's all that matters, even if one doesn't look like someone with substance from the outside. The very worst is if one is unripe both inside and out. The point is that if one is unripe both inside and out, then there is not much point in saying that one is practising the Dharma because there has not been any benefit. Even if one's external behaviour is not so pleasant but one is peaceful, calm and happy on the inside, then that is alright. Of course, that is not ideal. The best is if one is ripe both on the outside and the inside. Besides being happy and calm inside, one's external conduct is also pleasant. Then that would be perfect.

We cannot tell what is happening in people's minds and people cannot really tell what is happening in our minds. Generally, our external conduct is important especially if we consider ourselves to be a practitioner or, in particular, a follower of the Mahayana teachings.

One of the earlier verses mentioned that our behaviour or conduct ideally should not be a condition for others to accumulate non-virtue or should not cause others to be upset. So our external conduct is still important. There is a saying in Tibetan that goes something like this, "Even if your realisations are equal to the gods, your conduct should accord with mankind." So even if one has realisations, that doesn't mean one can go around saying all kinds of things because external conduct is still considered important.

BELITTLING SHAME AND MODESTY

Verse 23

When everyone contradicts me, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for belittling shame and modesty. From now on, I shall avoid rough behavior.

In a situation where you are contradicted, when everyone seems to be against you even though you have not done anything, when others criticise and put you down, then how should you think? When such situations arise, there is nothing else to do

but think that these are the results of your own karma.

What kind of karma had we accumulated in order to have everyone contradict or criticise us even if we had not done anything wrong in this life? It is said it is the weapon of our own evil deeds turned upon us for belittling or disregarding shame and embarrassment in relation to our teachers, parents, loved ones, relatives and so forth in the past. Because of disregarding shame and embarrassment, we had engaged in all kinds of non-virtue.

The lack of shame is the mind that does not refrain from committing non-virtue on account of oneself. What is shame? For example, you have taken the lay vow of abstaining from alcohol. You find yourself in a situation where alcohol is present and if you wanted to, you could drink it. But because of remembering that you have taken the vow to abstain, you think, “I have made the promise not to drink. Since I have taken that vow, I should not drink.” Then you restrain yourself from drinking. This is an example of the mind that abstains from drinking alcohol on the account of having taken the lay vow. That is shame. You must not think of shame in terms of the English word because in English, shame is a bad thing. Here shame is a good thing because it is a mind that causes you to abstain from a particular non-virtue on account of yourself.

Khen Rinpoche: Shame is a good thing or a bad thing? No shame is a good thing? Being shameless is bad but shame is good. I think so.

If you have taken the vow of not killing, when you find yourself in a situation where you could kill if you wanted to, nevertheless, you abstain from killing on account of having taken the vow of not killing. That is having shame. If you don't feel shame, you could choose to kill.

Embarrassment is abstaining from non-virtue on account of others. For example, you have taken the lay vow of abstaining from alcohol or the lay vow of not killing. You find yourself in a situation where you could drink or kill if you chose to but nevertheless you decided not to. For example, you abstained from that non-virtue on account of the guru. You remember, “I have taken this vow from my teacher.” Or you remember the Buddha and think, “If I drink or kill, he will know for sure.” Hence this is on account of others, whether it is the guru, the Buddha or somebody else.

Remembering that our past disregard for shame and embarrassment is the cause for experiencing criticisms and blame from others, we make a pledge, “Henceforth, I shall avoid rough behaviour.” “Rough behaviour” is essentially behaviour that is not in accord with the Dharma, i.e., non-Dharmic actions. Here we make a pledge to avoid non-Dharmic actions and to have both shame and embarrassment. The point, henceforth, is that with shame and embarrassment, one abstains from non-Dharmic actions.

DISHARMONY AMONG FOLLOWERS

Verse 24

When there is disagreement as soon as my companions gather, it is

the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for peddling my discontent and evil disposition everywhere. From now on without any ulterior motive, I shall behave well toward all.

The commentary explains that you have gathered many people who work for you or help you, yet somehow they don't stay long and they leave you even though you had succeeded in bringing them into your fold. These things do happen. That is said to be the result of bad conduct in the past that caused people to be disharmonious, in disagreement with one another or to split up.

In general, if our own conduct and behaviour is not up to the mark, people will not stay with us for a long time. The solution is to have a pleasant disposition and to be honest and truthful. So one makes the pledge to have a pleasant disposition, to behave properly and be straightforward, truthful and honest. The result will be that one will have many helpers and friends in the future and they will stay with us for a long time.

HARBOURING EVIL THOUGHTS

Verse 25

When all my kin become my enemies, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for harboring evil thoughts. From now on I shall reduce my deceit and guile.

When we become distant from the virtuous friend or when our loved ones, friends, and companions become enemies, we become unhappy and suffer. At that time, we have to remember karma. When the people who matter to us and are close to us become our enemies, it is said these are the results of having harmed them in the past or having harboured, in the depths of our heart, thoughts of malice towards them even though we did not directly harm them in the past.

You may remember from our past discussions that just harbouring malicious thoughts, thoughts of wanting to harm or holding a strong grudge and resentment is enough to accumulate karma that will ripen in the form of suffering in the future.

It is possible that one may think, "I didn't actually harm them directly. I just have the thought of harming them but I didn't actually do anything. That should be alright." But actually that is not the case. If we harboured malicious thoughts in our mind for a long time or it is a very strong resentment or holding on to a grudge, that in itself will already result in the accumulation of karma. We will have to experience the suffering result. So from now on, we make the pledge, "I shall reduce my deceit and guile."

The two mental factors of deceit and guile were covered in the module on the mind and mental factors.

- Deceit is the mind that purposely or intentionally hides one's faults from others, motivated by the desire for material gain, praise and good reputation.
- Guile is the mind that puts up a false front, pretending to have qualities that one actually does not possess, motivated by desire for material gain, respect, reputation and so forth.

So guile is putting up a false front, pretending to have qualities that one doesn't have whereas deceit is also putting up a false front, but intentionally hiding one's faults from others.

Having said this, what is the relationship between the pledge reducing our deceit and guile and the experience of our loved ones becoming our enemies that is said to be the result of us harbouring evil thoughts?

Khen Rinpoche: Do you see any connection? I'm not sure how they are connected.

STEALING OTHERS' WEALTH

Verse 26

When I am sick with consumption or edema, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for unlawfully and indiscriminately stealing others' wealth. From now on I shall renounce plundering others' wealth.

There may be different versions of the root text. In my commentary, it says that we are beset with obstacles and sicknesses. When practising the Dharma, we may meet with interferences from both humans and non-humans. We may also fall sick, be it due to consumption (tuberculosis) or cancer. Whatever the sickness may be, the end result is we become very frail and weak to the point where we cannot do much practice.

Here, it is translated as "unlawfully and indiscriminately stealing others' wealth," but in Tibetan, it means taking the possessions of the Three Jewels, such as taking things belonging to the Buddha, and using them.

"Unlawfully" means that an ordained person who has committed a defeat of the pratimoksha and in reality is no longer ordained, still living in the monastic community and using the possessions of the sangha community such as the abode, food and so forth. It says here that would be "unlawful." Actually it is unethical because that person no longer has the vows and yet is still using the possessions of the sangha community. It also refers to a situation where one is partaking of those possessions indiscriminately and carelessly without any consideration for whether a particular action is virtuous or non-virtuous.

"From now on, I shall renounce plundering others' wealth." Here, "plundering others' wealth" refers to taking and using the possessions of the Three Jewels

TRANSGRESSING ONE'S SAMAYA

Verse 27

When my body is suddenly struck by contagious disease, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for committing acts that corrupted my vows. From now on I shall renounce non-virtuous acts.

Being suddenly inflicted by a contagious disease is said to be the result of having transgressed one's samaya—be it a spiritual commitment, vow, precept or promise—in the past. If one keeps to one's samaya, one's pledge and promise, one becomes good, excellent and holy. If one transgresses one's samaya, then one will fall to the lower realms and suffer. As such, one makes the pledge to henceforth abandon non-virtue.

~~~~~

Qualms from *the Tathagata Essence*.

*Qualm:* I have a qualm about the quality of spontaneity of a buddha. This quality is uncompounded. I'm not very sure if I fully understand this. The quality of spontaneous enlightened activity is to help all sentient beings. Therefore, in a way, it is dependent on the existence of sentient beings. If so, why is it uncompounded?

On the other hand, it is also not correct to say it is compounded because that would mean that effort and cause is required to perform actions to benefit sentient beings. That is not the case.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Do you understand the qualm? I better not answer it if you don't understand the qualm.

Of the eight qualities of the Buddha Jewel that were mentioned in the *Tathagata Essence*, what is the second quality and is that quality compounded or uncompounded?

What is the second quality? Spontaneity.

Is it compounded or uncompounded?

How does the Buddha's effortless and spontaneous enlightened activity come about? What makes it possible for the Buddha's enlightened activity to be spontaneous and effortless?

This is made possible by the abandonment of the two obscurations. This quality of acting effortlessly and spontaneously without needing to depend on thought is a quality of the buddhas only. It does not exist on the sentient beings' ground. Why are sentient beings not able to do things without thought and effort? It is said that that is because we have not yet abandoned the two obscurations.

First, we need to get an idea of what is non-abiding nirvana, what is enlightenment and what is nirvana. These are important points. When we talk about the non-abiding nirvana or enlightenment, what exactly do we mean? Essentially, what is enlightenment? This is crucial to understanding this question.

Nagarjuna said, "What is liberation? Liberation is the exhaustion of karma and afflictions." What are karma and afflictions exhausted into? The sphere of reality is where all karma and afflictions and all elaborations cease. Essentially, that is what liberation is.

But prior to talking about this, first, we have to know how suffering and samsara comes about. The root of samsara is ignorance, the apprehension of true existence, the mind that actively believes that each and everything that exists must exist from their own side. Whatever appears to us appears as established or existing from its own side or existing inherently. So first, there is this appearance of true existence. Inside us there is a mind that assents to that appearance and believes that that is how things exist. This mind is called the apprehension of true existence.

With that as the basis, incorrect mental attention comes into play. In reality, whether the object in question is good or bad, it is just a projection or a mere imputation by the mind. But that is not how things appear to the mind. That is not what we believe.

Whether the object in question is good or bad, as long as we think that it is good, that object will appear to us as completely good from its own side with qualities over and above what the object actually possesses. But we don't realise that. We exaggerate the attributes of the object. If the object is good, everything is 100 per cent good from its own side. If the object is bad, then everything is 100 per cent bad from its own side. It has nothing to do with our perception at all. The goodness or badness is right there coming from the side of the object. Based on that appearance and belief, very strong anger arises towards objects we find inherently repulsive. Or we develop very strong attachment for objects we find inherently pleasant or attractive. Based on that, we engage in all kinds of actions where we accumulate karma. The result is continuous suffering and problems.

We said that liberation is the state of emptiness—the sphere of reality—into which all elaborations dissolve. “Elaborations” has a few meanings but essentially the fundamental elaboration here is the elaboration of true existence. It refers to ignorance, the apprehension of true existence. While things do not exist from their own side, the apprehension of true existence conceives things to exist from their own side. That is an elaboration because in reality, there is no true existence but the apprehension of true existence “elaborates,” exaggerates or imputes inherent existence onto phenomena.

This elaboration, this apprehension of true existence, is a wrong consciousness from which all problems and suffering arise. Since it is a false elaboration of reality, if we apply the antidote—the understanding that true existence has never and will never exist—it can weaken the apprehension of true existence. In so doing, we can also remove this apprehension of true existence.

Comes the day when we generate the wisdom, the mind, that directly sees emptiness, that mind becomes an antidote that is powerful enough to overcome ignorance, the apprehension of true existence. If you were to ask, “When you generate the wisdom realising emptiness, where does the apprehension of true existence go?” then there is nothing else to say other than that it goes into emptiness. Where does the apprehension of true existence cease? It ceases in its sphere of reality. It ceases in the reality, the suchness, of the mind.

The mind is accompanied by defilements. When the suchness with defilements is



separated from the defilements, what remains is the suchness of the mind. That is liberation. There is nothing else to point to. That is the final sphere of reality.

It is the same thing as the non-abiding nirvana. When the two obscurations are abandoned, what is left is that suchness. That is the non-abiding nirvana, the suchness that is not accompanied by the two obscurations. That is the second quality of spontaneity, the non-abiding nirvana.

*Khen Rinpoche: Are you getting it?*

This non-abiding nirvana is uncompounded. It is the emptiness or suchness of the mind that has been separated from the two obscurations.

The emptiness of the mind has always existed. It is just that along the way, it acquires different names:

- When it is accompanied by defilements, it is called suchness with defilements.
- When it is not accompanied by defilements, i.e., when the two obscurations have been removed, it is called non-abiding nirvana.

As the mind acquires these different names, maybe one may think that at certain times, the mind is uncompounded and then at other times, it is compounded. It is not like that. When we talk about the final ultimate nature of the mind, the suchness of the mind, it is uncompounded. It has always been uncompounded and it will remain that way. That is the quality of the suchness of the mind.

If you think about it, the emptiness or the suchness of the mind is the basis from which samsara arises. It is that same suchness of the mind that makes nirvana possible.

It is challenging and not easy when you hear how all phenomena are the elaborations of emptiness, how they are the play of emptiness and how they are in the nature of emptiness.

Because the mind is empty of existing inherently, there is samsara and there is nirvana. If that is not the final nature of the mind, there is no way for samsara and nirvana to exist. If the mind exists inherently, then the presentation of samsara and nirvana would be untenable and not possible. If the mind exists inherently, why is it that there cannot be nirvana and there cannot be samsara?

Samsara is established from within the emptiness of the mind. So is nirvana. With that as the basis, the non-abiding nirvana that is essentially the uncompounded suchness of the mind, the Buddha, is spontaneous. And because of that, the Buddha's enlightened activities are spontaneous and effortless.

But when you talk about the Buddha's enlightened activities themselves, then they are not uncompounded. The Buddha's enlightened activities are compounded.

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