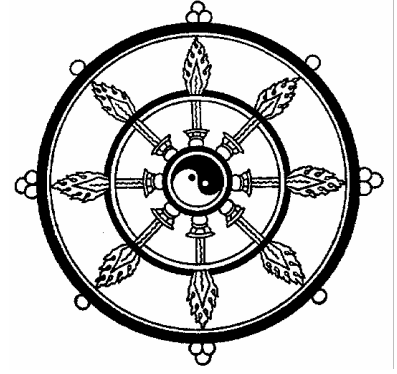


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཨྲ སྤྱིང་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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As usual we will do a breathing meditation for a few minutes. Make sure that the mind is calm and peaceful. Distracting thoughts prevent a peaceful mind. If they are not overcome, our minds will become like a piece of paper being blown about and agitated by the strong wind of distracting thought. So, losing the distracting thoughts will calm the mind inward. Now we can begin the breathing meditation. Make sure that the incoming and outgoing breaths are natural and even; they should not be forced. The mind should be single pointedly focused on just the incoming and outgoing breaths, without being interrupted by any other thoughts.

Disturbing thoughts are the main cause of unease and unhappiness in the mind. There are two levels of disturbing thought, the subtle and the gross. It is not easy to remove the subtle level of disturbing thought, so before we can even counteract that, we need to confront the gross level of disturbing thought. The only way to overcome these disturbing thoughts is by meditating, through redirecting our minds. We replace the disturbing object in our minds with one that enhances peace. Through meditation we can train the mind by making it more familiar with the peace enhancing object. This will slowly reduce the influence of disturbing thoughts, and as a result our minds will be more stable and will find more peace and happiness.

The Wheel of Sharp Weapons, *Verse 31*:

When all our affairs, both religious and worldly,
Run into trouble and fall into ruin,
This is the wheel of sharp weapons returning
Full circle upon us from wrongs we have done.
'Til now we have felt cause and effect could be
slighted;
Hereafter let's practice with patience and strength.

This verse is teaching us how to deal with the various problems that we face in our lives. Sometimes, no matter how much effort we put into something, the results can be frustrating. For example, some spiritual practitioners spend a great deal of time studying the Dharma, yet find that the more they study the more confused and ignorant they get. Likewise, there are practitioners who have been meditating for a long time, but the practice doesn't seem to yield any results in terms of increasing concentration or wisdom in the mind; but seems to bring more mental dullness instead. And, as well, we can think of worldly people who have failed in their various pursuits and face many obstacles at work.

We can see that there are always problems in people's

lives. If the problem isn't a material one, then it is a spiritual one, or a mental one. As soon as we solve one problem, another arises. So we need some inspiration or guide to help us cope with our problematic lives. Otherwise, whenever we find problems, we immediately lose interest in our work and even in life. So we can become very depressed and miserable.

The most helpful solution lies in the correct way of thinking. Then we can find a better understanding of just what is going on in these problem situations. For instance, we can observe cause and effect. So instead of just feeling depressed, we can learn from the problem and use this knowledge as a strength in overcoming future problems. This verse shows us that our problems are the result of our own karmic actions, the result of bringing harm to others. It is important to see the link between our current unwanted situation and our actions of the past.

Harmful actions come from having a selfish mind and a self-cherishing attitude. This is a state of mind in which we want to have all the happiness for ourselves and we have no consideration for the well being of others. All our negative actions are based on this mind. If we see some self benefit or advantage in a situation, then we are prepared to do anything, even if we have to murder, steal or engage in sexual misconduct. These harmful and negative actions don't bring us happiness. They result in the suffering that we are experiencing now. Any problem we are facing now is an indication of our disregard for the law of karmic cause and effect. The stronger the self-cherishing mind, the more motivated we are to perform harmful actions like killing, stealing and lying.

It is important to recognise the true cause of suffering in our lives. This recognition can help us, and it is at least a relief to see the cause of our problems. More importantly, though, what we are talking about here is how the way we think can make a difference to our lives. We shouldn't be discouraged when we face a problem, because we can see where the problem is coming from, and we know that we have some wisdom to apply to the problem. This is better than being helpless and just letting the tears fall from our eyes. There is something more that can be done. When we have this knowledge of cause and effect, it can give us strength.

In adopting the right way of thinking, we have to practice ethics. This means not harming others. The teaching of ethics is common to all the major religions.

Christianity, like Buddhism, talks about virtuous and non-virtuous actions, such as abandoning the non-virtuous actions of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. This advice is intended to prevent us from harming others. In Buddhism it is said that observing ethical behaviour is the foundation of spiritual practice—the first thing is to abandon the ten non-virtuous actions.

The teaching of compassion is fundamental to Buddhism and of Christianity. To bring real peace, harmony and happiness into the world, we have to see the value of the teachings of the great spiritual traditions. The teaching of compassion has the potential to make all people good and awaken their minds to the understanding that others are no different to oneself when it comes to wanting happiness and not wanting to suffer. On this basis, one respects others and considers their well being, and a strong intention not to cause harm to others is developed. Positive actions are seen as refraining from negative actions.

Life is precious to us and we cherish it. Likewise, it is precious to others. Think of this as you try to abandon the act of killing, and then slowly abandon the act of stealing. As people become more spiritually aware, and realise the benefits of moral practice, then society becomes a more livable, secure and peaceful place where we can build trustworthy relationships with others. The very essence of spiritual teachings is to show love and compassion towards others. It is fundamental to being a better person.

The spiritual teachings relate to and cover all the actions that we perform in our lives, through speech, body and mind. All the time, even at work, we shouldn't steal, and remember that the only thing that belongs to us is our wage. Corruption in the workplace and in government is all due to selfish wrongful actions and they affect the progress of the whole nation. In spiritual or material terms, it is true to say that spiritual teachings, like that of compassion, have the potential to bring peace and happiness to one's personal life and into the world as a whole.

We will now chant the Buddha's mantra. First choose the correct posture and let the mind be calm inside. Direct the mental focus to the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Jenny Brooks
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Edited Version*

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