

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 21

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Generating bodhicitta—the more powerful method? Perfect virtue. The root text: Verses 92—103. Verse 92: Request to Yamanataka. Verse 93: Practice of tonglen. Verse 94: Identifying the roots of evil. Verse 95: Only one thing to blame. Verse 96: Taking on the negativities & afflictions of others. Verse 97: Giving one's roots of virtue to others. Verse 98: Mutual support. Verse 99: Going to the lower realms with enthusiasm. Verses 100 & 102: May peace flourish unharmed. Verse 103: Practising ultimate bodhicitta.

GENERATING BODHICITTA—THE MORE POWERFUL METHOD?

Question: This text is talking about all the faults of self-cherishing. I was thinking about the two methods of achieving bodhicitta, the sevenfold cause and effect and exchanging self and others. It is generally said that exchanging self and others is the more profound practice and is meant for sharper-facultied students whereas the other method is for less sharp practitioners.

To me, exchanging self and others seems to be based on thinking about oneself wanting to be happy. One is not happy because of one's self-cherishing. So it entails the reflection on thinking of the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others. But to me, at the end of the day, we are really thinking of our own happiness, whereas the sevenfold cause and effect that entails thinking of the kindness of mother sentient beings ...

Khen Rinpoche: What did you say just before that?

Student 1: Exchanging self and others?

Khen Rinpoche: Yes. Say that again.

Ven Gyurme: Khen Rinpoche is referring to the last part of what you said—despite thinking about the disadvantages and advantages, at the end of the day, we are still thinking about oneself.

Student 1: Yes, that is my personal feeling. I feel it is still ego-centric. I can say, "I'm going to practise for the benefit of all living beings" but at the end of the day, I'm thinking of my happiness. Whereas the other method—where we talk about

remembering that all sentient beings have been my mothers and have been kind to me in countless lifetimes—that to me seems like a much more powerful basis for generating bodhicitta. Because when we actually think about the kindness of others, and thinking of them as having been our mothers, without even being Buddhists, even as a decent human being, we should think about repaying the kindness of our parents. I think that goes beyond any sense of obligation or anything like that.

I just feel that the foundation for thinking of the kindness of others is a stronger basis for developing bodhicitta whereas the other method to me still seems a bit selfish. I wanted to clarify with Khen Rinpoche. Maybe something has gone wrong in my reasoning.

Khen Rinpoche: Basically the conclusion of your question is that the seven-point mind training is better than exchanging self and others.

Student 1: To me, I think the basis of that practice is more powerful. In essence, to me it may be better, but traditionally we have always been told that exchanging self and others is a more powerful method.

Khen Rinpoche: The short answer is this. If the seven-point mind training suits you better, starting with recognising that all sentient beings have been your mothers, then you proceed with that. If meditating on exchanging self and others will cause your self-cherishing to increase, then don't do it.

It all depends on where we are individually and what level of practice we are at. Whatever practice we do have to accord with our capacity. For some people, the meditation on impermanence is stronger than the meditation on emptiness, because their meditation on impermanence helps them to reduce their attachment. Essentially, whatever practice we do, we have to do the one that is appropriate for our own level of mind. It also depends on where we are at. It is a very personal thing.

For example, as said in the teachings, in order to help a person to recover from his sickness, we cannot give that person just any medicine. Even if that medicine is said to be the best, the most famous or the most powerful, it doesn't mean that that medicine is necessarily effective for every individual. In order to cure a person of his sickness, appropriate medicine has to be given. It is the same thing here with practice. It depends on where we are in our practice and it also depends on our level of mind.

One of the verses mentions how due to our self-cherishing, we run after the high practices that are way beyond our ability. For example, we always talk about the greatness of the Mahayana teachings, how wonderful training the mind in bodhicitta is, and how wonderful love and compassion are. But that is from the perspective of the Mahayana and for a person who is ready for such practice. In general, it is true.

But there is no way to even start to train the mind in the Mahayana without having laid the proper foundations. Without having trained and actualised the path of a person of small capacity, one has no basis whatsoever to even begin to train in the Mahayana.

If one starts to train in the Mahayana without such a basis, although one may say the Mahayana in general is the best and most wonderful thing, until one has laid down the proper foundations, it will not be the best thing for oneself at that point in time.

It is called the sevenfold cause and effect instructions because there are seven elements that make up the instructions starting from recognising all sentient beings as having been our mothers and remembering their kindness, then developing the wish to repay their kindness, developing affectionate love, compassion and so forth. One has to train the mind gradually in these stages.

In the practice of exchanging self and others, the very first step is equalising self and others. In order to develop a deep and profound understanding of this practice of equalising self and others, one would probably need to think about and reflect on emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality.

When those of sharp faculties train their mind to develop bodhicitta through exchanging self and others, because they are sharp-facultied trainees, they have a lot of knowledge and understanding. Naturally they will understand that no phenomena exist inherently. They also understand that samsara has no beginning because the mind has no beginning. Since the mind has no beginning, definitely it is the case that all sentient beings have been one's mothers. All these understandings come naturally. For the sharp-facultied trainee who is training in exchanging self and others, the understanding and realisation that all sentient beings have been their mothers, remembering their kindness, developing the wish to repay their kindness and generating the affectionate love that considers all sentient beings as very precious—because of their reflections, all these realisations will come naturally.

I have mentioned recently these sharp-facultied trainees have an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality. That understanding affects them in a very positive way in their practice of equalising self and others. Because of their understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, emptiness, they come to understand the clear light nature of the mind, buddhanature. They also understand how the defilements are adventitious. That forms the basis for them to generate very strong compassion for sentient beings.

For those who have an understanding of emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, they realise that the minds of all sentient beings, including their own mind, are actually pure by nature and has never been afflicted by the delusions. The delusions are there but they are adventitious. These adventitious defilements can be removed but because they are still there, others and one have been suffering since beginningless lifetimes without reason.

So when they contemplate how others are in this position due to this small little mistake, the love and compassion they develop is very strong. Probably the strength of that love and compassion is not induced by just the reflection on how sentient beings have been their mothers, remembering their kindness and wanting to repay their kindness.

Those who have realised emptiness see that all the sufferings and all the problems arise from ignorance, the belief in something that has never existed. The whole problem just comes from this one mistake in the mind, this erroneous conception, this fundamental misapprehension of reality. That is why I think that when those individuals who have this understanding of emptiness put their mind to developing compassion, the compassion that they develop is very strong.

These individuals who have the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, emptiness, when they focus their mind on the suffering of all sentient beings, not only do they see the suffering, they also see that all the suffering that everyone has been experiencing since beginningless time has no basis whatsoever; that just due to this small fundamental mistake, ignorance, others and one have been suffering since beginningless time. This induces a very strong compassion in their minds when they are training their minds in compassion.

With that very strong compassion, this induces the wholehearted resolve, “I must do something to help others.” That wholehearted resolve then induces them to develop bodhicitta. They then conclude, “I must achieve full enlightenment to help others.”

So if we were to compare the strength of the compassion that is induced through training the mind in the first four steps of the sevenfold cause and effect instructions versus the compassion that arises from training the mind in exchanging self and others, I think we will be able to see which one is stronger.

The first four steps of the sevenfold cause and effect instructions are:

1. recognising all sentient beings as one’s mother
2. remembering their kindness
3. generating the wish to repay their kindness
4. generating the love that sees all sentient beings to be very precious and pleasant

Prior to training the mind in the sevenfold cause and effect instructions, one must meditate on equanimity. In that context, it is to remove any bias, feeling close to some and distant from others. That is necessary.

PERFECT VIRTUE

Question: In the last class, Khen Rinpoche differentiated between a perfect virtue that involves renunciation and a non-perfect virtue that does not have renunciation. What is the difference between a non-virtue and a virtue without renunciation and their impact on karma?

Answer: In general, what is virtue and what is non-virtue?

- Virtue is that which gives rise to a pleasant result.
- Non-virtue is that which gives rise to an unpleasant result.

We could engage in different kinds of virtue such as the practices of giving and so forth in order to achieve a good rebirth in the future as a human or a celestial being. Those practices are virtue. It is not non-virtue but the question is, is this particular virtue a perfect virtue? What makes a virtue a perfect virtue?

A perfect virtue is a cause for liberation from cyclic existence. In order for it to be a cause for liberation from cyclic existence, that cause must be conjoined with the determination to be free or renunciation. This is what I think.

In the prayers that we recite before class begins, the verse that starts with, “Do not commit any non-virtuous actions,” is essentially a presentation on virtue. Not committing non-virtuous actions is the practice of virtue. I guess you can relate that to the practice of a person of small capacity, i.e., not to engage in negative actions, to do only good things.

“Perform only perfect virtuous actions.” This line is saying that it is not sufficient just to engage in virtue as implied by the first line. One must engage in perfect virtue. Without engaging in perfect virtue, one will not be able to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. So virtue alone is not sufficient to be the cause for liberation from cyclic existence. It has to be perfect virtue, i.e., a virtue that is conjoined with the determination to be free from cyclic existence. As such, I think the second line could indicate the practice of a person of medium capacity.

The third line of that verse is “Subdue your mind thoroughly,” which I think perhaps may indicate the practice of the person of great capacity. In order to achieve full enlightenment, one must subdue one’s mind completely. Perhaps this can mean that one must vanquish and overcome one’s self-cherishing.

Just to achieve mere liberation is not sufficient. In order to accomplish the perfect fulfilment of one’s goal and in particular to accomplish the perfect fulfilment of the goal of others, one must achieve omniscience, full enlightenment. In order to do that, one must subdue one’s mind thoroughly in that one must first overcome one’s self-cherishing.

We can also understand the third line of the verse to mean overcoming the two obscurations, i.e., not just the afflictive obscurations but the knowledge obscurations as well.

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### **REQUEST TO YAMANTAKA**

Verse 92

I pray you, kill the enemy with your fierce wrath! I pray you,  
subdue my evil thinking with your great wisdom!<sup>1</sup> I pray you,  
protect me from my evil actions with your great compassion! I  
pray you, destroy this Ego once and for all!

This is a verse of request to Yamantaka to destroy without any hesitation our self-cherishing and self-grasping.

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<sup>1</sup> “I pray you, subdue my evil thinking with your great wisdom” does not appear in Khen Rinpoche’s Tibetan text.

**PRACTICE OF TONGLEN**

Verse 93

However much suffering those in cyclic existence may endure, I pray you, heap it surely upon ego-clinging! However many of the five poisonous afflictions anyone may experience, I pray you, heap them surely upon this ego-clinging, which richly deserves them!

This verse shows the practice of taking on the suffering of others. One is making a request to the deity Yamantaka to bring on all the sufferings of all sentient beings and direct them at our “ego-clinging,” i.e., self-grasping.

As I have said before, before one can do any practice of *tonglen*—taking on the suffering of others and giving our happiness to them—one must have reflected well on the faults of self-cherishing. Until we have developed a firm heartfelt conviction from the depths of our hearts that our self-cherishing is our real enemy and is the cause of all our problems and sufferings of this life and since our beginningless lifetimes, only then does one do the practice of *tonglen*. Otherwise, it is not going to work. So we need to have the realisation of how terrible our self-cherishing is, how it is our real enemy and how it has been harming us since beginningless time. It is only with that heartfelt realisation that one proceeds with the practice of taking on the suffering and causes of suffering of sentient beings. We take on their suffering in the form of weapons, poisons and so forth and heap it onto our self-cherishing.

A person generates the realisation of the faults of self-cherishing by having thought about them from every angle. Then on this basis, this person does the practice of *tonglen*, taking on the suffering of others. When they meet with problems in life or they fall sick, instead of suffering, they feel very happy because they think, “My wish has come true! My prayers have come true!” They don’t feel depressed or upset. In fact, they feel even happier with a ‘bring it on’ attitude.

When such people do the visualisation of taking on the suffering of others, it is not just talk. They really mean it and wish for this from the depths of their heart. Because they want it so much, when they meet with obstacles, they feel happy as this is what they want.

Of course we are not like that at all. Even when we are asked to think about or meditate on *tonglen*, we are already afraid, thinking “If I were to meditate on *tonglen*, what will happen to me? This bad thing will happen to me!” Without even starting the practice, we already have all these worries and fears.

While this is really one of the best methods for training the mind to overcome self-cherishing, whether such a practitioner can actually take on the suffering of others is another question. If you think about it, it is quite difficult to prove that a sincere practice of taking on the suffering of others actually results in one experiencing those sufferings in reality. What do you think?

Do you think a person who is able to do the practice of taking on the suffering of others sincerely is actually able to take on those sufferings? Is it possible for him to

free someone from cancer or free someone from spirit harms? Yes or no?

Anyway, this visualisation of taking on the suffering of others and heaping it on the self-cherishing is a method for reducing the strength of our self-cherishing to the point of eventually overcoming it.

The practice of taking on the suffering of others is a method to increase our compassion. For the person who has trained the mind in developing bodhicitta and has developed some compassion would actually mean it. It is not just talk. He really wants to free sentient beings from their suffering. Because that is his goal and is what is really driving him, he means it when he does the practice of taking on the sufferings of others in this visualisation. He has no qualms about taking on the suffering of others as this is what he is looking for.

“However many of the five poisonous afflictions anyone may experience, I pray you, heap them surely upon this ego-clinging, which richly deserves them!” The visualisation is the same. Earlier on, there was a description of taking on the sufferings of all sentient beings. Now we are taking on the afflictions of all sentient beings that are the causes of their suffering. One is taking on their ignorance, anger, attachment, jealousy, pride and all their karma, throwing them onto our self-grasping.

### **IDENTIFYING THE ROOTS OF EVIL**

Verse 94

Although through reasoning I have identified without a doubt all the roots of evil, if you judge that I am still abetting them, I pray you to destroy the holder himself!

“The roots of evil” refer to the roots of our faults.

This verse is saying: “Even though I recognise and acknowledge the faults of self-cherishing, I still follow my old ways and still give in to them. So please destroy me.” How should we understand this verse? “I pray you to destroy the holder himself.” Is it all right for us to destroy ourselves? What do you think? I am not exactly very clear about the last sentence. Maybe you can think about it. What does it mean when it says, “Please destroy me”? Here “the holder” means the person who has self-grasping and self-cherishing. What do you think is the meaning of that request?

It is clear in the teachings in Aryadeva’s *Four Hundreds Stanzas* that says, “One should not put the blame on sentient beings. Rather, one should put the blame on the afflictions.” We should view the afflictions as the enemy but with regard to sentient beings, we must always view them with compassion. So we shouldn’t be destroying anyone including ourselves.

### **ONLY ONE THING TO BLAME**

Verse 95

Now, drive all blame onto one thing! I shall cultivate gratitude toward all beings, take into my mind what others abhor, and turn

over the roots of my virtue to all beings.

“Drive all the blame onto one thing” is like a summary. Whatever problems or suffering we experience, who should we attribute the blame to? If we want to find someone to blame for all our problems, there is only “one thing” to blame, that is, our self-cherishing and nothing else.

“I shall cultivate gratitude toward all beings.” Always meditate on the great kindness of all sentient beings. The teachings are telling us that every single happiness that we experience arises in dependence on sentient beings. In that sense, all sentient beings are kind so we should meditate on their great kindness.

When we meet with problems, difficulties and suffering, we always blame someone else other than ourselves. All of us are like that. When anything goes wrong, it is always someone else who is at fault or the external situation that is the cause. This is what we believe.

The teachings here are telling us to reconsider that carefully. The teachings are telling us, “Don’t do that. The fault is not outside. The fault is inside. If we want to blame something, then there is only one thing to blame—our self-cherishing!”

For someone who has reflected on the faults of self-cherishing from many different angles and who has reflected on the advantages of cherishing others from many different angles, that person would be able to take on what others do not desire, i.e., to take on all the problems, suffering and the causes of suffering of others on to himself. That person will always be dedicating his roots of virtue for the happiness of others.

### **TAKING ON THE NEGATIVITIES & AFFLICTIONS OF OTHERS**

Verse 96

Just as the pattern of colors in a peacock’s feather is due to poison,  
may the afflictions be transformed into the aids to enlightenment  
by my taking on the physical, verbal, and mental deeds of other  
living beings, past, present, and future.

The verse here is talking about taking on all the physical, verbal and mental karma of sentient beings together with their afflictions on to oneself. The colours of the feathers of the peacock become more vibrant from ingesting poison. Likewise, here one makes prayers that through the practice of taking on the physical, verbal and mental karma, and the afflictions of all sentient beings of the past, present and future, may these not be obstacles for oneself but rather only be causes for one to achieve enlightenment quickly.

Here, one is making a prayer generating the aspiration to be able to take on the negativities and afflictions of sentient beings. May that become a cause for one to quickly achieve full enlightenment.



**GIVING ONE'S ROOTS OF VIRTUE TO OTHERS**

Verse 97

I give the roots of my virtue to living beings so they may be cured, as a poisoned crow is healed by medicine. I dedicate my life to the liberation of all beings so they may quickly achieve the buddhahood of the Sugata!

This is a way of making the wish, “May those sentient beings whose roots of virtue are cut off and whose merit have been depleted, may their merit be increased because of the dedication of my merit to them.” The analogy is of a crow that has ingested poison and is on the verge of dying. We save it from death by giving it medicine and helping it recover slowly.

Here, one makes the prayer that through the dedication of one's merit to all sentient beings, as a result of one's merit, may they quickly generate the conventional and ultimate bodhicitta and through that, may they achieve enlightenment quickly.

**MUTUAL SUPPORT**

Verse 98

Until I and those who have been my parents have attained enlightenment in the Highest Realm, may we support each other with a single thought, even when wandering about in the six states of existence owing to our actions.

Here we are making a prayer that through the practice, may all father and mother sentient beings and one achieve enlightenment together, aiming for Akanishta. Until enlightenment is achieved in Akanishta, all sentient beings and we have to take numerous rebirths in cyclic existence. As such, one makes the prayer in all those rebirths, “May others and one be free of attachment and hatred. May others and one support one another and be close to one another. May others and one become the mutual support for each other to quickly achieve bodhicitta.”

**GOING TO THE LOWER REALMS WITH ENTHUSIASM**

Verse 99

When I enter the three wretched states of existence for the sake of even one living being, may I save him or her from the suffering of that wretched destiny without compromising a great being's way of life.

Here, one is making a prayer that while one is on the path to enlightenment practising the bodhisattvas' deeds, even when there is a need to enter the lower realms to benefit just one sentient being, may one do so enthusiastically, willingly and happily, just as one would readily go for a party or a picnic. This prayer says that when one is in the lower realms benefitting sentient beings, may that situation never cause one's bodhicitta to degenerate. May one lead sentient beings out of the lower realms.

Individuals who have very strong compassion actually make such prayers. They mean it and would happily go to the lower realms if it were beneficial. They will do so to save even just one being. Having said this, if one really has this kind of aspiration, does one need to be fearful of the actual sufferings of the lower realms, i.e., fearing to actually experience them? Will they actually happen to one? The commentary here says, “Don’t be afraid!”

If motivated by very strong compassion, one makes strong prayers and aspire to go to the lowest of the hells, the Avici hells, to benefit sentient beings because one really means it, do you think one’s prayers will be actualised?

The answer to this question is this: Instead of going to the hells, one will actually end up in the pure land.

Did you understand the answer?

*Khen Rinpoche: If you understand, then that is good. If you don’t understand, ask questions.*

#### **MAY PEACE FLOURISH UNHARMED**

Verse 100

At that very instant, the guards of hell will may realize that I am a guru, and their weapons will turn into a rain of flowers. May peace flourish unharmed!

Do you need an explanation of that verse? If not, I will move on.

Verse 101

Even those in wretched states of existence shall obtain superknowledge and mantras, assume the bodies of gods and men, and generate bodhicitta. In return for my kindness, may they repay me with Dharma practice! Taking me as their guru, may they properly attend me!

“Superknowledge and mantras” refer to clairvoyance and dharanis.

Verse 102

Then, may all the beings in higher realms also deeply meditate on selflessness, just as I do, cultivating the non-conceptual meditative absorption on the identity of existence and peace. May they recognize this identity!

“The identity of existence and peace” is the aspects of samsara and nirvana.

#### **PRACTISING ULTIMATE BODHICITTA**

Verse 103

Having done so I will crush the enemy. Having done so I will crush

conceptual construction. After cultivating selflessness through non-conceptual wisdom, how can I not obtain the causes and effects of the form body?

All the verses up to Verse 102 are an explanation of the practice of cultivating bodhicitta through overcoming self-cherishing by means of the method of exchanging self and others that is done on the basis of realising the faults of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others.

From this verse onwards is the explanation of the practice of ultimate bodhicitta. It is not possible to achieve enlightenment through cultivating conventional bodhicitta alone. One must also cultivate ultimate bodhicitta. In fact, one must practise the combination of these two in order to achieve enlightenment.

We will finish the section of cultivating the ultimate bodhicitta next week.

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Question: The clear nature of our mind is luminous and aware. What is the meaning of luminous?

Answer: The mind is defined as that which is clear (or luminous) and knowing (aware). Perhaps we can think of the mind's clarity or luminosity in terms of the clear light nature of the mind in that the afflictions have never abided in the nature of mind. It is easier when we can think of an example or an analogy. Maybe water is a good example. The nature of water is that it is clear. If we think about the clear light nature of the mind from the perspective of tantra, the afflictions have never abided in the nature of this extremely subtle mind.

This extremely subtle mind is covered by a coarser level of consciousness. When the coarser levels of the mind dissolve, they dissolve into the extremely subtle mind. When one arises from the extremely subtle mind, then there is the mind of black near-attainment of the reverse order followed by the mind of red increase of the reverse order. This is then followed by the mind of white appearance of the reverse order. Basically, everything goes back to the clear light and when one arises from the clear light, then the coarser levels of consciousness come into being starting with the mind of black near-attainment, the mind of red increase and then the mind of white appearance and so forth. The mind becomes increasingly coarser.

The extremely subtle mind has the power to cognise any object including the emptiness of inherent existence. According to the explanation in tantra, it is through cognising emptiness with this extremely subtle mind that one achieves enlightenment. Perhaps it is easier to understand the clear light nature of the mind if we were to relate it to the extremely subtle mind according to the explanation of tantra.

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## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF EXAMINATION**

*Khen Rinpoche: There will be an examination for this module but I don't know when the examination will be as of now. I am thinking of how to make it short and sweet. It will not be difficult. Maybe something that you can complete in half an hour.*

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng & Aki Yeo; edited by Cecilia Tsong