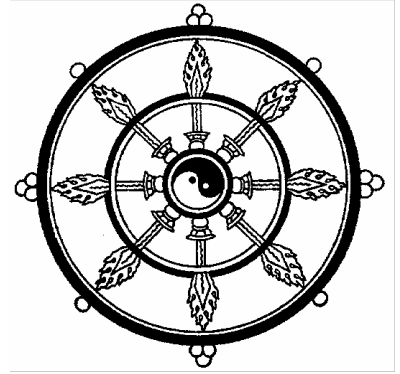


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



ཨོ སྤྱིང་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།

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As usual, we'll begin with some breathing meditation, so choose the sitting posture most comfortable to you.

This meditation is to bring one's mind under one's control. If we investigate the causes of the peace and happiness we seek in this life, we find that the main cause is calmness and peace in our minds. We can create this within ourselves.

When our minds are not at rest, then no matter what activities we engage in, no matter what conditions we meet, peace and happiness still elude us. It is important to realise that there is no way of finding the peace and happiness we seek without bringing some calm to one's mind.

Meditation is a spiritual or 'dharma' practice because it counters the negative states of mind, which are the main source of the unending problems in our lives. Therefore, we must clearly recognise at the outset, that the obstacles or negativities are within, and that we are engaging in mediation to try to overcome them. Then we can know the troublesome thought; we can identify it very clearly, including the object it holds, and the way in which it perceives its particular object.

As we turn our focus within, we can clearly see that as we generate certain types of thought and states of mind, and that the result is some unhappiness or discomfort. So, in our practice of meditation we are trying to get rid of or remedy such a thought - perhaps by just simply disengaging the mind from the object of that troubling thought.

Having overcome all the objects of distraction, let the mind settle completely within, and, without losing the mind to new objects of distraction, direct the attention to the incoming and outgoing breath. We try now to keep the attention on the breath for a while.

Pause for meditation.

Tonight we continue the teaching on the Thought Transformation text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*.

We're up to verse 8 of the root text, which reads:

All of our sufferings derive from our habits
Of selfish delusion which we heed and act out.
As all of us share in this tragic misfortune,
Which stems from our narrow and self-centred
ways,

We must take all our sufferings and the miseries of
others

And smother our wishes of selfish concern.

In this verse we learn about the truth of the sufferings that beset a life, which is bound to this so-called 'samsara', or cyclic existence. At the same time, we learn about the root cause of these sufferings that we cannot avoid within this cyclic existence.

"All of our sufferings derive", as it says in the text, "from our habits of selfish delusion which we heed and act out." This line describes the experience we find within cyclic existence. Suffering is something we cannot avoid as long as we are within cyclic existence. And we should understand that 'cyclic existence' refers to this very life, this physical form that we experience at this moment. So thinking of even this, our present form, we can see that the mere fact of our physical human life means that suffering is inevitable, and we cannot stop the suffering even though we may find some temporary pleasure. Suffering is in the very nature of our existence.

This is not only our experience. If we observe other beings who are also born to this samsaric life then, even though, on the surface, their conditions may sometimes seem far better than ours, in reality they are not. They are subject to the same unending suffering that we go through - if not physical suffering, then suffering in their minds.

So, in this way, everyone, including oneself, undergoes immeasurable amounts of suffering.

We say that the cause of being born into this life is karma, or actions we have created in the past. Otherwise it is very mysterious: why are we - and not just ourselves but all other beings - born to a life subject to so much suffering?. Why are we born as vessels for suffering? However, we can trace the cause; and its root, as it says in the text, to the self-centred mind. We can get some idea of how that mind serves as the root cause of our existence by thinking in terms of this life's experience.

If we look along the causal chain of the selfish actions that we perform we will see that where there's a strong self-centred mind there's also a very strong wish to have all the happiness, and all the goodness just for one's self. We'll also see some desire to possess the objects that we believe will fulfil that selfish desire. In pursuit of that object, we'll commit various actions and - especially if our selfish motivation is very strong - we'll also abandon our ethics, our embarrassment, our sense of moral shame. So, we're prepared to perform the action even though it may mean a great loss to our parents, other close relatives, our friends. With such actions, there is no honesty. This we call 'karmic action', which is the source

of misery or unhappiness in one's life. On top of this habit of creating very harmful and unskilful actions, when we look at our mind we see very negative habits and tendencies like strong desire, hatred, pride, ignorance and jealousy. We are so familiar with these states of mind that we generate them almost without effort. Our delusions are always liable to arise because they are completely built into the structure of our mind.

The whole thrust of this verse is to show that we are bound to cyclic existence and unending suffering by continuously creating karmic actions. We create karma because our minds are so very familiar and well acquainted with the variety of delusions.

In Buddhism, karma is a very important topic because Buddhism states that everything that happens in our lives is due to our karmas. If we ask "What is karma?", the reply we hear is "Without karma, there's no action". So, in one sense, karma is the driving force behind all our actions, it motivates them. From this point of view, we say there are two types of karma: the non-virtuous and the virtuous. Obviously, virtuous karma is preceded by a virtuous state of mind and non-virtuous karma is the driving force behind our non-virtuous actions.

What, though, determines that karma becomes a driving force for our actions? To a great extent, whether karma is virtuous or non-virtuous is determined by our attitude. If the attitude is very self-centred or self-cherishing then we will accumulate more non-virtuous or negative karmas. It is important to try and see the relationship between the self-cherishing attitude and the creation of negative actions in our day-to-day experience, to try to know how this attitude determines our actions. As we've seen in the text, all our problems, all the unwanted things in our life have their roots in this self-cherishing attitude. So, more than just understanding in theory, it is important to counter this attitude in terms of our daily experience, and observe how we can blame all the undesirable things on our self-cherishing mind.

With the self-cherishing attitude we create negative karmas and bind ourselves to cyclic existence. Again from our own experience, we can see that with the self-cherishing attitude we want all the victory for ourselves and reject the thought of accepting even the smallest loss. So, if we see some advantage to win some benefit to ourselves, we're prepared to do anything - even to cause harm to those who support us, our families and close friends.

We can think of instances where children cheat their parents and such like, all for the sake of their own gain. They bring great suffering to others, and worse still, they don't even recognise any relationship between their actions and the suffering others experience as a result. One can easily think how, with no sense of responsibility to others, one person can bring great harm to the lives of many beings. Perhaps those who bring harm to others for their own gain will enjoy some quick or immediate satisfaction. In the long run however, they'll realise that they look bad, and might regret their actions. In the end, they'll have to pay for those actions. Perhaps, one by one all those who were harmed will exact their revenge and

so, in the long run, the suffering that comes from their actions will far outweigh the satisfaction they found before. In this way, we can reflect on the disadvantages of having the self-cherishing mind.

If we want to solve the problem of loneliness, then the most effective solution is to overcome one's self-cherishing mind, because most of us depend on the love and support of our fellow beings. So, in a sense, our own happiness, peace and satisfaction depends on the friendship from others. Conversely, it is futile to expect friendliness and love from other beings if your attitude towards them is always very selfish.

If we change our attitude, our personalities, if we're always willing to share, always ready to help wherever there's a need, if our speech is always pleasant and kind, if our manner is always warm and friendly then there's no problem of loneliness. because we'll find others always willing to offer intimacy and friendship. This change will occur not only in the people with whom we usually associate. Even if we go overseas, within a short time, we'll find that we easily cultivate genuine friendships.

So there are tremendous practical benefits that we can enjoy in this life, if we can transform our self-cherishing mind to the attitude of cherishing others.

We will finish the teaching here. As usual, we'll now chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. Make sure your sitting posture is comfortable and the mind is not distracted by outside objects. As we chant the mantra, focus on the sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from the tapes by Gaye Radcliffe

Transcription checked by Mark Emerson

Edited by Richard Garward

Edit checked against the tapes by Mark Emerson

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