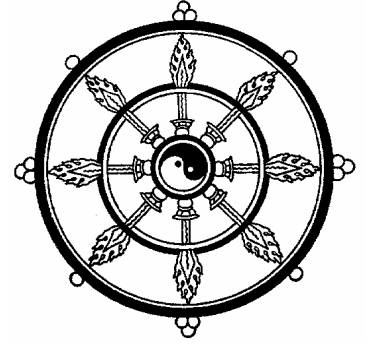

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

འོ་སྤྱོད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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First we shall do a breathing meditation. Choose the most convenient sitting posture for yourself, and fully relax your body.

More important than this physical discipline of posture however, is the mental discipline of meditation practice. When we talk of finding real peace and happiness, it is dependent on our mind being away from all our busy daily activities, and resting in a state of peace. In other words, even if we physically put aside all busy activities, noises and so on, if our mind is not free from the influence of those activities, then we defeat the purpose of sitting in this meditation posture. Therefore after assuming the meditation posture try to withdraw the mind inward.

Having brought the mind inward by removing all outgoing thoughts, then we begin a breathing meditation. The focus of our mind in breathing meditation is on the outgoing and incoming breath, and making sure that no outer distractions interfere with this meditation.

In general, there are a lot of benefits if we practice meditation. Whenever we practice meditation we always have to remember the main tools which can make this practice very effective and so make more progress. There are two main tools - mindfulness and alertness.

Meditation is familiarising our mind with a chosen object, and focussing the mind on that object. To sustain this object in the mind with single pointed concentration on that object, we always have to be mindful of the object. If our mindfulness begins to weaken and diminish, then this means the meditation will also diminish.

Along with mindfulness is the other tool of alertness, which is making sure that the mind stays on the object, with no other distraction or other interference to your meditation practice.

We can compare practising meditation with driving a car. Driving is not just a matter of holding your hands on the steering wheel. You have to concentrate in order to prevent accidents and to arrive at the right destination. You really have to use your eyes, focussing not only on the road but paying attention to all directions, watching out in case other drivers make mistakes. You have to be very alert.

Alertness in meditation practice is similar. We must remain alert in the meditation; otherwise we shall not notice when obstacles arise. Without being alert to them

these obstacles can impair our meditation practice.

There is also a story that many of you may have heard in the past, but it is worth repeating. Once there was a fight between a skilful archer and a swordsman. The swordsman was winning because every time the archer fired an arrow, the swordsman used his sword to deflect it. This went on until the archer had only one remaining arrow. At this point the archer's girlfriend came to the archer and said, "Wait a minute". She put make-up on her body and then appeared where only the swordsman could see her. As soon she saw the archer's girlfriend, her beauty seduced the swordsman and his mind was distracted. At that moment the archer used his last arrow which went through the body of the swordsman. As swordsman was dying, he said with his last breath: "I was not killed by the enemy, but was killed by the loss of my mindfulness and alertness." This reminds us that those with an intelligent mind should always rely upon mindfulness and alertness.

We shall now continue our discussion on the thought transformation text *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to Verse 49, which we discussed last week. The last line of that verse reads,

Oh what relief that I have conquered this doubt!

Using this exclamatory word 'Oh' implies that you realise that you have gained some totally new knowledge. What is that totally new knowledge? It is the realisation that you are really your own number one enemy. You are the number one destructive force in your life because of this self-cherishing attitude, which you can now recognise within yourself. This realisation is a wonderful one, because up until now you always thought the other way. You mistakenly viewed this selfcherishing mind as something which protected you, and which secured the peace and happiness you wanted.

When we do not understand the negative influence of this self-cherishing mind has on all the events in our life, we allow this self-cherishing mind to direct our actions. Then we cannot see any faults or shortcomings that this mind brings to our life.

If we check very thoroughly and deeply, then we can see that this self-cherishing mind is the source all our unwanted problems. It is the reason why you now have enemies when you did not have any in the past; it is the reason why your friends become your enemies and even your good relationships with others are now in trouble. If you check on your life you will also see that this self-cherishing mind is even the reason why we have

happiness in our mind at one moment, and in next moment it is replaced with sadness and unhappiness. If we check we can understand that all our problems stem from the self-cherishing mind.

Recognising that all blame lies with the self-cherishing mind, it is a great wonder in the sense that in the past we always believed that we were perfect. If we had some fault we tried to cover it up as much as possible. In some very rare instances we even tried to blame the cause of our problems onto other people and outer conditions. When we look back at our past, there are not many moments when we pointed the finger at ourselves as the cause of our problems.

So now is the time to feel very positive. Somehow you have gained this understanding of the real cause of your problems by meeting with these spiritual teachings through the kindness of the teachers. By putting these teachings into practice you are able gain this understanding, and so you are able to say: "What a relief that I have conquered this doubt about the cause of my problems. They are caused by my self-cherishing mind."

As I have said many times in the past, we never think that there is any fault in a self-cherishing mind. It is so deeply rooted that despite our practice we still cannot completely accept that the self-cherishing mind is the absolute cause of all our problems. So you can see how essential it is to conquer this doubt.

It is important to try to develop an understanding of the shortcomings of the self-cherishing attitude, and of the advantages of cherishing other beings. It is just a matter of giving some thought to this issue. We are instructed here to think beyond external things, and to focus our attention on our own mind trying to get a clear picture of what is in our mind. Then we can understand the difference we can make to our life by correcting our mental attitude.

It is important to discern the mental attitude that you display to other people. This understanding is, as I said before, just a matter considering the very simple fact of how we feel when some other person shows this strong self-cherishing mind. We begin to dislike that person. We do not like those who are only interested in themselves, and who always want positive experiences for themselves but never any losses. You can see how people with such a strong selfish attitude have problems in getting along with others and finding any friends, or even just a companion.

Would we like it if we are in the same position as those very self-centred, self-minded people who have to spend most time by themselves because they are such a difficult person? Of course not. We do not want to find ourself in that situation because our nature is a very social one. We enjoy the companionship of others even with such simple activities as eating, or going out somewhere with a good companion.

The wealthy, who have everything, appreciate the warm friendship of other beings. If you were very well off, your life would be very miserable if there were no other people who sincerely liked you. A wealthy person would

have more satisfaction when their wealth was utilised by those they consider as friends. Likewise, when in a state of poverty, we look for some support and companionship from others.

It is important to be clear in our mind about what brings happiness to our life. There are two causes - external causes and internal causes. We have to focus on the internal factor that brings happiness to our life. That internal factor is trying to develop more positive, wholesome mental attitudes within ourselves. To do this it is most important to try to diminish this self-cherishing mind. This is because the self-cherishing mind makes our life difficult for both other people and ourselves.

If you say, "This is mine" about your belongings, you are sending a message to other people that "you can't touch this", "you can use this", or "there are some restrictions in how you may use this". It is very narrow offer, compared to the use of "ours". Saying "these are our belongings", is very broad compared to saying "my belongings".

Basically all the other people that we interact with in our daily life have an intelligent mind that clearly senses what we are doing to them. They understand it if we show some gesture of some respect for their opinions and their needs because we have given some thought about their needs. You feel the same when someone does this to you.

You appreciate it and you always try to remember this feeling of gratitude. We feel grateful because we know that the other person cares about us. Understanding this, it then becomes natural that our self-cherishing attitude is diminished and we establish better relations with others. Then there is more mutual benefit for all of us.

That is the end of the teaching tonight. Now we shall chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. As we did at the beginning of this session, could we sit in the meditation posture, relaxing the body and calming the mind? Then we use the sound of the mantra as the object on which to concentrate.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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