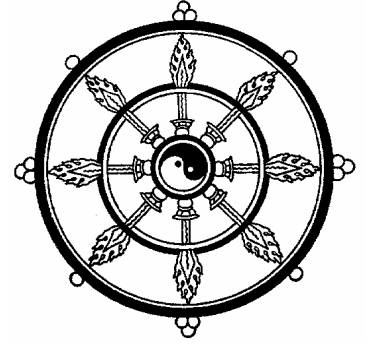

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ཨོ ལྷོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



3 March 1999

First, we shall do a breathing meditation together. Choose the most comfortable sitting posture and fully relax your body.

Then try to get rid of all thoughts of external objects. Regardless of whether they are good or bad thoughts, try to get rid of them. As we do this, we shall experience a deeper state of mind that is at peace, and not affected by any of these external thoughts. Then we start this breathing meditation, focusing the mind just on the outgoing and incoming breath.

Think about whether we are achieving anything from our continuous and varied activities, and whether we are gaining any satisfaction from them. Our fundamental goal up until now, and what progress we have made, has been to achieve happiness and to minimise or eliminate the suffering in our life. Considering the amount of effort and time that we have spent in pursuing some sort of satisfaction and purpose in our life, it makes us wonder whether in fact we should have accomplished our goals by now. Surely we should be feeling some sense of satisfaction in achieving some purpose in our life?

Instead of satisfaction however, we feel that as far as our fundamental goals go, we have not achieved anything. We still do not feel any sense of satisfaction that we have made a good success of our life. Why does success in terms of material wealth, possessions, qualifications, education not bring satisfaction? Why do these successes not serve as a source of happiness in our life? There seems to be gap between the actions that we are doing and our achievements, and what we truly want.

It is said that if we think about the teaching by the famous Indian teacher, Shantideva, we can understand why this is the case. Shantideva said that although we do not want any problems or suffering, we are continuously creating the causes of suffering. What we really want is happiness, but due to some form of ignorance in our mind we are continuously destroying the causes of happiness.

This is a clear indication that there are some everyday actions that are not skilful, and which are influenced by some sort of ignorance. Even if they result in problems, we always think that our actions are a cause to bring more happiness or a good result. However our actions do not seem to bring good results. Therefore, we have to consider why we are not finding lasting happiness and peace, and always finding endless problems.

It is important to examine whether the causes of our problems are external or internal. If we examine very clearly, we can see that the main causes are in fact internal. We can understand that to a large extent it depends upon our mental attitude - the way we view situations. When we

view a situation in a certain way, it seems that we have more tolerance in the sense that we do not regard very problematic situations as being a problem, and we are more positive about the whole situation. We are more positive about it in the sense that we appreciate all the good conditions we have in our life, for instance the fact that we have enough food and drink. Material comforts like these are held to be the source of happiness. So with a positive way of thinking we can feel good about those things.

Conversely, if we have a very negative way of thinking, then everything becomes very hard for us. For instance, if you face some difficulty, even if it is very minor, it can bring a lot of worries and stress to your mind; it appears to be very serious to you. On top of this, if you have a wrong way of thinking, everything we experience in life is miserable. We cannot see any reason to feel happy or positive about our life. It is as if our mind is blind. Even if we are surrounded by good things - friends, wealth, etc. - we don't recognise them. What we understand here is that it is our own mind, and its way of thinking that shapes our perceptions of our environment.

It is important to understand that if we want to bring more happiness and peace to our life, we really have to understand our mind very well. We have to try to overcome this ignorance within our mind, and overcome our negative ways of thinking.

Try to think that in fact you now are in a very good situation as far as putting these spiritual teachings into practice. Why? Because whatever actions you have done in the past, whatever you have experienced as a result of those actions in the past, you understand how fortunate you are right at this moment. Whatever happened in the past, you still a healthy human being, with a life endowed with freedom and all the suitable conditions. Also your mind has knowledge, reasoning power and wisdom, and you can see causes and effects very clearly. So it is important to try to generate some sort of strong motivation to calm one's mind.

It makes a lot of difference if we can understand our mind as the main source of happiness and the means of solving problems in life. With this understanding, we try to overcome the view that the source of problems and happiness is external. An example of this type of thinking that establishing good relationships with others, and gaining their friendship, will solve all your problems and bring true happiness". Another example is thinking of any kind of external object as a source of happiness, which will rid you of all the problems in your life. We have to learn from our own experience that if the happiness and peace you want to *secure* can be offered by other people, then there is no reason why it is not being offered by your friends, your relatives, all those who have close feelings towards

you.

The true peace and happiness that we seek in life is not external and it is not something that can be bought, or something that we can receive from others. Of course we can see that there is some form of pleasure and happiness that we experience from external objects or causes or conditions. However, when we think about the nature this external happiness and pleasure it is very impermanent, just like a rainbow. It can disappear at any moment and we have no control over it, since the cause is beyond our reach.

Therefore, if we try to understand that the true means of finding happiness is calming our mind, and enjoying a very positive state of mind. We will also find that the best and most effective force with which we can overcome our problems is also within ourself. It is our own courage and strong, positive motivation that we cultivate within our mind. We should also understand that everybody will face some difficulty or problems in life. It is inevitable. Whether or not these difficulties become a real problem also depends on your own way of thinking, your own inner ability to handle that situation. We should also remember that His Holiness, the Dalai Lama has said that throughout his life he has found that the best experience, and the one which gave him tremendous knowledge and understanding, was when he faced the hardest times of his life.

So when we face some difficult problem, we can reduce that problem by generating more courage, and more endurance within ourself. If you think, you can see that the problem situation is also offering an opportunity to learn and experience something new, which other circumstances have not offered. Often people undergo a lot of hardship in their life. They become toughened and it is almost as if nothing can ever bring misery or suffering to their life. Whereas there are other people who always have a very easy life. Friends, wealth, business - everything is going fine. Then suddenly something goes wrong in their life. When that happens, the problem can overwhelm their mind and they cannot cope. As a result of this, the problem leaves a black mark in their mind, and it is very hard for such people to overcome their problems. So therefore the emphasis is on our mind and the way we view situations.

The reason why developing some tolerance, courage and determination is important is because without these qualities we cannot extricate ourselves out of problems. This is so important because that no matter what you are -whether you are a business person, a farmer, a meditator -there is always a time when you face problems. So you have to understand beforehand that you need this inner strength and courage, and you need the correct way of thinking. You need to know that you do not want an ignorant mind to lead you. Rather, you want some correct way of thinking to guide you.

If you have a positive and correct state of mind, then the problems that you face cannot put you into a state of hopelessness, depression, and so on. More important than anything else, more than the support we receive from friends, relatives and other people, is our inner strength and courage.

Furthermore you have to know this right way of thinking. Otherwise, even if you follow meditation practice all you may see are problems in pursuing your practice. You become confused about finding about the right place, and worrying about having enough food and drink; so many problems will arise. However if you understand, you can

reduce these kinds of problems by generating more courage and strength from your side, and a more positive way of thinking.

Just before this teaching I saw a news report on the television. It was a brief coverage of a very old lady, who looked about the same age as myself. She looked a very contented, happy lady, even though her house was old and dilapidated, with a very small backyard. She was showing the reporter the tomatoes that she grows in her backyard. Her face expressed a lot of joy and happiness despite the worn condition of the house. I mention this because we can see from television and from real situations how some people live very happily in very poor and basic living conditions. So we can learn from our own experience and from observing other peoples lives that it is not external conditions, but the internal ones that determine whether life is happy or unhappy.

At one stage, that old lady just relaxed herself in a chair as if she was meditating - eyes shut, hands resting. I was not sure what was going on in the mind of the reporter at the time, if he was wondering whether that this old lady's mind was alright or not. But to me, this is the kind of lady who knows how to relax, and to be at peace.

So it seemed like she was living alone in a remote place and her only companion was a dog, which did not have a luxury kennel. There was a shopping trolley in front of her house, and if you stepped outside of her front yard, there was no proper road, just dust. It was a harsh area. It reminded me of the way some hermits live in Dharamsala in India, alone and in harsh areas. Of course the old lady could be a hermit because you can't judge a person from their external appearance. Whatever, she was living in her own kind of world where she was full of peace and happiness. Obviously the peace and happiness she has found is not because of external factors. Rather it is something that she has cultivated, and found within herself.

So if you think about life from the point of view of our fundamental desires - peace and happiness - she has got it. Even if externally there is not much accomplishment or development, it doesn't matter because you have fulfilled the purpose of your life. So we can learn these things by observing other people.

We will stop the teaching here, and chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. So please be seated again in the meditation posture, fully relaxing your body and bringing the mind inward, and then we try to focus our mind on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from the tapes by Mary-Lou Considine

Edited by Adair Bunnnett

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