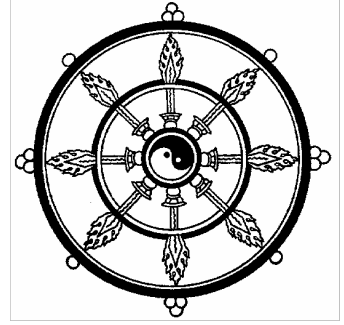

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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First we will do a short breathing meditation. Choose the most convenient sitting posture and try to fully relax your body.

Think over this point – how we are always led by our minds in terms of what we do, our future, and so forth. But if we check this mind that leads us, it is in fact overpowered by some kind of negative thinking or mental delusion. Because of this, the consequences of our daily actions only leave us in a state of confusion or chaos.

We find we are always caught in some problem and, even if we struggle hard, we find there is no way out. So, it is important to recognise that the source of our problems is the mind being overpowered by some delusion. We should try to understand that, if these delusions are not removed from our minds, no matter how much effort we make to find more lasting peace and happiness, we will not achieve it. Even if we do find some peace and happiness, it only lasts for a very short time. The way to find lasting inner peace and happiness is to now get one's mind under one's own control rather than letting it be controlled by mental delusions. This is the reason we engage in meditation practice.

So try to draw your mind inward, dissolving all distracting thoughts, whether these thoughts are pleasant or unpleasant. When you begin meditation, you have to bring the mind completely inward. Once it is inward, the mind may again go out after external objects of distraction. Instead of letting this happen, one directs the mind to the meditation object, which here is the incoming and outgoing breath. So, without being distracted by any other object, we try to fix the mind on the breath. It is very beneficial to do some meditation practice on a regular basis.

Now we are going to continue our teaching on the text called *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to Verse 42, which reads:

When after we do any virtuous action
We feel deep regret or we doubt its effect,
This is the wheel of sharp weapons returning
Full circle upon us from wrongs we have done.
'Til now we have been fickle and, stirred by base
motives,
Have courted only those who have power or
wealth;
Hereafter let's act with complete self-awareness,
Exerting great care in the way we make friends.

This verse concerns a situation where we engage in some spiritual practice, but afterwards feel bad about the practice, because we feel that it has not benefited us in terms of finding more peace and happiness. Think about someone who has taken a commitment to do an intensive retreat or some specific meditation practice, who then engages in that retreat or practice to fulfill that commitment. Afterwards, when they try to assess their performance and the result of the practice, they may be disappointed because they feel they have not achieved anything. The practice has not produced a result in terms of calming the mind, gaining more self-control, or developing oneself.

Because they don't see any result, instead of feeling positive about having done the practice, they regret having made that commitment, and feel that the time they have spent has been wasted. So they may think that it would be better not having this commitment or doing this practice.

This verse shows why we do not make progress in any practice we start, and why at the end we have a bad feeling about the practice. The cause is a past situation in which one has been fickle in terms of the spiritual practice and the relationship with the spiritual teacher. In terms of this relationship, there are many people who are quick to adopt teachers as soon as they meet them. Soon after that, however, they start to criticise and despise the teacher. This happens because, in choosing our teachers, we do not consider whether they're suitable for us or not, or whether they have the qualifications that we seek in a perfect teacher.

Such inconsistency is not only considered an obstacle for one's spiritual practice, but also in making friends with other people. If we have this kind of mind where we can easily make a friend of anyone, then just as easily change our minds and criticise that person, this can be a cause of trouble.

Another cause is that, in the past, we haven't put great importance on choosing the practice that is most suited to our needs – one which suits our own mental capacity, interests and predisposition, and is truly beneficial and effective for us. Rather, we always showed interest in learning about something new and different. For example, someone may be fond of spiritual teachers who emphasise cultivating love, compassion and a good heart towards other beings – emphasising the importance of ethics, such as refraining from giving harm to other

beings. But later, they may hear somebody teaching some profound philosophical view of emptiness, and become more fascinated with the concept of emptiness. Because of this, they lose interest in the teaching that emphasises love and compassion, and also diminish their daily practice of love and compassion.

If we give up the spiritual practice that suits our minds, which completely makes sense to us, and through which we are capable of making some progress – if we give this up and begin something else, we cannot make any progress. Therefore, having such an attitude in the past is said to be a cause of not being able to make progress in any meditation practice or retreat we undertake.

Therefore, as instructed here:

Hereafter let's act with complete self-awareness,
Exerting great care in the way we make friends.

If we see this teaching in a spiritual context, we have to take great care in adopting a spiritual friend, or teacher. After adopting a spiritual teacher try not to your change mind but, to the best of your ability, fulfill the teacher's spiritual advice. This is important because without keeping a specific spiritual teacher in mind, it is possible that we may get very confused about which spiritual practice to do. If we always change our spiritual teacher, ultimately, even if we have contact with many teachers, we cannot identify any particular person as our teacher, and cannot choose which practice to do.

As said before, the best practice is the one most suited to your own spiritual needs and temperament. If the teachings of the lower scope of the stages of the path – like the teaching on death and impermanence – seem suitable and makes sense to you, it is important to make sure that your understanding of that part of the teachings, and the practice of that teaching, never deteriorates. Because you find the impermanence meditation to be the most effective for you, even if your spiritual teacher says to learn the teaching on emptiness and do the emptiness meditation, it doesn't mean you have to give up the other practices you have been making progress in and have a great interest in. Rather, take this advice from the teacher as something to add to the practice you have been doing. You can then make progress in your practice. Otherwise, you would have to keep giving up what you have been practising, whenever you were advised to do something new or different.

Just as finding the right spiritual teacher and forging a good relationship with that teacher is important for our spiritual development, forging good friendships with others is also important if we want to find more happiness. No matter how strong a sense of independence we may have, in reality we depend on the support of other people. We suffer greatly when we are not treated well by other people, especially our friends. We also find it difficult to face problems when there is no one to come and help us. But if we are having a difficult time and a friend comes and spends some time listening to our difficulties, it can help us.

Most of us appreciate good friendships. Therefore, we should seriously think about how to establish harmony

in our relationship with others. The qualities required to establish a good friendship are not only to be found in others; we must also have to possess those qualities. If we don't have these qualities, but instead have negative, unpleasant qualities, no one is going to make friends with us.

On the other hand, when we think of all the good qualities that we could cultivate in a friendship and the qualities that we would like in a friend, we also have to accept the fact that no one is perfect. This does not just mean others – you yourself are not perfect. In choosing a friend, while we see many qualities that lead us to befriend that person, that same person may also have many negative habits. We do not have to be influenced by these negative habits. Some teachings say we have to abandon evil friends. This does not mean that you should actually abandon that person, or label that person as evil. Rather, we have to abandon is the bad side of that person.

For example, you might meet a very good person who is an alcoholic. Of course, you don't have to reject that person, but you do not have to accept the habit of drinking. Even if your friend encourages you to drink, you do not have to drink. If you do this, you know where you stand in the friendship and, even though your friend is an alcoholic, you can make that friendship last for your whole life and remain a non-drinker. If, however, you are not skilful with a new friend who is an alcoholic, within a day you can end up with the same drinking habit.

The most important thing in improving our relationships with others is improving ourselves, because if we have a serious problem in our manner or attitude, we cannot solve problems that arise in our relationships. Also, just as it is important in our relationship with the spiritual teachers, we should not change our attitude towards worldly friends easily. We should not be quick to adopt friends, or quick to change our minds. If we do, then even if we meet with hundreds of people over many years, there is not one person we can call a friend and with whom we have established a good relationship. But if we have developed the good skill of making friends with others and sticking with them, over a period of time we will have more and more friends in our lives.

Basically, in our friendships we should try to learn only good qualities, while avoiding picking up negative ones. If you do this, whether that friendship lasts forever or finishes after a short time, you know that from that friendship you have gained good qualities. However, if we do the opposite, when the friendship finishes not only does this hurt our minds, but it leaves us with bad qualities. This is something else we have to think about.

We will stop the teaching here, and we will chant the Buddha's mantra for seven times. As before, sit in the meditation posture and again relax the mind and body, focusing the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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