

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 16

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The root text: Verses 54—62. Verse 54: Another request to Yamantaka. Verse 55: Targetting the mode of apprehension. Verse 56: Desire for comfort is great; desire and greed are great. Verse 57: One's effort is small. Verse 58: Relationship with the guru. Verse 59: Skilled at flattery and hinting. Verse 60: Swollen with pride. Verse 61: More on the guru-disciple relationship. Verse 62: Many vows, minimal practice.

Question: With regard to the objects of abandonment, we were taught there are afflictive obscurations and knowledge obscurations. Are these two exhaustive or are there objects of abandonment that is neither of the two?

Maybe I should explain why I am asking this. An arhat has abandoned self-grasping but still has self-cherishing whereas the bodhisattva on the middle path of accumulation does not have self-cherishing. I have no idea which object of abandonment self-cherishing comes under.

Khen Rinpoche: What about trying to answer this question first: Is there a common locus between self-cherishing and a path, i.e., is there something that is both self-cherishing and a path?

Student 1: What is a path?

Khen Rinpoche: It is where people walk. That is called a path. (Laughs).

Is it possible for such a common locus to exist?

Student 1: I think there is another problem. What exactly is the definition of self-cherishing? Even if I were to recite prayers or develop the Mahayana mind-generation, there is an element of acting for one's own welfare per se so there are two parts—acting for one's own welfare and acting for the welfare of others. There is a sentient being here that needs to be cherished as well. If I can't even cherish myself, how can I talk about cherishing others?

What exactly is this self-cherishing we are talking about? Do I take other people as a priority in comparison to myself but not totally *not* cherish myself either because after all, I am a sentient being too?

I find it hypocritical to say that I cherish others more than myself when I totally don't cherish myself at all because I don't even think this sentient being is worth cherishing. In the first place, the definition of self-cherishing is not so clear.

Khen Rinpoche: I still want my answer.

It is said that we must discard our self-cherishing in order for the mind of enlightenment to arise. When bodhicitta is generated, the power of our self-cherishing decreases and gradually there will come a point when it is eliminated.

In the case of cherishing others, I don't think there is the element of disregarding oneself. Usually self-cherishing means that we prioritise ourselves over others, that we see ourselves as more important than others. Therefore cherishing others has to be the opposite of that attitude.

It is not that you disregard yourself. Rather, from the perspective of cherishing others, others become more important and more precious than oneself. So I don't think there is an element of neglecting or disregarding ourselves when we have the attitude of cherishing others.

Ordinary bodhisattvas are forbidden from giving their bodies to others. It is said that ordinary bodhisattva should not give away any parts of their body, such as their eyes and so forth, to others because the time for that has not come.

When we talk about the objects of abandonment, we usually talk about the two obscurations—the afflictive obscurations and the knowledge obscurations. I would think that if it were an object of abandonment, it would have to be one of these two. It may be difficult to posit otherwise.

An object of abandonment is abandoned by an uninterrupted path, which is its antidote. So this is an object of abandonment.

Having said this, we now back to your question: Whether self-cherishing is an object of abandonment? Going by what we have said so far, it seems that we would have to say that it is *not* an object of abandonment because if it is an object of abandonment, it would have to be either an afflictive obscuration or a knowledge obscuration.

When one trains the mind in the path of the person of medium capacity, for example, through that training, one comes to develop the renunciation that wishes to abandon cyclic existence for oneself. We are primarily seeking our own nirvana or liberation. That thought seeking personal liberation, i.e., seeking nirvana for oneself, is like self-cherishing.

But in the normal sense of the word, self-cherishing is not an object of abandonment. If it is an object of abandonment, it has to be either a path of seeing abandonment or path of meditation abandonment. Nevertheless, self-cherishing is to be discarded from the perspective of the Mahayana.

In general, however, it is not to be discarded as in the example of the mind wishing to achieve liberation for oneself. That is a virtuous mind. As it is a virtue, it is to be adopted and not discarded.

Khen Rinpoche: Do you understand my answer? Yes or no?

If you were asked, “Is self-cherishing necessarily an object to be discarded? Yes or no?”

(Students’ responses are inaudible).

If it is a virtue, is it necessarily to be adopted?

(Students’ responses are inaudible).

Khen Rinpoche: You have to say something. When you say something, then I can respond. Otherwise, I have nothing to say. Either you say yes and say what you think or you say no, then say something. The answer doesn’t matter. It is according to your knowledge, your idea.

If it is a virtue, is it necessarily to be adopted? If you were to say, “Not necessarily,” then right away, you should be able to give me some examples of virtues that I don’t really need.

Khen Rinpoche: When I tell you something, if you don’t understand, then I will ask you more questions. The whole purpose of asking more questions is for you to respond to them. Then that would make things clearer for you. But if you don’t participate, I will not be able to make things clearer for you.

Let’s deal with this one by one. Self-cherishing is not necessarily an object of abandonment. Yes or no?

Khen Rinpoche: Do you or don’t you want to participate? If you are not participating, I can just make a simple statement.

In order to be an object of abandonment:

- it has to be either an afflictive obscuration or a knowledge obscuration
- it has to be abandoned by an uninterrupted path

As such, self-cherishing is not an object of abandonment. But if you are looking at this from the Mahayana perspective, then it is an object to be discarded.

In general, self-cherishing is not an object to be discarded. Why is this so? Because there is a common locus between self-cherishing and a path, i.e., there is something that is both self-cherishing and a path, that is self-cherishing and a virtuous mind. Therefore, self-cherishing is not an object to be discarded. If it is a path, it is necessarily virtuous. If it is virtue, it is necessarily an object to be adopted.

If you have any doubts, you should bring them up right away.

Khen Rinpoche: Do you agree or disagree?

Student 1: I do not agree (that if it is virtue, it is necessarily to be adopted). It is not necessarily so.

Khen Rinpoche: If it is a path, isn't it necessarily an object to be adopted?

Student 1: Even if it is a path, it is not necessarily something that I must adopt.

Khen Rinpoche: That is not the question. You must listen to the question and you must answer according to the question.

If it is a path, isn't it necessarily an object to be adopted?

Student 1: Yes. That is no problem because I didn't say that all paths must be cultivated by a single person. It is not an issue. If it is a path, yes, it is necessarily to be cultivated, but it is not necessarily to be cultivated by one person.

Khen Rinpoche: Nobody is asking that question.

Student 1: There is no contradiction.

Khen Rinpoche: Nobody is asking that question. That I already know. That is why I didn't ask.

- Earlier I have said that self-cherishing is not to be discarded on the Hinayana path but bodhisattvas don't need it and they don't want it so they discard it.
 - A path is necessarily virtue, which is to be cultivated.
- As such, self-cherishing is *not* necessarily an object to be discarded.

Student 1: This whole text is telling us that the enemy is self-cherishing by listing out all these negative karmas and so forth. The arhats also won't have duplicity and all these negative karmas. So why would self-cherishing be a problem to an arhat? The enemy is not necessarily self-cherishing. It can be self-grasping. By looking at the text in a different context with a different motivation, the enemy can actually be self-grasping.

Ven Gyurme: You are basically asking how the self-cherishing in the arhat's continuum harms him?

Student 1: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: Are you suggesting that self-cherishing doesn't harm the arhats?

Student 1: Yes because all the verses are talking about karma.

Khen Rinpoche: I heard “Self-cherishing doesn’t hurt the arhat”? Did you say something like that?

Student 1: What I meant is that the whole text is talking about all these different karmas and it is saying that self-cherishing is the cause for us to create all these karmas.

But from the perspective of an arhat who does not have self-grasping but does have self-cherishing, he won’t go on to create these karmas. So it would be difficult if you want to convince an arhat using this text because they won’t even create the karma in the first place.

I think even the Buddha cannot do much in this case. The arhat won’t create these karmas because they don’t even have self-grasping. The reasoning in this text won’t work for arhats unless they were to have this thought, “I may not create these karmas but other sentient beings can create these karmas because of their self-cherishing.” Maybe that will work. So my question is how to you convince an arhat based on this text?

Khen Rinpoche: I am not quite sure what you talking about. I have no idea!

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## **ANOTHER REQUEST TO YAMANTAKA**

Verse 54

Approach, great tutelary deity Yamantaka. I beseech you at this very moment to rip to shreds this leather sack of actions and the five poisonous afflictions that mire me in the mud of worldly action.

There were a few preceding verses making requests to the deity Yamantaka to destroy our self-grasping and self-cherishing. Likewise, this verse is making another request.

Here, one is making a further request to the deity Yamantaka. Just like a very dirty place that is filled with all kinds of filthy substances, likewise, samsara is filled with the filth of karma and the afflictions. This is the creation of one’s self-cherishing that causes one to fall into the mud of samsara. One is thus making a request to the deity Yamantaka to immediately destroy our self-cherishing.

## **TARGETTING THE MODE OF APPREHENSION**

Verse 55

Although it has brought me suffering in the three wretched states of existence, not knowing enough to fear it, I rush to its cause. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

It says that all of us have already experienced the terrible sufferings of the lower realms in the past due to our self-cherishing. Although we have suffered for a long period of time in the lower realms but now we seemed to have forgotten all those sufferings. It seems we are not afraid of those sufferings, and we accumulate many causes again to return to the lower realms under the control of the power of our own self-cherishing.

By seeing how self-cherishing is the cause of our suffering, and in this case, how self-cherishing had caused us to go to the lower realms in the past and is still the cause of us accumulating the karma to be born in the lower realms again, the last two sentences come into play: “Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction.” “The destroyer, false construction” refers to the evil thought or conception that is our self-cherishing.

“Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!” As I said in the last lesson, the “enemy” refers to *both* our self-cherishing and self-grasping. We should strike at the heart of this enemy, the “heart” here meaning the mode of apprehension of our self-cherishing and self-grasping. How do we overcome our self-cherishing and self-grasping? We target the way our self-cherishing and self-grasping apprehend phenomena, i.e., we strike at their mode of apprehension.

In the Tibetan edition, many verses end in *maraya*, which means to kill or mortally strike by taking life in Sanskrit.

### **DESIRE FOR COMFORT IS GREAT, DESIRE AND GREED ARE GREAT**

#### Verse 56

Although my desire for comfort is great, I don't accumulate its causes. Although my tolerance for suffering is small, my desire and greed are great. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

What does “desire for comfort” mean? There are times when our life is running smoothly and things are going well. We don't have any problems and we feel that life is wonderful. We are not particularly aware that we need happiness and peace not just for a day but for months, years, even beyond this lifetime and for many lifetimes to come.

If we want to have a similar standard of living or whatever happiness we have now for the rest of our life and for all future lives to come, then we need to accumulate the merit that is the cause of such happiness. It is better if we were to think of the wish for ourselves to have the happiness of future lives, the happiness of liberation and the happiness of enlightenment than just to think of the happiness of this life, out of concern for ourselves.

Very often in life—whether it is our work, our job, studying the Dharma, doing our daily recitations, doing retreats and so forth—when we meet with some challenges and difficulties, we just give up or we will procrastinate, “Not now. Forget it. I'll do it

next time.” Generally, we don’t think of the happiness of future lives. We just focus primarily on this life’s happiness. We work so hard but everything we do is to achieve happiness for this life alone. We only have a short-term view in relation to everything we do, focussing only on the here and now and never really looking beyond this life.

If we investigate what is the cause of us not having a long-term view, I think it comes back to our self-cherishing attitude.

When it comes to earning money, our greed is amazing. We are so greedy. Whether it is work or studies, we always aim to be the richest or to have the highest position. Here the advice is that all these problems arise from our self-cherishing. As such, there is a need to eradicate our self-cherishing.

### **ONE’S EFFORT IS SMALL**

Verse 57

Although that which I desire is near at hand, my effort to achieve it is small. Although my projects are many, none of them are completed. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Self!

“Projects” are activities or plans. Here, the order of the text is reversed. Verse 57 should precede Verse 56.

### **RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GURU**

Verse 58

Although I have many new friendships, my modesty and friendships are of short duration. Although I freeload off of others, I eagerly pursue those who pilfer. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

One of the earlier verse<sup>1</sup> talked about new friendships, i.e., establishing relationships with friends or gurus. The point here is not to rush into things. In the case of taking on somebody as a guru, one should not rush into it right away, but one should think and examine very carefully before one decides to rely on him or her. If one does not analyse in this way and rush into the relationship, then there is a danger of giving up the guru later. As mentioned before, one decides to switch gurus and this will never stop.

In the *Lam-rim Chen-mo, The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path*, in the section on correctly relying on the virtuous friend, two examples were given when it came to the number of gurus that one should have. There was one lama by the name of Sungpuwa who had many gurus. He would regard whoever gave teachings as a guru

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 42. Lesson 14, page 2—3.

and then take those teachings. The great master Dromtonpa on the other hand had only five gurus in his life. These are two different approaches. There was a discussion between the Kadampa lamas, Geshe Potowa and Gampa Rinchen. In their discussion, Geshe Potowa was asked “Which approach is better? Is it better to be like Sungpuwa who took on many gurus or is it better to take the approach of Dromtonpa?” Geshe Potowa said, “When your mind is still untrained and you tend to see faults in others easily, then you will generate non-faith easily. When your mind is at that level, then it is better to have fewer gurus. Therefore it is better to follow the approach of Dromtonpa.”<sup>2</sup>

In the section on correctly devoting to the virtuous friend in the lam-rim, there is an extensive and detailed explanation on the eight benefits of correctly relying on the virtuous friend and the eight faults or disadvantages of relying incorrectly after one has taken on somebody as guru. The point is that if you do not know how to rely properly on your virtuous friend after you have taken him as your guru, then there is no profit for you but only great loss as a disciple. Therefore, it is extremely important to know and understand this and to find out more from the lam-rim.

There are people who go around taking on gurus. They take one person as a guru. After a while, they start to see faults and get upset and criticise the guru. They then switch gurus with the hope that the next one would be better. But the same thing happens. The same story repeats itself over and over again. All of this is the result of self-cherishing.

When one has great desire, one will find it difficult to be generous to make offerings to accumulate merit. Although we need to develop a generous heart and accumulate merit by making offerings, but when we have great desire, we don't do all of these things. In fact, we may end up hankering after the wealth of others, stealing, robbing and deceiving others. Again, these actions are the results of self-cherishing.

### **SKILLED AT FLATTERY AND HINTING**

Verse 59

Although I am skilled at flattery and asking for things indirectly, my despair is great. Although I assiduously amass things, miserliness binds me. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

Here flattery and hinting, i.e., asking for things indirectly, are mentioned. These are part of the five types of wrong livelihood that is mentioned in the lam-rim:

1. Flattery: Out of wanting to acquire some material goods, one may put on a show in front of others such as acting in a holy way and maybe flattering others.
2. Hinting: One is asking for things indirectly. Motivated by the desire to acquire an object or some material possession, one hints, “I do have this particular object but I don't have enough of it.” Saying such things is hinting with the motivation of

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<sup>2</sup> *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Tsong-ka-pa, Volume 1. Snow Lion Publications, Page 77.



getting something from the person one is talking to. However, if one doesn't have that intention but simply making a plain honest statement that is fine and is not hinting.

3. The use of force or pressuring others: Sometimes the person doesn't want to give another something but motivated by the desire to acquire that object, this persons says or does things that makes it difficult for the first person to say no.
4. Baiting: One puts out a bait, wanting something bigger in return. One gives a small thing to somebody with the hope that the recipient will in return give one something bigger or more than what one has given.
5. Hypocrisy: This refers to acting holy by putting up a front but in reality one is neither disciplined nor subdued. In order to get something in return from somebody, one puts up this false front or show.

It is said that all of these faults are motivated by our self-cherishing.

Again, due to our self-cherishing, we are stingy and miserly, unable to give to others and to make offerings. We may even end up being unable to use things for ourselves. All of these again are said to be the faults of our self-cherishing.

Going back to the question, "How does self-cherishing harm the arhats?" Actually that is the arhat's business. Our business is to see whether self-cherishing harms us in that way. We have to see, investigate and analyse for ourselves whether we are actually harmed by our own self-cherishing, based on the numerous examples given in the text. We have to think for ourselves individually whether all the numerous examples cited in the teachings about the faults of self-cherishing are indeed true or not. I guess if we really think about it, the answer is pretty obvious.

### **BEING SWOLLEN WITH PRIDE**

Verse 60

Although whatever I have done has been insignificant, I am swollen with pride. Although I have no reputation, my hunger for it is great. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

"Although whatever I have done has been insignificant, I am swollen with pride." The meaning has to do with qualities. Although one does not have any qualities and there is really nothing good about oneself, yet one has desire for many things, "I want this and I want that."

We may have done a small thing but we make a big deal out of it as if we had done a lot. For example, "I offered great service to my lama! I offered service to the Sangha community! I did so much for the Dharma centre!" We did something insignificant but we make a big deal out of it, going around saying, "I did this. I did that".

*Khen Rinpoche: It is not boasting.*

(Students' suggestions as to how to describe this attitude are inaudible).

When it comes to offering service to the guru, offering service to a Dharma centre and so forth, if the motivation is really just to do something good or to accumulate merit and purify the mind, then no matter how much one does, there is no need to even mention, “I did this. I did that.” Anyway, we do this because of our self-cherishing.

From the Dharma point of view, actually we have no accomplishments, no knowledge and no understanding. Nothing! Even from the worldly point of view, we don't have much that is significant or worthy of mention. We are like that, yet at the same time, we have very high aspirations to be famous, to be powerful, or to attain a very high status in the organisation or society. All of these are manifestations of our self-cherishing.

### **MORE ON THE GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP**

Verse 61

Although my preceptors are many, my ability to keep my vows is small.  
Although my disciples are many, I give little time to help and look after them.  
Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

Back to the issue of relying on the guru. We may have many gurus but we may not have paid attention to keeping pure the samaya between the guru and disciple. When we take someone as a guru, it is extremely important to maintain a pure bond, a pure samaya and a good relationship. Although we may have many gurus, yet do not pay attention to maintaining a pure bond, and in fact let it degenerate. Again, this is a result of self-cherishing.

Here is the advice for taking on students. Before we take on any student, we have to check and see whether it is right and beneficial to do so. After we have taken on the student or disciple, we have to make sure to help them to the end, giving them both Dharma advice and advice on how to deal with daily life.

The bond of the guru-disciple relationship is extremely important. Before taking on anybody as a guru, it is important to check carefully. Once we have taken on someone as our guru, it is important from our own side to not let our samaya and bond with our guru degenerate. Likewise, for those who have students, it is important to take care of the students both materially and spiritually.

### **MANY VOWS, MINIMAL PRACTICE**

Verse 62

Although my promises are many, my practical assistance is minimal.  
Although my fame is great, if it were examined, the gods and demons would put me to shame.  
Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

In this context, “promises” can be understood to refer to vows and commitments. As such, “my practical assistance is minimal” can be amended to “my practice is minimal.”

“Although my fame is great, if it were examined, the gods and demons would put me to shame.” This is referring to all of us. We are all guilty of this. When it comes to taking on vows, all of us have taken on the three classes of vows—tantric vows, bodhisattva vows and the different kinds of pratimoksha vows. All of us have taken these vows. These are not promises that are made lightly but are great promises. When we took on these vows, who were our witnesses? The witnesses were the gurus and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and in their presence, we voluntarily accepted the vows.

We have taken on all kinds of vows, commitments and promises. If we were to honestly examine the purity of our vows, I don’t think we will be able to point to any vow that was kept purely, not even one. Instead all we would find is this, “I’ve degenerate this vow. I have broken this commitment and that promise.” That is what we will find. We will not find any vows that were kept purely. This is what is meant by “my practice is minimal”.

“Although my fame is great”: One could be a famous teacher or one may be famous for whatever reason. If one were to honestly examine oneself, one’s behaviour, our conduct and way of thinking would embarrass even the ghosts or spirits. If that is the case, then there is no need to mention what the worldly gods will think.

Whatever has been said so far in the text is talking about us. We are all like that. All of these are the results of our self-cherishing.

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