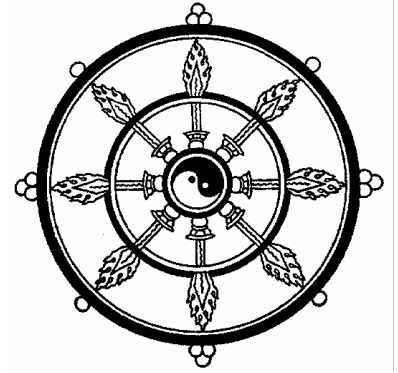


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sonam Rigzin

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29 April 1998

We will do a little meditation. Relax your body and get into a comfortable position. When you relax your body, the idea is to relax your mind as well, even though sometimes when you try relaxing your body you find your mind remains disturbed. So try to calm your mind. If you find difficulty in settling your mind, tell yourself gently that it is important to calm your mind. If you don't do this, but let the mind go on its own merry-go-round, it becomes scattered and uncontrollable.

When you try to settle your mind, you often encounter a paradox - even though you subjectively 'own' your self and your mind, the mind seems to 'have its own mind' and does not listen to you. So develop the determination that you must make your mind work for you; you are the master of it and if you don't do this, your existence becomes meaningless. With this kind of reasoning, bring your mind to a state of mindfulness.

The objective of relaxing your mind is to achieve a sense of clarity and single-pointedness. You achieve this by gently reasoning with the mind. It must be made supple, controllable and tamed. Slowly withdraw your attention from different sensory objects, and re-direct it into your own heart or mind. Naturally, you will find your mind calmer as it is freed from its normal intellectual thinking and chattering. After awhile, you may find it gets excited again. Bring it back to the point of simply breathing. Feel the sensation of your breathing. Concentrate on it gently and single-pointedly. Try to spend some time abiding in that sense of equilibrium.

You can come out of your meditative equipoise.

Meditation is a technique, a system, a method; it is not the end result. The word for meditation in Tibetan is 'ghom', which means a way of becoming familiar with a new habit - a habit that is wholesome, positive and integrated into our psychological makeup. Whether or not the experience of meditation is peaceful and an antidote to our heartache or angst depends upon the habits we develop as a result. If you discover, for instance, the meaning of loving-kindness or compassion and make that a natural habit of mind, the meditation has worked.

None of us likes to experience pain of any kind, especially mental pain or suffering. If we feel tremendous suffering caused by our attachment to desirable objects, such as a beautiful body, we can overcome it through a meditation technique whereby we visualise that body as being less clean and beautiful than our attachment mind apprehends it. This pacifies the

mind, making it happy and relaxed, because you are no longer a prisoner of your desire. If this is the result, the meditation has worked, in the sense that the meditation has been used as the teaching had intended. From a Buddhist point of view, if we use meditation to transform our destructive mind and emotions into something more peaceful, kind and loving - which is the true nature of the mind - then the meditation has been used in the right context.

Peace of mind is a rare commodity and we have every right to experience this. When we talk about the Buddhist teachings, however, we have the lofty aim of becoming fully enlightened - achieving Buddhahood. As an end result, this must not be divorced from our practice, but it might be difficult at this moment. So we must try to achieve some other experience of peace of mind - if we do that we are doing the proper practice. Thus meditation is a mechanism for civilising our mind from bad habits such as anger, hatred and desire, which are negative in the sense that they bring unhappiness.

Meditation offers us a tool to overcome destructive minds or emotions, such as having tremendous attachment to our bodies. We try all sorts of ways to maintain a desirable body but we are never satisfied. If you were to bring your mind from the external object, and look at it carefully with your logical mind, you would find that your body is made from not-so-wonderful things. It has many substances that aren't necessarily desirable. When you do this, again, you end up pacifying the pain that attachment to your body has caused you. If we were to gain even a moment's peace of mind through doing such practices, we would be making progress on our spiritual path. To have that experience of peace of mind is a foundation for our spiritual practice.

The basis of meditation should be that we try to bring the mind back into our own heart, and check how our minds are working. We use meditation as a kind of peace-keeping agent within the mind, pacifying the mental discursiveness that causes unhappiness. Lama Tsong Khapa has said that the gap between the spiritual life and worldly life is not that big a gap at all - it is all a matter of outlook. If your outlook is positive, that spiritual feeling influences everything you do. If, on the other hand, your mind is negative, everything you do becomes worldly. So, it's a matter of two sides of the one coin.

We must emphasise the need to check inwardly, to not

always blame external things. This is the key to finding the happiness we all seek. The resources for happiness are not that hard to gather, if only we could learn to look inwardly. All we need to do is change our outlook and peace and happiness are already there. The Buddha's teaching says that you are your own master and your own enemy- the tormentor of your own self. We can learn to look inwardly, training our mind in positive habits and eliminating negative ones. We don't have to ask anybody else to assist - we have the fundamental resources to do this work ourselves.

We all desire inner happiness. Ironically, emotions such as anger are provoked by external people and circumstances. We say that this person or object has caused me unhappiness, therefore he or she is my enemy. That is how we categorise certain people as an enemy. If we were to think this through in an objective, unbiased way, we would find out that a negative or destructive state of our mind, such as anger, is the real enemy, for it brings us happiness.

The good thing is we can eradicate it and work through it, for it has no sound basis. When we can control our internal enemy, like anger and hatred, external conditions or people no longer appear so hostile. They no longer have the power to provoke a negative reaction in us, such as feeling upset and hurt. But if we are not rational, and if we always blame external conditions, even a tiny incident could provoke a tremendous amount of unhappiness within us. If we think about this carefully, this is so unnecessary and ridiculous. If we learn to rely on our inner happiness through establishing proper reasoning, we would develop much more inner strength and happiness, and then, external conditions would no longer bother us. Instead, they only bring us happiness by teaching us how to develop patience and other qualities. So if one desires happiness, it makes sense to pay attention and see how our confused emotions are often mistaken in terms of how it operates and how it ends up running our lives.

Our mind is innately good and wholesome. The hope it offers us to grow is infinite. For instance, His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, as an ordinary person would be totally stressed out in the difficult situation he finds himself in- where a communist government has done inhumane things to his people. While the Dalai Lama has never lost his compassion for the Tibetan people, the situation in Tibet has not been able to disturb the basic peace and happiness of his mind because he has developed the positive qualities of mind - such as loving kindness and compassion - to the extent that they are completely natural.

Unfortunately, we have never allowed ourselves to develop those qualities, but instead have allowed destructive emotions such as anger, hatred and so on to run our lives. When a tiny little thing happens, it can cause tremendous anger or hurt. If we look at it rationally, we find no reason to be so angry or hurt. We have the potential to make ourselves feel secure, happy and relaxed and to have peace of mind. The bottom line in pursuing a spiritual life is to seek happiness for self

and others.

Even though our mind is sometimes difficult to handle, it can be trained to behave positively and lovingly. The Dalai Lama often says that he can learn the nuts and bolts of how to be patient from his masters, but he does not learn the actual experience of patience through his teacher. The only time he learns it is when he encounters so-called 'enemies', which give him the chance for the beautiful experience of patience.

There is a famous story about when Acharya Atisha came to Tibet and had a companion who seemed to be always in a bad mood. Some of his students suggested to Acharya Atisha that he get rid of the companion. Atisha said to leave him alone, for it was through this companion that he experienced the true nature of patience. Every circumstance can be transformed into a positive one. If you share a place with someone who is cantankerous or temperamental, one way to use that circumstance positively is to enhance your level of patience.

Geshe-la says it is funny that our normal reaction to anger is to react with more anger. If we think about it, it never works, even though we think it does. Yet if we react without anger, we always seem to get the better of the situation. He recounts a personal experience of how he trained himself to be patient. He had a companion who was always in a bad mood and angry. Geshe-la says that sometimes he would deliberately provoke him to make him angrier and then he would try to practice patience. For a while, he seemed to get more angry, but Geshe-la thinks his own patience must have rubbed off on him, because he became more patient than Geshe-la, who says he lost his patience!

Geshe-la says they were good friends and that his companion cared deeply about him. About the time of the Lhasa uprising, they got separated and Geshe-la was able to escape into exile in India. His friend was captured and imprisoned for about 18 years, and it seems that two days after he was released, he died.

If you have any questions, Geshe-la would be happy to hear them.

Q: How would you advise one to react when threatened or harmed?

A: That is the reason why you have to learn mind-training. Normally, our instinct is to answer aggression with aggression. With a person who lacks some understanding of this, you will end up having an even bigger fight.

This is the social norm that exists in our society - if you don't respond to an aggressive situation aggressively, you are seen to be weak or a wimp. But the true situation isn't like that. Someone who responds to aggression with patience is a man or woman of tremendous substance, tremendous spiritual understanding. If we don't understand patience and its value, we may find ourselves in a situation where somebody who has been our friend for a long time can cause us anger through a very small incident or by

saying something that we've misunderstood. You may end up becoming a sworn enemy. But if you were to look at it rationally, you would find nothing of substance there, except that you were unable to have a bit of patience when certain unpleasant words were uttered on the spur of the moment.

Q: Is the difference between wrathfulness and anger in the motivation?

A: I'm not sure that I properly translated the distinction between wrath and anger to Geshe-la. But what I understand from Geshe-la is that if your seemingly wrathful actions are to achieve a positive goal, it can't be termed anger because it lacks malice, which is the intent to cause trouble or hurt. Often in Tibetan families, the father will express a wrathful or frightening look to discipline the children so that they behave properly. The mother behaves in a loving, compassionate way. The idea is that your children will be brought up in a secure, disciplined and firm way, yet free-spirited, loving and kind. That type of behaviour would not be considered to be anger.

Q: Geshe-la, if you know that there are many people that would like to cause you harm how do you protect yourself? Is it enough just to have patience? How do you actually protect yourself?

A: There is no hard and fast rule that can be used as a guide. It is based on common sense and depends on many things - your level of patience, your level of spiritual development, and the situation in which you find yourself. If your level of patience and your level of understanding are high, you will experience whatever harm they cause you in a way that enhances your level of patience. If your level of patience is not that strong yet, you must use your common sense. Perhaps you might need to run away from them, or do whatever is needed to ensure you don't get bashed up or don't get done in!

Geshe-la gives an example of finding yourself in an angry mob where everyone is feeding off each other's anger. Just make sure you spot the ringleader and whack him! Get him first, then run away! Geshe-la says he is talking from experience. When he was a little boy, he used to often get into fights with other gangs. That is why he always sought out who the gang-leader was, and got in first!

Anyway, to get back to what Geshe-la said, his teacher was in Tasmania giving a teaching at which Jampa Gendun was translating. Although Geshe-la didn't know exactly how the question came about, the gist of the story is that a fellow put a question to Geshe-la in response to the teaching Geshe-la's teacher had given about the Buddhist values of patience and loving kindness. His question was that, if he found himself in a situation where his girlfriend or friend were threatened by an angry mob, what should he do. Geshe-la's answer was if he were a brave man and cared about his girlfriend, he should defend her and fight, but if he were chicken, he should run away and leave his friends to their own peril! If your level of patience or understanding is developed, you no longer see every circumstance from the normal

conventional viewpoint as being unbearable. Rather, you can use them to make yourself more powerful in your practice of patience.

An example Geshe-la gave is that of a monk who was in an Indian town or village and was accused wrongly of trespassing. The villagers gave him a good thrashing and beat him up badly. But the monk found it to be good for his practice of patience. He did not feel any anger towards them. Instead he experienced a greater degree of patience. He felt so grateful that the few rupees he had left he gave to them and thanked them for bashing him up. That took the Indians by such surprise that they ended up giving him more rupees! So everybody lived happily ever after.

Shantideva has said that as living beings trapped in this world of antinomies, in the pursuit of happiness, we often end up doing the things that make us unhappy. If we were more loving to our enemies, they would end up helping us and it would be more useful to us. But we end up instead pursuing our enemies with anger. And, instead of making us feel better, it causes more unhappiness and anger.

Geshe-la said he has a lot of other interesting stories but you will have to wait for another time! He said that when he was a young monk, he was no angel and tended to be a ringleader and cause fights. One day, he was involved in a fight with a group of young monks from another monastery, and happened to be on his own. He gave a good account of himself, but at the end of the day he got done. One of the boys hit his head with a stone - actually the scar is still there - then they used a few more and caused him to bleed. At the time, even though he was a monk, he hadn't yet received full ordination, so he says this was his excuse! Anyway, not being satisfied with his performance, he waited for an opportunity to seek out the ringleader from the other group and avenged himself. Later on he saw him again and had felt that what he had done was no good. Instead, he felt remorseful and gave him some delicious food he had with him. They have been good friends ever since, and the friendship has continued for a long time. The moral of the story is to feed your enemy with loving kindness rather than anger.

We will do a concluding meditation, reciting the Buddha's holy mantra seven times. Relax your body, withdraw your mind from external distractions and concentrate on your recitation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

In response to an earlier question:

This was a situation in East Tibet in Kham where Geshe-la came from. As a little monk, Geshe-la was doing his memorisation exercise downstairs, while some of the little monks were upstairs and the teachers were out. The group of boys upstairs started to annoy him by throwing pebbles and saying a few rude things to him. So Geshe-la tried his patience but ran out of it - he says he didn't have much anyway at the time. He issued a challenge to them that if they were so powerful and so brave, why were they hiding? Why didn't they come

downstairs? So five of them did! Geshe-la was busy looking at their size and he figured out there were two big boys much taller than him and he felt less confident about his chances.

Anyway, he didn't have much time to wonder because they all attacked him, particularly the big boys who shoved him onto his knees and picked up a stone and whacked it on his head and made it bleed. Out of desperation, he thought of the tiny penknife he had and poked it in an arm. They were so scared, they all ran away saying 'Oh! He stabbed me!'. So Geshe-la said the moral of the story is that you have to make the best of a situation - the needs of a situation take precedence over the technicality.

(Translator's comment: That's what he said - and he's not joking either!) That is the truth, and, Geshe-la says he has a few scars to prove it!

Transcribed from the tapes by Jenny Brooks
Edited by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit checked against the tapes by Richard Garward
Edited Version
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