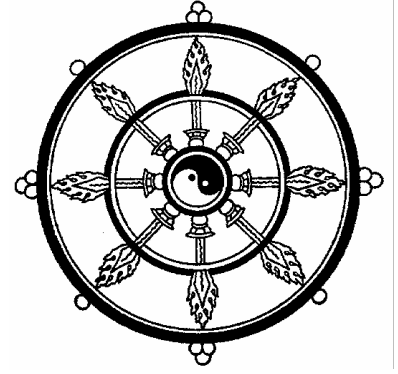


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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8 July 1998

As usual, we shall do some breathing meditation first. Sit in a comfortable and relaxing posture.

As we possess both a mind and a body, we should also rest our minds. When both our mind and body are at rest we, as the person who possesses these two, can also be at rest. One's mind can only be at rest when it is not disturbed by outside objects of distraction. We have to make some effort to tame the mind, not letting it wander here and there. When we stop it from wandering outside, the mind naturally comes back to us and can be at rest.

Having brought the mind inward, we find that we have prevented thoughts of external objects. When the mind experiences some sense of being empty, this is the indication it is at rest. We try and sustain this state of mind for a while, until we find the mind again drifting towards external objects. The point at which you begin the breathing meditation is about the time you notice the mind going outside. At that moment, instead of letting the mind go after outside objects, try to let it focus on the incoming and outgoing breath. As you do this, make sure the incoming and outgoing breath are even but natural, in the sense that you don't force the breath in or out in a specific way or for a specific length of time. Rather, make the breath flow as naturally and as evenly as possible. The mind just needs to be aware of that sensation of air coming in and going out.

Meditation practice is a way to teach our minds good discipline, to develop good habits within our minds. Therefore, as part of meditation practice, the mind has to be always watched by oneself, so we can figure out the type of thoughts the mind occupies itself with most of the time. We apply meditation practice to discipline the mind so that it is occupied by the right object and generates a right way of thinking.

We have to understand the types of thoughts and emotions we generate, and how often or for how long each experience lasts - and we must understand that this depends upon the object of the thought. For instance, if we are very acquainted, mentally or emotionally, with attractive objects, we can see that our desire is strong and forceful because one's mind is familiar with objects that arouse strong desire. When desire becomes very forceful, even smaller or less attractive objects can stimulate desire in us. Likewise, some people get angry easily, even over a minor cause. This shows their minds are familiar with anger or hatred. Studying meditation, on the other hand, shows us the antidote to each of the mental delusions or afflictive emotions.

If we look at alcoholics, they were not born alcoholics, but at some stage they begin craving intoxicating drink. As the craving becomes stronger, their minds become suffused with craving, until it is extremely difficult not to drink and they cannot miss any opportunity to indulge in drinking. On the other hand, some people don't like drinking alcohol because they do not have such craving. In fact, some regard alcohol as repulsive and, let alone taste it, they cannot even put up with the smell, or be near it. Why one person has a strong desire for alcohol and the other does not is due to mental craving. There are some people who used to be alcoholics, but after they broke the habit, they turned against drinking, having no desire for it whatsoever. It is important to learn that if we train our minds, we can bring about positive change by breaking down negative habits.

Now we will do verse 38 from *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*, which reads:

When our bodies are ugly and others torment us
By mocking our flaws, never showing respect,
This is the wheel of sharp weapons returning
Full circle upon us from wrongs we have done.
'Til now we have made images lacking in beauty,
By venting our anger we have made ugly scenes;
Hereafter let's print books and make pleasing statues,
And not be short-tempered, but be of good cheer.

The meaning of this verse is self-explanatory. Put simply, it is saying that we all wish for our bodies or our physical appearance to be beautiful; physical beauty, in terms of shape, size, colour, and so forth is cherished equally by all beings. Even attractive pets, such as dogs or cats, are liked by more people. Having an attractive physical presence is a great advantage.

Even though we wish to be attractive, we may not be for many reasons. Some people have physical deformities, are born handicapped, or blind, or have missing hands or legs, or abnormal body shape. These people confront problems related to their appearance - as said in the text, people mock them because of the shape of their bodies. Not only outsiders - even close friends or family may insult them. This can cause a lot of suffering, it can be hurtful to their minds. This verse is saying we have to understand the deeper cause of having such a bad physical appearance.

The cause mentioned here is that a bad appearance can result from past actions like destroying temples or holy images - sculpture or painting, images or temples that others created out of their pure faith, as an object of their

worship. Having built a temple or holy statues with little respect or care can cause the same result. The materials used may have been inferior and cheap. The person may not have taken care, not having built the temple or created the sculpture or painting properly, in the sense that there were obvious faults in the statue or the drawing – for example, the two eyes of the statue did not match. Such obvious faults were made out of carelessness.

In this way, this verse reminds us of the torment we undergo as a result of abuse from others because of our bodily unattractiveness. We try to see that this is the 'wheel of sharp weapons' returning – and when a sharp weapon strikes you, it is naturally very painful. We have to see that the negative actions we have committed in the past are like weapons that are striking us now. Recognising this, try to resolve that from now onwards you will respect the temples, holy sculptures or paintings created or built by other people. And, if you are building a temple or making a statue or painting, try to do it as well as possible in terms of the materials used and the way it is crafted.

If we try to summarise the meaning of this verse, the main implication is that we should practice patience, because patience is the main cause of physical beauty. And we should overcome anger, because it is the main cause for having an ugly body. Our aim is not simply to learn what is said here, but to integrate it into our lives. As Lama Tsong Khapa said, with the practice of patience all the virtue we gather in our minds will not disintegrate, and there will be peace and happiness in our minds. We should try and learn more about the disadvantages of anger, and the advantages of practicing patience.

A further benefit of practicing patience is that it sustains the peace and happiness we enjoy in our minds. In long run, with the practice of patience we can even obtain the everlasting joy of liberation or complete enlightenment. The practice of patience can also protect us from taking a lower state of rebirth. If we try to understand the effects of practicing patience on the mind, it can make it very stable, which means that the inner peace and happiness we have cannot be destroyed, even by outer conditions. Whenever we lose our temper and find ourselves disturbed, we tend to blame it on another person or outside situation. But we have to realise that, even if the outside situation is harmful and destructive, if we maintain patience, external things cannot disturb us.

However, if we lose our tempers and become overpowered by anger, the anger can completely destroy our inner peace and happiness, which gives way to suffering and unhappiness within us. By being aware of these things, we can remember that anger is bad for us both now and in the future- while patience is a virtuous practice which, if we adopt it, can provide the greatest security for us. It can provide us with lasting peace and happiness.

Thus every time you see someone with a very unattractive body, try to feel sympathy for them rather than looking down on them or showing hatred towards

them. Neither the owner nor observer of an unattractive body would wish for it, so we should be more inspired to practice patience and minimise showing anger towards others. However, if we have physical beauty, it is not something we should feel proud of because it is simply the result of practicing patience. Instead of feeling pride, we should feel inspired to keep practicing patience. And we should think of the implications of this verse from the point of view of our jealousy towards the beauty of others. It teaches us a good way of looking at beauty and ugliness; but the main purpose of this verse is to inspire us to practice more patience and to overcome anger.

Another benefit of practicing patience and overcoming anger is that patience is the gateway to success while anger is the cause of failure. We can observe this in those people who have a great deal of patience towards any kind of difficulties they face, with their work or whatever they do in their life. These people's lives are stable and successful, while those who have anger or a short temper, or have less forbearance do not achieve much in their life. We, of course, choose to be with people who have great forbearance, great patience in whatever they do, while we do not want to be around those who have a short temper. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, said the best means of overcoming hardship is showing patience.

We can also think of the work situation, in which many people find the job they do to be very difficult, so they're always looking to get out of that job. But there are others who have a different attitude towards their work, even if it is hard work like labouring, they endure their hardship. Because of that they enjoy what they do. Each day, they go to work with a positive state of mind, a strong motivation to do their job. We can see that it is not so much the type of the job, but rather the forbearance you bring to that work.

We could keep going on about the benefits of practicing patience. While, if we think of the shortcomings of anger, there are a great many. Ashvagosa, the famous Indian master said that with the projection of anger, no matter what you wear or adorn yourself with – earrings, necklace or makeup – no matter what, anger will make you look ugly. Geshe Doga said he finds it hard himself to look at the face of someone showing great hatred or anger; it is horrible and you feel uncomfortable looking at them. As said before, the purpose of learning about these things is to develop your practice of patience and of overcoming anger.

We will leave the teaching here, and we will chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. As before, we should try to relax the body, sit in the meditation posture, and try to calm the mind, using the mantra as the object on which to focus our minds.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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