

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 17

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Self-cherishing on the paths and grounds. Listening to *lojong* teachings. The root text: Verses 63—62. Verse 63: Scant learning, empty verbiage. Verse 64: Unreliable companions and underlings. Verse 65: Holding titles but lacking in qualities. Verse 66: One's view is lofty, one's conduct is low.

(Student 1's question not recorded).

Khen Rinpoche: There are certain instances of self-cherishing that brings us to the hells and there are also certain instances of self-cherishing that can lead us to liberation. As such, we cannot say self-cherishing is virtuous nor can we say that self-cherishing is non-virtuous.¹

SELF-CHERISHING ON THE PATHS AND GROUNDS

Student 2: How do we abandon the self-cherishing that leads to suffering? We know that on the path of the ten grounds, there is no self-cherishing because bodhisattvas have bodhicitta. This text cannot be for the bodhisattvas since they do not have the self-cherishing that leads to suffering, am I right?

Does it come through the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, constant meditation, the sevenfold instructions, or tonglen?

My question is how. First of all, I think all Buddhists, both Mahayanist and Hinayanist, should abandon the self-cherishing that leads to suffering. To me, abandon means to have the bodhicitta that diminishes self-cherishing since self-cherishing leads to suffering.

Then the question is, if it is to be abandoned, how do we do it? The bodhisattvas on the grounds already have bodhicitta. They start on this path because they have the direct perception of wisdom. I'm trying to connect the wisdom part. Does it play a role in the abandonment of self-cherishing?

And if you are not a bodhisattva, as a Buddhist, how do you abandon self-cherishing?

¹ There was a recording malfunction at the beginning of this lesson so the question that Khen Rinpoche was answering was not recorded.

It is not an affliction to be abandoned, it is not a knowledge obscuration to be abandoned but it has to be abandoned. This is my dilemma.

Khen Rinpoche: I think I have given the answer to this question before.

Of the many verses that we have read so far, they all end with:

Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction!
Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

These two lines are repeated in many of the verses. This shows that the solution to overcoming self-grasping and self-cherishing is to generate the conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta.

“Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy.” In the context here, the “enemy” means self-cherishing and self-grasping. The antidote—the slayer of this enemy—is conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta.

- How is self-cherishing destroyed? It is destroyed by bodhicitta.
- How is self-grasping destroyed? It is destroyed by the wisdom realising selflessness.

One trains in either the sevenfold cause and effect instructions or the instructions of exchanging self and others to generate bodhicitta. Comes the time when one generates the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, one enters the Mahayana path and one achieves the Mahayana small path of accumulation.

We have gone through this in class before—that there are bodhisattvas on the small path of accumulation who fall back into the Hinayana. That happens when they lose their bodhicitta, i.e., when their bodhicitta degenerates. These bodhisattvas had realised bodhicitta before their bodhicitta degenerated but still their self-cherishing manifested again. Because of the arising of self-cherishing, they fell into the Hinayana.

There is a historical account related to Shariputra. It is said that Shariputra had generated bodhicitta. One day, he met someone who asked for his right arm. Shariputra used his left hand to chop off his right arm. He then used his left hand to pick up the chopped arm and offered it to the recipient. The recipient then asked him, “How can you give me your right arm with your left hand? That is so disrespectful!” It was culturally disrespectful to offer things with the left hand. Shariputra thought, “Oh my goodness! Sentient beings are hopeless. Forget it.” So he gave up his bodhicitta and fell back into the Hinayana.

You can train your mind to generate bodhicitta either through the sevenfold cause and effect instructions or the exchanging self and others. At the end of that training, when you generate uncontrived bodhicitta, that is the fully qualified actual bodhicitta. Simultaneously, you enter the Mahayana path and achieve the Mahayana small path of accumulation. But it is still possible for your bodhicitta at that level to degenerate. From this, you can see it is very clear that even after having actualised bodhicitta while on the Mahayana small path of accumulation, one hasn’t gotten rid of one’s self-cherishing to the point where it will never arise again.

It is said in the great treatises that when one achieves the Mahayana middle path of accumulation, the bodhisattva's bodhicitta becomes very stable. His mind generation is called the mind generation like gold because gold always remains constant and does not change into something else. It is said that regardless of the conditions that this bodhisattva may encounter, his mind generation will *never* degenerate.

While it is not clear in the treatises, I think that by this time, i.e., the Mahayana middle path of accumulation, the bodhisattva would have realised emptiness. That could be the reason why his mind generation will never degenerate henceforth. There must be a reason for this and I think that reason must be that the bodhisattva would have realised emptiness by then.

It is clear that you have to say that on the great path of accumulation, one has calm-abiding observing emptiness. In order to enter the Mahayana path of preparation, one needs the special insight observing emptiness. Therefore, prior to entering the Mahayana path of preparation, prior to achieving the special insight observing emptiness, one must first have achieved calm-abiding observing emptiness.

As such, you will probably have to say that definitely one must have realised emptiness by the Mahayana middle path of accumulation. Before one can actualise the calm-abiding focussing on emptiness that occurs latest by the Mahayana great path of accumulation, first one must have realised emptiness.

As to whether one will have *necessarily* realised emptiness by the middle path of accumulation, when I think about it, I think I would have to say yes. But I'm not saying definitely this is so because it is not clearly mentioned in the treatises. This can be a subject for further discussion. The issue of whether the bodhisattva definitely would have realised emptiness by the middle path of accumulation has to be analysed further.

But it is very clear that on the small path of accumulation, there are instances of both bodhisattvas who have not realised emptiness *and* bodhisattvas who have realised emptiness already. The sharp-facultied trainees enter the Mahayana path with the realisation of emptiness whereas the dull-facultied trainees do not enter the Mahayana path with the realisation of emptiness. As such, on the small path of accumulation, there are both bodhisattvas who have realised emptiness and bodhisattvas who have yet to realise emptiness. That is quite clear. As such, I would think that from the middle path of accumulation, self-cherishing will never arise henceforth.

How do you overcome self-cherishing? Likewise, how do you overcome self-grasping? The general procedure is the same. Both self-cherishing and self-grasping have their own modes of apprehension, i.e., their own manner of apprehending their objects.

Overcoming self-grasping

In order to overcome self-grasping, the apprehension of true existence, which is its mode of apprehension, one has to generate another mind whose mode of apprehension is the direct opposite of the mode of apprehension of self-grasping.

Overcoming self-cherishing

Likewise, self-cherishing has a particular mode of apprehension. So to overcome self-cherishing, one has to generate a mind whose mode of apprehension completely opposes that of the mode of apprehension of self-cherishing.

To counteract self-cherishing, we have to generate the mind that cherishes others, i.e., its mode of apprehension is cherishing others. Through training gradually, one then comes to develop bodhicitta. When one has bodhicitta, one has the mind that can counteract self-cherishing.

Simultaneous with the generation of bodhicitta, one enters the Mahayana path and achieves the small path of accumulation. When one reaches the middle path of accumulation, I guess we can say that henceforth, from then on, self-cherishing will not arise again.

Training in the paths of the three scopes

The text that we are studying here is a text on Mahayana mind training. The subject matter is the practices of the path of a person of great capacity. It is an instruction for generating the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta.

When we talk about *lojong* or mind training, it specifically means the Mahayana mind training, which strives to develop bodhicitta. After one has developed bodhicitta, one needs to increase the bodhicitta that has been generated. The word *lojong* specifically means that.

Lojong in English is mind training, which in the general sense literally means developing the mind. There is training the mind in the path of a person of small capacity, in the path of a person of medium capacity and in the path the person of great capacity. But *lojong* mainly refers to Mahayana mind training.

Before we can even begin to engage in training our mind in the path of the person of great capacity, first we must have trained our mind in the path that is shared with the person of small capacity and the person of medium capacity. This is explained very clearly in the lam-rim literature. Only after that is one then really qualified to train in the practices of a person of great capacity.

What is the main obstacle for someone aspiring to be a person of great capacity? The biggest obstacle is self-cherishing. That is why a detailed explanation of the faults of self-cherishing is given to such a person. In such an explanation, there is no mention of anything good about self-cherishing. It points out everything that is bad about self-cherishing. That is the primary focus.

As you can see for yourself, in this text, from beginning to end, it just talks about how bad self-cherishing is. So these are the instructions for the person who is about to train his mind in the Mahayana. This person is someone who has fully completed training the mind in the paths that is shared with the person of small capacity and the person of medium capacity.

If we look at the path that is shared with the person of small capacity, there is no discussion whatsoever of how bad self-cherishing is. But there is the discussion on death and impermanence, karma and its effects. At that point in time, the whole emphasis is on reversing and overcoming one's attachment to the happiness of this life.

After one has gotten rid of one's attachment to this life's happiness, one can then start to train the mind in the path that is shared with the person of medium capacity. But if one looks at the instructions for that period of training, again, there is no discussion on the faults of self-cherishing. Instead, there is an extensive explanation of the suffering of cyclic existence and how one circles around in samsara. Then there is the presentation of the four noble truths. All these are aimed at producing the thought for liberation.

- For the person on the path that is shared with the person of small capacity, the emphasis is to overcome one's attachment to the happiness of this life.
- On the path that is shared with the person of medium capacity, the emphasis is to overcome attachment to the happiness of future lives. It is the whole explanation of how one really has to achieve liberation from samsara.

As such, there shouldn't be any confusion as to whether self-cherishing is good or bad or when it is good, when it is bad. If you understand the whole structure of the path, then it is very clear.

Khen Rinpoche: Did you understand the answer?

Student 3: I clearly understand the explanation. If you could please explain or give an example of what is virtuous self-cherishing and non-virtuous self-cherishing? I don't understand the difference between the two.

Khen Rinpoche: Somebody come up and give the examples he is asking for.

Student 4: An example of virtuous self-cherishing is the thought, "I want to attain nirvana to get out of samsara first to achieve lasting happiness for myself alone." I think that is considered virtuous self-cherishing. I think non-virtuous self-cherishing is all the ones we have in this life.

Khen Rinpoche: Is the mind seeking the happiness of future lives a virtuous mind? Is the mind seeking rebirth as a human or god virtuous? Or is it self-cherishing?

Student 4: It is self-cherishing.

Khen Rinpoche: Is it virtuous?

Student 4: It is virtuous if ...

Khen Rinpoche: No, no, no! It is either virtuous or non-virtuous. Don't explain now. I will ask you.

Student 4: Virtuous.

Khen Rinpoche: It is virtuous because ...?

Student 4: Because before you can attain nirvana or enlightenment, you need to fulfil the short-term aim, which is a higher rebirth. You have to achieve good conditions in order to practise the path. Therefore, you aim for higher rebirths.

Khen Rinpoche: There is a wish to live a long time now. Is that not self-cherishing? It is, right? Is it virtuous?

Student 4: Depends on what you want to use your long life for.

Khen Rinpoche: Therefore, extrapolating from what you have just said, it follows that the mind wishing for the happiness of a future life as a god or human being is *not* necessarily virtuous. By virtue of what you have just said, it would also depend.

Student 4: I wanted to say that but you stopped me.

Khen Rinpoche: The point is, there is no pervasion, right?

Student 4: I would have to say yes.

Khen Rinpoche: It is not certain that the mind looking for a good rebirth is necessarily virtuous.

Student 4: Yes. You can just want it for its own end, to have a god's rebirth. That's all. You don't want to use the higher rebirth for a higher purpose like nirvana.

Ven Gyurme: So you are saying that just wishing to get a good rebirth for the sake of a good rebirth is definitely not virtuous?

Student 4: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: We practise generosity or ethical discipline looking for something in our future lives. Maybe we want a good rebirth, a good body or we want possession or wealth in future lives. That is the reason why we practise ethics and generosity. The karma that is created will ripen in the form of a good rebirth and enjoyments. Is this karma necessarily virtuous or not?

Student 4: I think it is virtuous.

Khen Rinpoche: Necessarily virtuous?

Student 4: It doesn't produce suffering so it has to be virtuous.

Khen Rinpoche: If that is the case, then the mind that seeks good rebirths in future lives and the mind that seeks the happiness of future lives are necessarily virtuous, isn't it?

Student 4: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: So then there is no “It depends ...”?

Student 4: Yes, correct.

Khen Rinpoche: You don't just go correct, correct, correct like that.

Student 4: Higher rebirths do not produce suffering on their own. The karma is not non-virtuous so a higher rebirth is virtuous.

Khen Rinpoche: So, achieving nirvana is not suffering?

Student 4: At least there is no obvious suffering.

Khen Rinpoche: So you don't have obvious suffering.

The mind looking for the happiness of future lives is nothing but virtue. It is virtuous, right?

Student 4: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: The wish to live very long in this life. That is self-cherishing. Is it virtuous or not?

Khen Rinpoche: Don't say again, “It depends”!

Student 4: I supposed it is virtuous.

Khen Rinpoche: You have to think before you respond. Don't just say, “It is virtuous,” without thinking.

Isn't sponsoring pujas for the happiness of this life virtuous? Isn't reciting mantras for the happiness of this life virtuous? Don't they have to be virtuous? Are the results virtuous?

Khen Rinpoche: Say something!

Student 4: I have no choice but to say they are virtuous.

Khen Rinpoche: Is practising generosity looking for wealth and prosperity in this life virtuous?

Student 4: That sounds like the eight worldly concerns. Praying for things in this life is non-Dharma.

Khen Rinpoche: Do you have an answer? Yes or no?

So doing pujas and reciting mantras just for the happiness of this life are virtuous?

Student 4: Seems like they are not. They are the eight worldly dharmas.

Khen Rinpoche: I don't know.

Student 4: At which point does an arhat enter the Mahayana path? Is it right at the beginning at the small path of accumulation?

Khen Rinpoche: What makes you ask this question? Are you looking for something? The answer is straightforward. It is very easy. But the more important thing is: What makes you ask the question? Obviously you must have some doubt.

Student 4: He has the direct realisation of emptiness. In this case, he has generated bodhicitta to enter the Mahayana path. He can't be entering at the point of the path of seeing can he? I don't know how strong his bodhicitta is, whether it can still degenerate. If that is the case, then maybe he enters at the small path of accumulation?

Khen Rinpoche: An arhat doesn't have bodhicitta, does he?

Student 4: If he has first generated bodhicitta, at which point does he enter the Mahayana path?

Khen Rinpoche: The moment the arhat generates bodhicitta, he becomes a bodhisattva. He then enters the path of accumulation.

Student 4: The small path of accumulation?

Khen Rinpoche: Yes. There is no other point of entry.

Student 4: Does he then accelerate very quickly to the path of seeing compared to the rest because he already has the direct realisation of emptiness and moreover, has gotten rid of all his afflictive obscurations?

Ven Gyurme: Are you saying that he accumulates only the collection of merit and not the collection of wisdom?

Student 4: Is that the case?

Khen Rinpoche: OK. I think we need to read the text also but it is good to ask questions.

It is good to have such questions. When questions are raised, it is very important to pay attention to the discussion because we can really understand a lot of things just by participating in the question and answer. It is useful.

LISTENING TO LOJONG TEACHINGS

The text that we are going through is not intellectually difficult as it is meant for practical application right away. In that sense, there is really nothing much to say about it. When we listen to the teachings of Mahayana mind training, when we read them, there are times we may feel hurt and uncomfortable. That is actually a good

sign because it is a sign that something has poked at our own self-cherishing and hurt it.

If you know how to listen to these Mahayana teachings in general, especially *lojong*, you will feel hurt and uncomfortable because you are supposed to be reflecting on your own state of mind. It is not meant to be the description of what other people are doing or not doing. If we listen to the teachings, thinking that they point at somebody else, then they do not touch the heart. But if we listen and learn these things properly, it should be about looking at our own mistakes and faults. If it leaves you feeling uncomfortable at that time, then that is actually a good sign.

It is said that one can receive blessings when listening to the teachings. When we hear somebody's teaching about the faults of our own self-cherishing, we feel uncomfortable as we feel exposed. That is a sign that the blessings of the Dharma have entered our heart.

If we don't have self-cherishing, then it is a completely different thing. Then whether you feel anything or not, it is fine because if you don't have self-cherishing, there is nothing to say. But this teaching is just talking about the faults of our own self-cherishing. We only feel hurt because we have self-cherishing. If there is no self-cherishing then we will not feel offended, hurt or uncomfortable. So, when we study and listen to these mind training teachings and we don't feel anything, then there are only two possibilities—either we don't have self-cherishing or we really have no idea how to listen to and use the teachings.

Khen Rinpoche: So which one applies to you?

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### **SCANT LEARNING, EMPTY VERBIAGE**

Verse 63

Although my learning is scant, my penchant for empty verbiage is great. Although the extent of my religious instructions is slight, I pretend to understand everything. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

Our understanding of the Dharma is limited as we have not done much learning and reflection. But we pretend to be very knowledgeable. We pretend to be a meditator or great practitioner. This verse is talking about such people.

Suddenly when somebody asks us a Dharma question, because of our limited understanding, experience or knowledge, we do not have much to say. But pressed to say something, we may say, "There is no need to know so much and study so much. You just need to examine the mind as everything is in the nature of emptiness." We just leave it at that. Such things happen again and again due to our self-cherishing.

When we have extensive learning, extensive knowledge and extensive understanding, then it doesn't matter what questions people may pose to us. We will be able to answer them or at least eliminate their qualms by employing reasons and scriptural sources. We can offer a reasonable answer by employing scriptural authority, quoting citations and lines of reasoning. We can at least help the other party to gain some understanding or to eliminate his qualms.

If our understanding is limited, yet we want to talk about the Dharma to others, when they ask questions, what we can say is very limited since our understanding is limited. But due to our self-cherishing, we do not stop there. We proceed to fabricate answers, make up stories and tell all sorts of lies and half-truths in order to come out with some answers. This is the result of our self-cherishing.

We may know a few words from the sutras or a few sentences from some texts but we don't actually have any real understanding. But when we talk to people, it is as if the few sentences we know represent the entire Dharma and that is the emphasis. We will repeatedly tell people about those few sentences, talking about the same thing over and over again. We create the impression and emphasise that they are the most important parts of the Dharma and are the real thing! We try to convey to others that we really know a lot while in reality we do not really know anything. We are only pretending. Again, this is the fault of our self-cherishing.

When we are asked a question, just be honest. If we know the answer, just share what we know. But if we really don't know the answer, as we haven't reflected or studied well, then we should just say, "Sorry, I really don't know" and leave it at that. If you are a graduate of the Basic Program or you are going to graduate from the Basic Program, if somebody asks you a question and you don't know, then just say "I don't know," and don't pretend to know.

### **UNRELIABLE COMPANIONS AND UNDERLINGS**

Verse 64

Although my companions and underlings are numerous, not one is dependable. Although I have many masters, not one is a reliable protector. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

### **HOLDING TITLES BUT LACKING IN QUALITIES**

Verse 65

Although I have high status, my merit is less than an evil spirit's. Although I am a great religious teacher, my passions are grosser than a demon's. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy, Ego!

"My merit" can also be understood to refer to one's qualities while "passions" refer to one's attachment and anger.

If one has a high status or position with the qualities that can make one beneficial to others and one has the intention to benefit others, then that is very useful. Otherwise, just having power or authority and being in a high position alone don't necessarily bring benefit to others. There are different qualities: external qualities and internal qualities. Internal qualities are mental qualities that are positive aspects of the mind.

It doesn't help just having a title such as being a lama, a Geshe or Dharma teacher. One must have the requisite qualities and engage in appropriate conduct and behaviour. However, if one's conduct is motivated excessively by anger or attachment or one has not worked with one's anger or attachment to the point where the mind is fairly stable, then just having a title alone doesn't help. In fact, the teachings say that there are people like that—who have titles but have no quality and whose behaviour and actions are worse than the maras, spirits or ghosts. Such people may also have a lot of jealousy and are competitive in a negative way. All of these again are said to be the manifestation or the result of self-cherishing.

### **ONE'S VIEW IS LOFTY, ONE'S CONDUCT IS LOW**

Verse 66

Although my view is lofty, my behavior is worse than a dog's.  
Although my good qualities are many, their basis is carried off by  
the wind. Roar and thunder on the head of the destroyer, false  
construction! Mortally strike at the heart of the butcher, the enemy,  
Ego!

“Although my view is lofty” refers to the fact that one may have some understanding of the view of reality, emptiness. One's understanding may be small but one behaves as if one has a very correct, profound and high understanding of emptiness. At the same time, one's actual behaviour or conduct may actually be “worse than a dog's.”

In reality, the person who has the correct and profound understanding of emptiness is someone who guards his vows and samaya carefully. He will never deprecate karma and its effects. But for those with lofty views, they talk about emptiness, they claim to think about emptiness, yet at the same time, they do not pay any attention to guarding their vows and samaya. In fact, they may even despise, deprecate or look down on karma and its effects. This again is the result of self-cherishing.

Whether one's view of emptiness is lofty or not, the point is that one has to abide by the ethics that one has adopted. For instance, there may be ordained people who talk about emptiness but are not careful about their ethical conduct.

An ordained person is supposed to be celibate and not partake of alcohol. In the case of my village or home town, I have seen with my own eyes ordained monks drinking so much that they get drunk and vomit. I have seen them drinking during pujas. Then half-way through the puja, they have to go out and vomit. I have seen this with my own eyes. This is what is called the conduct or behaviour that is “worse than a dog's.”

The practice of ethics is said to be the foundation of all qualities. As such, it is important to practise ethical discipline. There is a verse by the fifth Dalai Lama that

says, “Although tantra is said to be very secret and profound, first one must have trained the mind in the shared paths before attempting the practice of tantra. Otherwise, it will be like riding an untamed elephant and in the end, you will destroy yourself.”

Do you understand the meaning of that verse, what it is trying to say and what it implies?

What it is saying is that one shouldn't act in any way one pleases just because one says one is practising tantra. The practice of the foundation, ethical discipline, is important.

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