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### Summary

The article highlights the important qualities of a 'pro-active' versus a 'reactive mind'. It is based on teachings found in a Tibetan Mahayana text, "*The Wheel of Sharp Weapons Effectively Striking the Heart of the Foe*", by Dharmaraksita.

### The 'Pro-active Mind'

**B**uddhism is an essentially practical philosophy which teaches the way out of all suffering (dukkha). And because suffering arises through the law of cause-and-effect (kamma-vipaka) from unwholesome action, Buddhism teaches the cultivation of wholesome action (i.e. sila).

It is only through wholesome moral behaviour in one's relations to other sentient beings that, on the one hand stops the further production of unwholesome karma which would later give rise to the vipaka of disturbing effects in one's life and Dharma practice; and on the other radically re-orientates the mind away from ignorance and towards the knowledge of the Truth of anatta (non-self). Mental dispositions which are egotistic, selfish, conflictual (i.e. are characteristically separative among beings) are overcome, and replaced with those which are outward-going, generous, compassionate (i.e. are characteristically unitive among beings). Such a direction in life is essential to one treading the Path from ignorance and suffering to Enlightenment and peace. One can never be fully and finally satisfied through the adornment of a self: there is always a craving for more of this, which the self-cherishing disposition generates. But the mind which pursues harmony with others and an interest in the welfare and happiness

of others is (because its activity is pure), one which becomes fully contented and at peace. Unlike the egotistic mind, it has no agitation born of dissatisfaction and nonfulfillment.

Indeed the basis of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path is moral discipline, which gives rise to consistent and unstrained wholesome moral action. It is embodied in Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. It is on the development of these that the other five parts of the Path depend for their own full development- Right View, Right Understanding, Right Effort, Right Concentration, Right Meditation. Wholesome moral action may arise in the world as a result of inductive or coercive sanctions. (i.e. the "carrot" or the "stick"). However, it arises spontaneously (uninstructed) consistently and without restraint only from inner moral virtue.

At the beginning of the Path of moral cultivation one does not, of course, have anything but the desire to change one's behaviour. Because right moral action is not inherently known by the seeker on the Path (who may have a long past of immoral conduct), he or she must be instructed as to how a wise person would act in his or her relations with others.

Within Buddhism such instruction is given in the form of the discipline of cultivating observance in mind, speech and action of the Five precepts (panca sila) of avoiding the immoral actions which the five precepts proscribe one from doing.

The three precepts specifically considered at the fore-mentioned five-day Dharma instruction and Meditation course were:

- (1) the precept which is undertaken to train one away from killing;
- (2) the precept which is undertaken to train one away from stealing,  
and
- (3) the precept which is undertaken to train one away from committing adultery and other kinds of sexual misconduct.

As stated, the remaining two days of the course were occupied with introducing to the students present the concept and reality of the pro-active mind. The pro-active mind is the antithesis of the reactive mind. The reactive mind is very prevalent in our society.

Many people go through life with one, barely aware, if at all, of its

negative, stunting nature. The reactive mind is the mind that springs defensively into anger when the being who has it is justly criticised, even by those who have their best interest at heart. It is resistant to change and is the source of persistence with much in the individual and the world which is timely for improvement.

The vocabulary of the reactive mind includes words like, "I can't", "It's too hard", "It's not fair", "It's their fault", "I don't know", "Why me?", "I tried", "Maybe", "Later", and similar such words which belie a non-committal and procrastinative attitude. One might say that it is lazy, for often it is not a matter so much of "can't" as unwilling to make the effort. For instance, "It's too hard" may require moving into 'unknown territory' with regards to a task which requires courage, imagination, and other skills of which one is unsure in their ability, rather than unskilled. One may be like the cat which wants the fish, but is unwilling to get its paws wet. "I don't know" is the product of a mind which is unwilling to search out the appropriate answer or solution. The mind for instance, which says "What do you mean?" is the mind which is too lazy to look at the issue at hand, wanting others to do the work. It is the 'buck-passing' mind which also says, "It's his/her/their fault". The mind which says, "I tried" is nothing but a self-excusing, negatively rationalising mind which wants to escape the task at hand and leave it for others to pick up. It is the mind which will leave all important and difficult tasks for others to do, and yet will expect tasks whose completion affects its owner's comfort to somehow be done. It is the mind which will blame anyone but itself for the grief it may come to. Essentially it is a "childish" mind, which is selfish and "small", and can be indeed quite irresponsible.

Hence owning the reactive mind, many people go through life failing to realise their full potential. They have never come to realise that it is only with conscious effort that such as is worth having in life - in personal qualities and skills or external wealth and honour - can be attained. Essentially, nothing really comes to one who sits and waits, as the cause for it to arise has not been sown and will not remain if the cause has not been cultivated.

We must re-orientate our whole disposition to one which is diametrically opposed to the reactive mind, and this we call the pro-active mind. The pro-active mind is mature, responsible, positive. It is positive about itself and its potential, and the potential of others. It is the mind of the leader, the initiator, the individual who can martial himself and others enthusiastically into actively directing change for the better. Taking initiative against the reactive mind, the pro-active mind is sown and cultivated. Cultivating the pro-active mind, the reactive mind simply dies.

As Practitioners of the Buddha-Dharma we ardently and with haste pursue the production of great wholesome karma while our good conditions for doing so remain intact. We come at a certain point (as a result of our wholesome actions) to realise the folly and futility of our self-thwarting behaviour. The “penny drops” at last; we have had enough. Sitting like ‘stone Buddhas’ will not do the job if we do not break the alternatively complacent, self-satisfied, or frustrated, stropky minds which expect the Teacher to do the liberating for us. We must bear in mind that even the Buddhas “do but point the way”.

During the final two days of the Dharma instruction course, the Tibetan Mahayana text, *"The Wheel of Sharp Weapons Effectively Striking the Heart of the Foe"*, by Dharmaraksita was used for the purpose of cutting away the reactive minds of attending Meditators. This Text invokes Yamantaka, the Wrathful Aspect of Manjushri, Bodhisattva of Wisdom as a powerful and unrelenting force to help the Meditator do this.

Stanza 57: We have high expectation of speedy attainments,  
 Yet do not wish to work at the practice involved.  
 We have many fine projects we plan to accomplish,  
 Yet none of them ever are done in the end.  
 Trample him, trample him, dance on the head  
 Of this treacherous concept of selfish concern.  
 Tear out the heart of this self-centred butcher  
 Who slaughters our chance to gain final release.

This article was written by Martin Lawless

### Reference

1. Dharmaraksita, "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons Effectively Striking the Heart of the Foe ", Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1976: p.18 M.A.L.