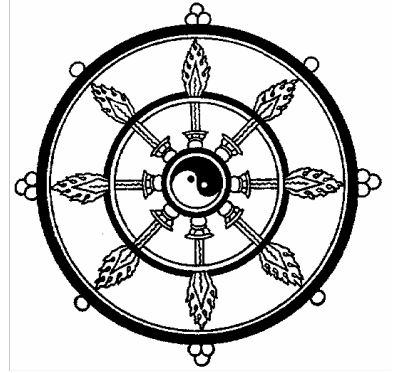


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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As usual, we start with a few minutes of breathing meditation together. Choose a comfortable sitting posture with the back straight, and make sure that the muscles are relaxed.

Being at rest depends upon both mind and body being at rest. We can see a link between our mind and body, and our self; when mind and body are at rest so are we. After choosing a meditation posture and relaxing your body, try to relax the mind by removing all agitated thoughts.

If we examine why our mind lacks peace, it is because it is always filled with thoughts. We can't stop worrying about something in the past, present or future. We cannot enjoy ourselves or feel at rest when there is disturbance in our minds. Even when we lie in bed, if we keep our mind busy with various thoughts - especially those that bring anxiety or bad memories - we cannot feel rested, let alone fall asleep. Therefore it is important for us to rest our minds by having fewer thoughts. This can even benefit our health.

To rest the mind, we should first try to get rid of outgoing thoughts, and bring the mind inward. Then we begin the breathing meditation, focusing our mind on the outgoing and incoming breath in the nostrils, without allowing any other object to disturb that focus.

We will now discuss the text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. Last time we finished verse 10 which reads:

When our bodies are aching and racked with great torment
Of dreadful diseases we cannot endure,
This is the wheel of sharp weapons returning
Full circle upon us from wrongs we have done.
Till now we have injured the bodies of others;
Hereafter let's take on what sickness is theirs.

This verse concerns the practice of refraining from harmful actions towards other beings. It says here that the root cause of experiencing physical pain is causing harm to the bodies of other beings.

The verse states explicitly that we must stop causing physical harm to other beings, because we do not want to harm our own body, and experience unwanted pain and suffering. We are able to see in this very lifetime the relationship of our physical pain to the pain our actions cause in others, because we often receive harm from others in retaliation for harming them.

If we clearly understand this causal link (that causing harm to others is like harming ourselves) and still engage

in harming others, we can see there must be some delusion in our mind that makes us do this. Otherwise, why would we harm others when we do not want suffering or pain? It's in our own interest to refrain from harming others.

We also have to consider the perspective of other beings. From this perspective, we can see they are no different from us in wishing for happiness and not wishing for suffering. Just as we do not want pain and hate suffering, so all other beings do not want suffering but want happiness. Out of respect for their right to happiness, we motivate ourselves to refrain from harming others.

The verse also indicates that we can use moments of suffering as part of our spiritual practice. When we experience a painful disease where there is no prospect of immediate relief, simply worrying about the pain is not going to help cure the disease, or relieve the pain. Rather than worrying about the pain, we should think of transforming the experience to further our spiritual practice.

We do this by contemplating the true cause of our pain and suffering. The pain did not arise unconditionally, so what caused it? The cause is that we possess this body in cyclic existence. Why is our life subject to cyclic existence? We have to reflect here on the second noble truth, that is, the truth of the origin of suffering. There are two main sources of suffering, karma and delusion. Of the two sources, delusion is the principal one. What are the delusions? There are many types, all of which are derived from the root delusion, which is self-grasping ignorance, or the ignorance that misapprehends the way we exist in reality. That is the root cause.

We should contemplate our life and how we take repeated rebirth in cyclic existence. We can also contemplate the way to reverse this unending process. Is there any remedy to self-grasping ignorance? You can see the direct remedy to that ignorance is the wisdom of realising emptiness, the ultimate truth. To cultivate that wisdom, we have to engage in the spiritual practice of the three-fold training, which besides the training in wisdom, includes the training of concentration, and moral ethics. To engage in these, we need to rely upon a qualified spiritual guide who can thoroughly teach us this three-fold training.

So, with an appreciation of the causes of suffering, and the trainings to bring about its end, it is possible to use any experience of suffering to understand all the spiritual

teachings. This includes not only the process of repeated rebirth in cyclic existence, but also how to stop that process and achieve liberation.

We should understand that none of us wants to undergo any kind of pain or suffering, but when we do, it is not necessarily bad for us. Through our experience of suffering we can develop knowledge, and also show more compassion to other suffering beings. As the famous Indian Buddhist Master Shantideva said, one of the many good things about experiencing suffering is that it can help you better understand the suffering of others. By understanding their suffering, you can feel true compassion for them. For instance, if you have a bad stomach ache, and, subsequently, you see another person with the same stomach ache, you know exactly what that person is going through, and you naturally feel sympathy.

So suffering can teach us to be more compassionate towards other beings, it can help us to reduce our pride, and cause us to seek liberation from worldly existence. Suffering can also motivate us to do virtuous deeds and abandon non-virtuous ones. Thus, even if we face unwanted physical pain, it can lead us to perform virtuous actions and develop spiritual realisations. Suffering can, in fact, help us purify our negativities, and accumulate merit.

That is the end of the teaching. We will now chant the Buddha's mantra. Again, sit in the appropriate posture, relaxing the body and letting the mind stay inward by stopping all outgoing thoughts. As we begin the chanting, focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Jenny Brooks
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