

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 13

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The root text: Verses 34—39. Verse 34: Sinning against the gods and mantras. Verse 35: Driving spiritual teachers and others from their homes. Verse 36: Not guarding one's vows and moral conduct. Verse 37: Not giving charity or offering to the Three Jewels. Verse 38: Erecting ugly images. Verse 39: Hardening one's malevolent, evil mind. Answering of qualms from Module 6 on the *Tathagata Essence*.

SINNING AGAINST THE GODS AND MANTRAS

Verse 34

When conceptual construction rises up as pollution demons and evil spirits, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for sinning against the gods and mantras. From now on I shall crush all conceptual construction.

In the Tibetan edition, "When conceptual construction rises up as pollution demons and evil spirits" reads as, "When experiencing spirit harms and accumulating negativities from having degenerated or broken the spiritual vows and commitments."

Sometimes when one experiences harm from external spirits, it could be due to transgressing or breaking one's vows and samaya. Due to that transgression, this appears as an external spirit that is causing harm.

Whatever the specific karmic cause may be, in general, if we analyse the main cause of receiving spirit harm, at the end of the day, it always comes back to our own afflictions.

I don't remember exactly who said this. It could be Lama Atisha and it goes like this, "If your mind is subdued, the external spirit cannot harm you. But if your mind is not subdued, then that external spirit acts as a condition for your own mind to be burnt."

In the context of this verse, what it is saying is that due to the degeneration of one's samaya or vows, negativities arise in the form of an external harm—non-human entities, spirits or whatever causes you problems. This is due to having sinned against the deities or the gods in the past.

“The gods” here could be a worldly god or deity, or it could be a transcendental deity. Whatever it is, one may have despised them, put them down or criticised them in the past.

“Sinning against mantras”: *Mantra* is a Sanskrit word and when translated into Tibetan, it means “mind protection” or “protecting the mind.” In this case, we can take it to mean protecting the mind from non-virtue.

The entire Dharma can be condensed into the practices of the path of the three types of persons:

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

Whichever Dharma it may be, starting from the Dharma of a person of small capacity, it is a method that protects our mind from non-virtuous states. So criticising, despising, disregarding or putting down such a Dharma would lead to the accumulation of negativities that will ripen in the form of an external harm such as a spirit that causes us problems.

What should we do henceforth? “From now on I shall crush all conceptual conception.” In the Tibetan text, the word is *namtog*. This means negative concepts or negative thoughts. The thoughts that we should overcome are those thoughts that do not accord with the Dharma. Here one undertakes or pledges to vanquish such negative thoughts.

We have all kinds of discursive or negative thoughts that arise from our anger and attachment that are induced by our ignorance. All these are non-beneficial negative thoughts so we should try to overcome them.

DRIVING SPIRITUAL TEACHERS AND OTHERS FROM THEIR HOMES.

Verse 35

When I wander far from home like a helpless person, it is the
weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for driving spiritual
teachers and other from their homes. From now on I shall not expel
anyone from their home.

This verse gives the example of being expelled from a place. Sometimes you may be living in a pleasant environment but somehow somebody who has more power than you comes along and forces you to leave that particular place. Or sometimes at work, somebody who is more powerful does something that makes you leave your job. Or in a community or organisation, somebody who is more powerful for whatever reason expels you from that community or organization. These experiences cause us suffering.

If you are a Buddhist, the way to think when encountering such situations is to remember karma, “Whatever I am experiencing is the result of my own actions.” It is not about looking for the source of the problem outside, pointing the finger at

somebody out there but rather to remember that it is the result of your own karma. This is the approach of a Buddhist. This is the way to experience the situation without disturbing or upsetting the mind and to bring peace to your heart. This is the best way of thinking.

If one were to ask, “What kind of karma did I accumulate to experience this?” the teachings tell us that this is the result of having expelled or driven people away from their homes. The verse mentions “spiritual teachers” but this is just one of the examples. Essentially motivated by anger, jealousy or competitiveness, one expels someone from where they live.

Henceforth, if one does not want to experience something like this in the future, the solution is that one needs to avoid expelling anybody from their home, community and so forth, motivated by anger, jealousy or competitiveness, especially when one has the power and authority to do so.

NOT GUARDING ONE’S VOWS AND MORAL CONDUCT

Verse 36

When calamities occur like frost and hail, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for not properly guarding my vows and moral conduct. From now on I shall keep my vows and moral conduct pure.

There is nothing much to say about this verse.

NOT GIVING CHARITY OR OFFERINGS TO THE THREE JEWELS

Verse 37

When I, a greedy person, lose my wealth, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for not giving charity or making offerings to the Three Jewels. From now on I will zealously make offerings and give charity.

This does happen. Generally speaking, people are looking for material gain or profits. They work very hard, investing all their money, time and effort towards this end. But despite their hard work and effort, they still do not meet with any success. Not only that. They lose what they have invested and end up with nothing.

If we were to experience this, we would be very upset. At that time, when we experience such problems, suffering or unhappiness, it is important to bring karma to mind. We have to think, “This is the result of my own karma.” Which particular karma? Here it says, “This is due to not having practised giving in the past or making offerings to the Three Jewels.”

It is said that not meeting with success in one’s work, business, career and not making profits and money out of such ventures is the result of having been tight-fisted and very miserly in the past. Even though one had the resources and money, one didn’t practise giving or making offerings to the Three Jewels.

What is the solution if we don't want to experience similar problems in the future? The solution is to practise giving and make offerings to the Three Jewels.

It is mentioned in the lam-rim literature that having perfect resources, a perfect body, perfect enjoyments, perfect helpers and a perfect environment are the results of having practised generosity, ethical discipline, patience and joyous perseverance in the past.

But having these attributes alone are not sufficient. If we have some kind of meditative stabilisation or concentration, and, more importantly, wisdom, then having a perfect body, perfect resources, perfect helpers and so forth could be useful and beneficial. But if we don't have some kind of concentration, in particular some kind of wisdom, just having money, lots of helpers because we have an attractive physical appearance, a nice home and so forth do not necessarily mean we will end up to be a happy person. This is because such things could actually be the conditions for us to become even more afflicted. They can be conditions for negative emotions to arise. So having those things without concentration and in particular, wisdom, is not sufficient.

If we do not have the wisdom that enables us to discriminate between what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, what is harmful and what is beneficial, and in particular, if we do not have the wisdom that understands karma and its effects, then even though we are rich and have many possessions, we will be just using up our merit. Regardless of whatever enjoyments we own and partake of, we are simply exhausting our merit. If we are not accumulating merit at the same time, then we are depleting our merit. This happens when we don't have wisdom. And when we don't have wisdom, then having money, wealth and possessions actually become the causes for more delusions to arise, stirring up more attachment, more anger and more ignorance.

Just as we have wealth and prosperity now, we know that we need to do something to ensure we will continue to have wealth and prosperity in the future. If we have the wisdom that understands karma, then we will create the causes to experience wealth and prosperity in the future. We will happily practise giving and happily make offerings to the Three Jewels. If we have wisdom, this will happen.

The explanation in the *Lam-rim Chen-mo* in the section dealing with the introduction to the perfections is very good. It is really very good and very effective advice. So we should get acquainted with and think about the advice given.

In the Tibetan text, it says, "From now on, I shall strive in practising giving and making offerings purely." The word "purely" indicates the purity of intention. So whenever we are practising giving or making offerings, it has to be done sincerely with a pure motivation and not in a slipshod manner. That should not be the way.

Rather when we are making offerings, it must be done with a pure intention. That means we should not make offerings motivated by partisanship, bias or in pursuit of fame, power and reputation. Nor should we expect something in return. It is important to make offerings and to practise giving purely.

If we look at the practice of giving from the perspective of the bodhisattvas, it is mentioned that bodhisattvas give without expecting anything in return, without expecting any kind of reward. They would not even expect to experience the ripening effect of giving. So making offerings to the Three Jewels and practising giving without any hopes of reward or even to experience the positive ripening effect of those actions is the practice of the bodhisattvas.

But this doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with practising giving in search of the happiness of future lives. That is good. It is alright if you practise giving just looking to be rich and wealthy in future lives. But if you are talking about the practice of a bodhisattva, then the bodhisattva gives without the slightest expectation.

There is much discussion about karma in the Buddhist teachings such as the benefits of giving and the practice of ethical discipline. For example, from giving comes resources and from ethical discipline comes a good rebirth. These things are explained in detail. That is the theory that is mentioned many times in the teachings.

However, if we look at the actual reality in the practical world, if we look at the Buddhist community at large, generally speaking, we don't do as well as followers of the other religious traditions when it comes to extending practical assistance to society such as helping the poor, building schools and so forth. We may talk a lot, but in terms of action, generally speaking, we pale in comparison to the followers of the other religious traditions.

So we have to think for ourselves. If we have sufficient resources and have enough to give, then we should help others. When we talk about giving, the practice of giving is mainly to those who are destitute, to the poor and the underprivileged.

The advice here is that we should practise giving and make offerings purely as much as possible within our own ability and means. We should try to put this into practice.

ERECTING UGLY IMAGES

Verse 38

When my companions mistreat me for being ugly, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for venting my rage by erecting ugly images. From now on I shall erect images of the gods and be slow to anger.

“Venting my rage by erecting ugly images” can be understood to mean erecting holy objects improperly, making bad representations of them and includes instances when the mind is disturbed in relation to holy objects.

As mentioned in the lam-rim, one of the eight fruitional effects is having a good physical appearance in the context of benefitting sentient beings. Having this quality is useful because by having a pleasant appearance, people are attracted to you and it becomes easier to benefit those sentient beings.

It is stated clearly in the stages of the path literature that if one acquires a special body of the high status that possesses the eight fruitional effects (or the eight special qualities), that will make a big difference to one's progress on the path to enlightenment. The eight qualities stated in the lam-rim literature are¹:

1. consummate life span
2. consummate colour (i.e., an excellent body)
3. consummate lineage
4. consummate power
5. trustworthy words
6. renown as a great power
7. being a male
8. having strength

What kind of karma do you need to accumulate to be born as a male? You will find in many sutras the advantages of having a male body. Many sutras say that one needs a male body to achieve the path of seeing.

Khen Rinpoche: Fourteen years ago, I went to a conference in Singapore. There were many speakers there, from the Theravada tradition, the Mahayana tradition and also from the Vajrayana tradition. There were some discussions about whether females can achieve enlightenment or not. That was one of the topics of discussion. There was much discussion over this question.

One of the monks from the Theravada tradition said that one cannot get enlightened in a female body. One must be a man. One Kagyu nun, Ven. Tenzin Palmo, was against that and she said, "I think it is not true. Women can get enlightened too." So there was a lot of discussion.

(Student's comments are inaudible).

All I said was that many sutras state that one needs a male body to achieve enlightenment. But in tantra, it is mentioned that one can achieve enlightenment on the basis of a female body.

Anyway, this is not a critical issue. It is not important. We have to be aware that the Buddha would say one thing in one situation and say something different in another situation. What we have to understand is what the Buddha's intent is and the purpose for saying these different things at different times to different people. Therefore, when we talk about the four reliances, one of them is not to rely on the interpretative meaning but to rely on the definitive meaning. That is very important.

In order to achieve a special body of high status that possesses the eight fruitional effects or fully ripened qualities such as the ones we mentioned earlier, it is not sufficient just to keep the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten non-virtues. There are many qualities. So there are many different karmas that need to be accumulated such as reducing pride, practising patience and so forth.

¹ *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Tsong-kha-pa, Volume One. Snow Lion Publications, Page 243.

Here, in order to achieve the quality of having a good body that includes a pleasant physical appearance, the cause is practicing patience. It is also mentioned in the lam-rim that constructing holy objects such as the statue of a buddha and making offerings of garments to the statue of a buddha are also causes for achieving a good body.

When one makes a statue of a buddha or a holy object or one commissions a holy object, it is important to do it properly. The statue or the holy object must be made properly with the proper proportions, dimensions, measurements and so forth. The final product should be such that when people look at it, they find it very appealing. That is important. If you achieve that, that becomes the cause to have a good body in the future.

You may already know of the practice of making tsa-tsas, i.e., making images of the Buddha using clay or plaster. What I personally think is that one should not emphasise the quantity made. It is the quality that is important for the reasons we have looked at so far. The priority should be the quality. It should be made well such that the final product is appealing to people when they look at it. That leaves a positive impression on people. With regard to the material for the holy object, according to one's ability, one should use the best material if one can afford it.

If you are thinking about erecting a holy image of a buddha using clay or plaster versus using gold—which material will help you gain more merit? If you can do it well, then just by doing one tsa-tsa can be the cause to get a good body in the future. So it is important to make holy objects properly with the proper measurements, proportions and dimensions, not missing anything out.

Sometimes when people make holy objects or tsa-tsas, in the final product, you see that the eyes are missing, the hands are missing or the hands and the legs are out of proportion or crooked. These are defects in the final products. These are the causes to be born in the future with incomplete sense faculties, sense powers or missing parts of the body and so forth. So one has to be very careful.

There are also people who disrespect holy objects such as statues, Dharma texts and so forth because of anger. There are people who destroy holy objects or destroy Dharma texts by burning them motivated by anger and afflictions. These are causes to have a bad body in the future.

In society, we see people who are considered ugly or people who are not physically attractive. People who are ugly tend to have a harder time. People make fun of them, jeer at them and say all kinds of nasty things. It is not pleasant to experience all that.

The solution then is this: "From now on I shall erect images of the gods and be slow to anger." "Be slow to anger" means that one should not be short-tempered. There are people who are very short-tempered. It doesn't matter who they meet. They just get upset almost immediately for whatever reason. So we should try not to be like that. We should "be slow to anger."

HARDENING ONE'S MALEVOLENT, EVIL MIND

Verse 39

When lust and hate are stirred up no matter what I do, it is the weapon of my own evil deeds turned upon me for hardening my malevolent, evil mind. Obstinacy, from now on I shall totally extirpate you!

We may be aware of the defects of being attached to people who we consider to be on our side, i.e., our loved ones and so forth. We are also aware of the disadvantages of having anger towards those who we considered not to be on our side. Although we may be aware of all this and we may even try to stop such a biased attitude, somehow we don't succeed. It is said that this is the result of having come under the control of our self-cherishing in the past.

Henceforth, by recognising the source of the problem, i.e., our self-cherishing, we undertake to vanquish our self-cherishing and promise ourselves to expel it once and for all.

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**QUALMS FROM THE TATHAGATA ESSENCE**

(1) Does the developmental lineage include the wisdom directly realising emptiness that is the cause for the dharmakaya, in particular, the wisdom truth body? Is the wisdom realising emptiness the cause of both the wisdom truth body and the nature body?

*Response:* The wisdom directly perceiving emptiness is the substantial cause of the wisdom truth body but it is not the cause for the natural purity that is the nature body. The emptiness of the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness is that which becomes the natural purity that is the nature body.

(2) Is the tathagata essence an extremely hidden phenomenon? If so, then it cannot be proven but rather one can only understand it based on the testimony of somebody else.

*Response:* No, the tathagata essence that is the emptiness of the mind is not an extremely hidden phenomenon. Initially, one can come to understand it through reasoning. As such, it is *not* an extremely hidden phenomenon. For example, one can realise the emptiness of a person through reasoning, i.e., a person is not truly existent and does not exist inherently because the person is a dependent arising. Through the reason of dependent arising, by depending on this reason, one comes to understand that the person does not exist inherently.

However, the tathagata essence that is the emptiness of the mind is not an obvious or manifest phenomenon. It is a slightly hidden phenomenon.

Objects of knowledge or comprehension can be divided into three:



1. manifest (obvious, evident) phenomena
2. slightly hidden phenomena
3. extremely hidden phenomena

Of these three, the tathagata essence is a slightly hidden phenomenon.

It is good to know a little bit more about these ways of categorising phenomena.

- Manifest phenomena are phenomena that you can understand directly without the need for reasoning such as a pillar or the flowers that we see. We can experience and see the flowers directly. We don't need to depend on any thinking or reasoning to realise these are flowers. So, phenomena that can be experienced directly without depending on reasoning are called manifest phenomena.
- Slightly hidden phenomena are those phenomena that we cannot initially realise directly. Initially at least, we have to realise them through reasoning. Emptiness of inherent existence is an example of a slightly hidden phenomenon. Subtle impermanence is another example of a slightly hidden phenomenon.
- An example of an extremely hidden phenomenon is the subtle presentation of karma and its effects that we see in the teachings—if we do this, then we will get this particular result. It is not possible to understand this or prove it through reasoning. We can only understand it based on testimony. In this case, the mind that realises extremely hidden phenomena is an inferential cogniser generated through belief, i.e., inference through belief.

Although we can only understand and accept extremely hidden phenomena based on the testimony of someone else, in our case, we have to base this on scriptures. It is not so straightforward. It does not mean that we have to accept whatever is said in the scriptures. Yes, ultimately, we accept them because they are the words of the Buddha. But there is a whole line of reasoning that should precede the acceptance of what is said in the scriptures. We have to subject the scriptures, the words of the Buddha, to scrutiny and analysis.

There are three kinds of analysis. If the Buddha's words or scriptures are not harmed by the three kinds of analysis, then we can accept the testimony, the scriptures and the Buddha's words.

- (3) Are all buddhas the same or are some buddhas superior to others? If all buddhas are the same, why don't we see more buddhas around us?

*Response:* All buddhas have the same realisations. Their qualities of abandonment and realisation are the same.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Who asked this question? I am wondering about the last part of the question: If all the buddhas are the same, then why don't we see more buddhas around? What is the purpose of asking this?

- (4) When the defilements are completely eradicated, does the disintegratedness of the defilement still exist? If so, what function does it perform?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Did you all get this question? If you don't get the question, then there is no point in answering it.

*Response:* I did talk about this in class before. This is an uncommon assertion of the Consequence Middle Way School. The Prasangikas assert disintegratedness, the past of the disintegration, which is a composite (or composed) phenomenon. This is something that you can think about. The topic of disintegratedness is a challenging one. Those of you who have been around for a while, at least you have heard of the term and the explanation. So you will have something to think about. For the newer students, just be aware that there is such a question.

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