

Transcript of the oral commentary by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on Dharmarakshita's *Wheel-Weapon Mind Training*

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Lesson 23

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The root text: Verses 106—117. Verse 106: All phenomena are mere appearances. Verse 107: Embracing virtue and avoiding sin. Verse 108: Forsaking evil actions. Verse 109: Ignorance and the like are without substance. Verse 110: The effect of the unanalysed aggregate. Verse 111: Analysing causes and effects. Verse 112—114: Appearance and emptiness are mutually complementary. Verse 115: The state of meditative equipoise. Verse 116: Becoming a great being. Verse 117: Realising the two aims.

ALL PHENOMENA ARE MERE APPEARANCES

Verse 106

This butcher, the enemy Ego, is just the same. It seems as if it really exists, but it has never really existed. It seems as if it is really true, but it has never been really true anywhere. It seems as if it is vividly appearing, but it is beyond the realm of affirmation or denial.

“This butcher, the enemy Ego, is just the same. It seems as if it really exists, but it has never really existed.” If we stand in front of a mirror, we will be reflected in the mirror. It looks as if we exist within the mirror itself. However, it is just a reflection and we are not inside the mirror.

Likewise, let's say you climb up a mountain. When you reach a certain height where you are above the clouds, when you look down, you will see that the whole space below you is covered with clouds. It appears as if the clouds will be there forever. Although it seems that way, that the clouds will remain unchanged forever, in reality, change is happening in each and every single moment because there is air movement, the wind and so forth. All composite phenomena undergo momentary change although they appear to be unchanging, stable and always there.

These are the analogies. The point is that in the same way self-cherishing and self-grasping also do not exist truly. They exist because of this mistake in our mind. By depending on these analogies, we come to understand that all phenomena, including our self-cherishing and self-grasping, are just mere appearances. They do not exist in and of themselves.

“It seems as if it is really true, but it has never been really true anywhere. It seems as if it is vividly appearing.” All phenomena appear to our mind to be truly existent although in reality, they do not exist truly. They do not exist inherently. Nevertheless, when anything that exists appears to our mind, it appears to have this concrete existence. It appears to exist truly. In reality, inherent existence has never existed. There is never been a phenomenon such as inherent existence.

Whether it is our self-cherishing or self-grasping together with the person or the ‘I’ that is observed by our self-grasping, when we bring these different objects to the attention of our mind, they all appear to be inherently existent and we believe that they are inherently existent. But their appearing to us to be inherently existent doesn’t mean that they *are* inherently existent. The appearance of phenomena to our mind to be inherently existent comes not from the side of the object but rather it is due to our wrong mental projection.

“...but it is beyond the realm of affirmation or denial.” The phenomenon that is designated, i.e., the thing that is designated as a phenomenon, does not exist truly.

- Our self-grasping,
 - together with the self-cherishing induced by that self-grasping,
 - together with the karma that we have accumulated motivated by these attitudes,
 - together with the results of that karma, which is suffering,
- have never existed inherently, have never existed truly. They do not exist in and of themselves. They are all mere appearances of the mind.

Up to this point in the text, starting from the section on ultimate bodhicitta (from Verse 103 onwards), many examples and reasons are given to delineate the view of emptiness.

There are different examples and analogies that we can think of in order to understand how things do not exist truly.

For example, take our dream experience. When we are dreaming, we see and experience many things in our dream. Nevertheless, these are just mere appearances to our dream consciousness.

Likewise, when we see the illusion that is created by a magician or illusionist. He is able to conjure up the appearance of an elephant. Because we are not aware that it is just an illusion, we think that it is a real elephant but in reality, there is no elephant. It is just an illusion that looks exactly like an elephant. If we were to look for the elephant, there is no elephant out there. There isn’t any functioning elephant. It is just an appearance to the mind that has been affected by the illusion.

In a dream, we may see different things such as an elephant or a horse. There is this appearance of a real horse or a real elephant but they are not a real elephant or a real horse. They do not function as such so they do not qualify as an elephant or horse. But there are still these appearances to that particular dreaming consciousness.

Likewise, during a magic show, when we see the illusion created by the illusionist and there is the appearance of an elephant or horse, those are not real elephants or

horses as they are not functional elephants or horses. They are just appearances to the mind that is affected by the illusions.

Khen Rinpoche: You must understand the example. Otherwise you will have problems with its meaning later.

You see things in your dreams such as an elephant. That elephant is a mere appearance to the dreaming consciousness so it is a dream elephant. What is a dream elephant? It is a mere appearance to the dreaming consciousness.

Likewise, everything that exists—others and oneself, samsara and nirvana—exists in mere name and is merely imputed by thought. All phenomena are mere appearances and are merely designated in dependence upon their bases of designation.

The phenomenon in question, whatever it may be, does not exist from the side of its basis of designation. It doesn't exist *in* the basis of designation and it doesn't exist *on* the basis of designation. There is nothing from the side of the basis of designation that is the phenomenon.

What the teachings are saying is that all phenomena have never existed and do not exist from the side of their bases of designation. There is nothing from the side of the basis of designation that is the object. Rather, phenomena exist as mere appearances that are merely imputed by thought and exist in mere name.

Why do we say that a particular phenomenon, the one we choose to investigate, doesn't exist from the side of its basis of designation? Because if a phenomenon exists from its own side, this means that the phenomenon in question exists within the basis of designation. Then, from the side of the basis of designation, we should be able to find the phenomenon if we were to look for it there.

But when we analyse and investigate the basis of designation closely, we cannot find the phenomenon in question. That is the funny thing. Since it cannot be found, this is why it is said that the phenomenon does not exist from the side of its basis of designation. This is the ultimate nature of all phenomena—how they have always been. We term this, 'the mode of abiding of phenomena'. This is the real nature of phenomena—nothing exists from the side of their bases of designation. Because if they did exist from the side of their bases of designation, then they should be findable. But as they cannot be found, therefore, they do not exist from their own side.

This question then arises: Although this is the nature of phenomena, why do we not realise this? Why does this ultimate nature of phenomena not appear to us in that way? Why is it that we see things to be truly existent?

That mistake comes from our side, because our mind is polluted by stains, the predispositions of ignorance. It is like the way we see all kinds of strange things that are not true in our dream consciousness.

Likewise, due to this mistake in our mind, particularly the pollution of ignorance, everything appears to us to be truly existent while it is not so. Basically the mistake

comes from our own mind because our mind is polluted by the predispositions or latencies of ignorance. The fault of these mistaken appearances of true existence is due to these predispositions of ignorance.

To the mind that is polluted by the predispositions of ignorance, there is the appearance of true existence. Whether we call this factor of appearance the object of negation or not, it is the object of negation. The object of negation is the object that we have to realise does not exist. This is what we need to target at.

The few examples given in the text will help us to understand how phenomena are not truly existent.

EMBRACING VIRTUE AND AVOIDING SIN

Verse 107

And as for the wheel of actions, it is just the same; though it lacks an inherent nature, yet it appears, like the reflection of the moon in water. Actions and their consequences are a variegated multitude of falsehoods. Even though they are just appearances, I urge you to embrace virtue and avoid sin.

“I urge you to embrace virtue and avoid sin” means that we are urged to adopt virtue and to abandon negativity.

The Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS) says that although all phenomena are not truly existent, nevertheless, the presentation of cause and effect is feasible conventionally. Conventionally, there is an agent, an action and the object.

For example, when there is the coming together of a body of water and moonlight, there is the appearance of the moon on the surface of that body of water. So as long as there is moonlight, i.e., there is a moon shining up in the sky, and as long as there is a body of water, when these two factors come together, there will be a reflection of the moon on the surface of that body of water. We cannot stop that reflection from appearing.

Similarly, when we engage in virtue, we will experience happiness, and when we engage in non-virtue, we will experience suffering. Although nothing exists truly—everything that exists is empty of existing inherently—nevertheless, it is impossible for suffering to arise from virtue and happiness to arise from non-virtue.

FORSAKING EVIL ACTIONS

Verse 108

When in a dream a peat fire blazes, we are terrified by the heat, although it is without substance. In the same way, although the hell realms and such are without substance, we fear the smelter’s fire and other tortures. As that is so, we should forsake evil actions.

It is possible to dream that you are caught in the middle of a mountain fire when suddenly everything is on fire. When that happens in your dream, you will be afraid and experience fear in that dream. You may even sweat or scream in the dream although it is just a dream. If you happen to sleep with someone and you start screaming in your dream, the person beside will see you screaming but he or she is not able to see the fire. Although it is just a fire in a dream and there is no real fire, nevertheless, you experience fear and physical and mental suffering.

Likewise, in the hell realms, the hell fires, the hell guardians and all the terrifying weapons that hell beings see exist but they do not exist inherently. Nevertheless, they bring about fear, suffering and great pain. All these are mere appearances and projections of a non-virtuous mind.

The point here is not to misunderstand that mere appearances mean that phenomena are non-functional. One should not look down on mere appearances. A mere appearance does not mean a phenomenon doesn't function as it can still give rise to a result. Therefore, the point is not to disregard karma and its effects. Although everything that exists exists as mere appearances, nevertheless it functions. Virtue leads to happiness and non-virtue leads to suffering.

IGNORANCE AND THE LIKE ARE WITHOUT SUBSTANCE

Verse 109

In a feverish delirium we may feel as if we are wandering around suffocating in a deep cave, even though there is no darkness at all. In the same way, even though ignorance and the like are without substance, we should get rid of our delusions through the three wisdoms.

“Ignorance and the like are without substance” means that ignorance and the like do not exist inherently.

It is said here that sometimes, when people have heat disorders of the body due to a very high fever, they may have the appearance of their environment being enveloped in darkness. It is like seeing dark clouds or a fog although in reality, they are not there.

Similarly, due to ignorance, everything appears to us to be truly existent while they are not truly existent. Although everything that exists are mere appearances, nevertheless, mere appearances do function conventionally, giving rise to their respective results.

The three wisdoms

In order to understand how all phenomena are mere appearances, we have to cultivate “the three wisdoms”:

1. the wisdom arisen from hearing
2. the wisdom arisen from reflection
3. the wisdom arisen from meditation

- First, we have to pursue extensive hearing and learning of the teachings on emptiness or selflessness. Then we develop some idea of what emptiness or selflessness is. This is the wisdom arisen from hearing.
- Then whatever we have heard and studied, we have to reflect on and analyse the knowledge we have gained over and over again until we develop an ascertainment, a definite certitude in our heart, about the subject, in this case, emptiness or selflessness. This is the wisdom arisen from reflection. The best kind of wisdom arisen from reflection is the inferential cognition of emptiness.
- With whatever certitude and ascertainment we have developed with regard to emptiness from familiarising ourselves over and over again with its meaning, then we come to develop the wisdom arisen from meditation. Of the different wisdoms arisen from meditation with respect to emptiness, the best is the direct realisation of emptiness. With that, we have the tool to uproot ignorance and overcome the predispositions or latencies of ignorance.

THE EFFECT OF THE UNANALYSED AGGREGATE

Verse 110

When a musician plays a melody on a lute, the sound lacks inherent nature, if we analyze it. But when the sweet sounds emerge, their unanalyzed aggregate eases the anguish in people's hearts.

When someone plays the guitar well and it is pleasing to the ears, one will enjoy it. If one were to analyse where that pleasant sound was coming from—did it come from the body of the guitar alone? The strings alone? Or from the side of the guitarist?—the sound did not come from any of these factors alone. Rather, they came from the aggregate of all these factors coming together.

When somebody plays the guitar well, it sounds very beautiful and pleasing. If we were to go beyond the appearance of that sound and search for what exactly it was and where it was coming from, we would not be able to find it in the guitarist or any part of the guitar itself. It cannot be found in any of the parts that make up the composite or aggregate.

However, if we were to just leave it at the level of appearance and just be aware of the sound without investigating and analysing further, that pleasant sound does bring comfort, it does exist and it does function.

ANALYSING CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Verse 111

When we analyze all causes and effects, they lack inherent nature as either identical or different. Yet phenomena vividly appear to arise and perish, and we experience pleasure and suffering as if they really existed. Even though they are just appearances, I urge you to embrace virtue and avoid sin.

When we investigate and analyse all causes and effects, we will not be able to find a truly existent cause and effect, a cause and effect that exist in and of themselves. But

if we do not investigate and analyse, leaving it at the level of appearances, they do exist and function. So at the level of mere appearance, cause and effect are feasible.

APPEARANCE AND EMPTINESS ARE MUTUALLY COMPLEMENTARY

Verse 112

When drops of water fill a jar, the first drop does not fill it, nor the last, nor each drop individually. Yet the dependently arisen aggregate fills the jar.

The meaning of the analogy in Verse 112 appears in Verse 113.

Verse 113

Similarly, when someone experiences their reward of pleasure or pain, it is due neither to the first moment of the cause, nor to the last moment, and so on. Yet the dependently arisen aggregate makes us experience pleasure or pain. Even though they are just appearances, I urge you to embrace virtue and avoid sin.

Verse 114

Aha! The appearance that delights our mind, though independent when unanalyzed, definitely lacks an inner core. However, the fact that phenomena appear as if they exist is profound and difficult for the dull-witted to understand.

“The dull-witted” means the lowly ones. “Aha!” in Tibetan is *e ma ho*, a positive proclamation of one’s amazement—“Wow! How wonderful!”

The author is proclaiming how wonderful it is to have realised that there is no contradiction between appearance and emptiness—that these two are not contradictory but are in fact mutually complementary. We need the correct understanding that this is so. This is the understanding we need to arrive at:

- Due to the fact that things are not truly existent, therefore they are mere appearances.
- Because they are mere appearances, therefore they are empty of existing truly.
- In reality, the meaning is that they are mutually complementary.

It is difficult for most people to understand that because when we think of emptiness, we do not know how to posit the existence of phenomena and we do not know how to posit that things are mere appearances. When we think of how things are appearances and how they exist, we then lose the bit about things being empty of true existence. So it is very difficult for most people to bring these two together.

If we were to relate phenomena at the level of appearances, that is, if we are satisfied with mere appearances without investigating and analysing further, there is a whole variety of appearances. Things exist conventionally and function. We are able to posit a multitude of phenomena.

But if we are not satisfied with mere appearances and analyse more deeply beyond the level of appearances and look for the final nature of phenomena, we will not be able to find anything that is truly existent. Yet things exist. That is why it is said that if we are satisfied with the level of mere appearances, things do function. But if we are not satisfied and go deeper, then we will not be able to point to anything that is the phenomenon in question.

We have to understand that whatever conventional phenomena we bring to the attention of our mind, they will necessarily appear to us to be truly existent. Although they are *not* truly existent, they will *appear* to us to be truly existent because our minds are polluted by the predispositions of ignorance. As long as the predispositions of ignorance are still in our mind, all phenomena will continue to appear to us to be truly existent. So it is extremely difficult to see that appearance and emptiness are mutually complementary instead of being contradictory. It is extremely difficult to see how they mutually support one another. It is very difficult to be able to posit that things exist conventionally at the level of appearances and yet they function. It is very difficult to attain these two realisations and understanding with the exception of those who understand the assertions of the CMWS.

As mentioned in the text, the “dull-witted” or the lowly ones do not understand this. Here, perhaps we can take the lowly ones to mean the proponents who follow the Autonomy Middle Way School (AMWS) and the tenets below it.

THE STATE OF MEDITATIVE EQUIPOISE

Verse 115

Now, when you are absorbed in meditative equipoise on this, what is there really to a mere appearance? How can either existence or non-existence exist? How can anyone anywhere assert “it is” or “it is not”?

This verse is saying that in the perspective of the wisdom of a person who is realising emptiness in meditative equipoise, there is no appearance of conventional phenomena whatsoever. But while there is no appearance of conventional phenomena, that does not mean that nothing appears to this meditative equipoise.

- “How can either existence ... exist?” “Existence” here refers to the conventional appearances that do not exist in the perspective of the meditative equipoise realising emptiness.
- “How can ... non-existence exist?” Although conventional appearances do not exist in the perspective of the meditative equipoise realising emptiness, what appears is emptiness itself. So, it is not non-existence that is appearing, i.e., it is not that nothing appears at all.

BECOMING A GREAT BEING

Verse 116

Subject and object lack ultimate reality. If your mind remains in its innate nature, uncontrived and shining, free from all discrimination and conceptual proliferation, you will become a great being.

The mind that is “shining, free from all discrimination and conceptual proliferation,” is the mind that is free of both the objects that are to be adopted and the objects that are to be abandoned in their ultimate sense and also free of all elaborations.

Just as phenomena do not exist truly, emptiness itself does not exist truly. Nothing exists ultimately and nothing is ultimately established, including the objects to be adopted and the objects to be abandoned. As such, in the perspective of the meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness, there is the freedom of all elaborations of conventional appearance. Without any distraction, one enters into meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness and by familiarising oneself with that realisation over and over again for a long period of time, there comes a time when emptiness will be perceived directly. At that time, one will become “a great being,” an *arya* or a superior being.

REALISING THE TWO AIMS

Verse 117

Thus, by practicing the conventional and ultimate bodhicitta, and thereby uninterruptedly carrying the two accumulations through to completion, may I perfectly realize the two aims.

“The two aims” refer to the two purposes.

As I have mentioned before, first, we have to think very deeply about the faults and disadvantages of our self-cherishing attitude and arrive at that understanding from many angles and perspectives. We also have to think very deeply, from many different angles, to realise the advantages and the benefits of cherishing others. Only based on these two realisations can one train the mind in developing bodhicitta through the system of exchanging self and others. Then one will come to develop the mind of enlightenment, conventional bodhicitta. With this conventional bodhicitta, one can finish accumulating the collection of merit.

By using analogies and reasoning, one comes to realise emptiness through hearing, reflection and meditation. One develops the wisdom realising emptiness. When one realises emptiness directly, ultimate bodhicitta is generated in one’s heart. With ultimate bodhicitta, one accumulates the collection of wisdom.

Through the union of the practice of method—conventional bodhicitta—and wisdom—ultimate bodhicitta—one accumulates the two collections. When one completes the accumulation of the two collections, one achieves the two bodies, the truth body and the form body. Through that, one accomplishes the aims of others and oneself.

Now, you have achieved the perfect and complete full enlightenment mentioned in the *Heart Sutra*.

Lama Atisha relied on many teachers and he received tantric empowerments from many of them. But among all his gurus, he considered a few of them to be the most kind and precious. One of them was Dharmarakshita. Lama Atisha considered the author of this text, Dharmarakshita, to be one of his most precious and kindest

teachers because of having received the instructions on cultivating and developing the two types of bodhicitta, conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta, from him. Why is this so? Because, at the end of the day, in order to achieve enlightenment, we need different teachings and instructions and their essence are these two bodhicittas. There can be no enlightenment without the cultivation of conventional and ultimate bodhicitta.

All of us have been tortured and tormented by our afflictions since beginningless lifetimes up to now. What will enable us to overcome and defeat our afflictions? It is the two bodhicittas, conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta.

What should we focus on in our practice? The whole point is to learn about these two bodhicittas and, as much as possible, to cultivate, develop and experience them. If we are able to do so, we will enjoy peace in our heart and experience happiness. We will also be able to destroy our ego, our afflictions and our ignorance. So that is the focus.

What we need to do is to gain mastery and control over our mind because since beginningless lifetimes up to now, we have not gained control over our minds. Rather our afflictions have always had the upper hand. In order to gain control and mastery over our mind, we need to cultivate and develop these two bodhicittas.

Many people ask these questions, “What should I practise?” or “What is the main practice?” The answers lie in what I have just said. The essence is the two bodhicittas. There is nothing more than that.

We have always been advised to be a good person with a good heart. It is true that we must have a good heart. But there are different levels of good heart as well. The ultimate good heart is bodhicitta. One of our primary focus then should be to aim for bodhicitta—to learn, train and move closer to actualising bodhicitta.

Once we have the good heart and, in particular, once we have the ultimate good heart, bodhicitta, it doesn't matter where we are reborn. There is only happiness whether we are in the pure lands or the hells realms. Because we have bodhicitta, we will be happy everywhere.

Often people think that the main practice is tantra, the deity yoga of meditating on deities. While deity yoga is very good, in order for the practice of deity yoga to be correct, first one must have bodhicitta. Without the practice and experience of bodhicitta, there is no way for deity practice to become a correct and genuine practice. Without bodhicitta, there is no real tantric practice.

When we talk about bodhicitta, we are talking about the two bodhicittas—the ultimate good heart plus the understanding and experience of the realisation of emptiness. Without these two bodhicittas, it is not possible to do tantric practice. If tantric practice is done on the basis of having an experience of these two bodhicittas, then tantric practice is beneficial in that it can act as the antidote to our self-cherishing and self-grasping.

But if one is doing tantric practice without any experience of bodhicitta and meditation on emptiness, instead of decreasing our afflictions, self-cherishing and self-grasping, there is the danger that that tantric practice will only strengthen our ego and our self-cherishing.

So our focus should be to learn and think about these two bodhicittas and, as much as possible, to practice and try to integrate them into our daily life. If we practise in that way, then our life will become a meaningful one.

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