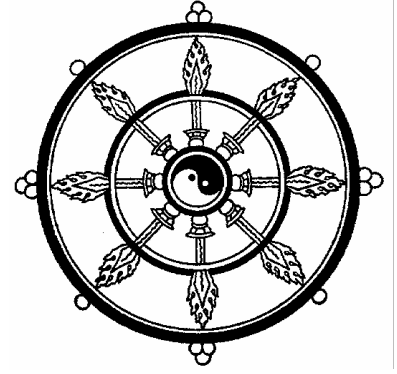


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཨྲ སྤྱིང་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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First, as usual, we will do a few minutes breathing meditation together. It is important to fully relax your body, and choose the most comfortable sitting posture.

We must realise that doing meditation practice is more than just an opportunity to find a few moments of physical or mental rest. Rather, the aim of your meditation practice should be to gain some control over yourself - especially your mind - as well as to develop a positive mental attitude. It should also make you more aware of your thinking, so that your thoughts can have a more beneficial influence on your actions.

Meditation practice can free the mind from the influence of overpowering and uncontrolled thinking. We have to see why it is important that our minds are not overpowered their usual unruly, disturbing thought patterns. For instance, we can observe how even a minor cause can become a source of great problems and difficulties, which are caused by our unending thought processes. If you look at it, in the beginning there is only one thought, which can become a burden by disturbing the mind. The initial thought leads to the next thought and, as we progressively generate more such thoughts, the mind perceives the problem to be bigger and bigger. We should try to prevent these unruly thoughts from always controlling our mind. This is what we should aim to achieve when we practise meditation.

After relaxing the body, we should try to bring the mind fully inward by removing all outgoing thoughts. Next, we should focus the mind single-pointedly on the in- and out-breath, not letting any other thought distract the mind from the breath.

We will continue the commentary on the thought transformation text called *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. Last time, we finished halfway through verse 53. Now we will move on to the last two lines, which say:

Tear out the heart of this self-centred butcher
Who slaughters our chance to gain final release!

When it says, "tear out the heart of this self-centred butcher", the text is referring to the two enemies: the mind of self-grasping of a person; and the self-cherishing mind. It is advising us to strike and kill these two enemies. Metaphorically, these two minds of self-grasping and self-cherishing are like two enemies with swords dwelling in the centre of our heart, ready to strike us and destroy our happiness.

Of course, first we need to know exactly what these self-grasping and self-cherishing attitudes are. Without going

into detail, the text is saying that deep within us lies the true source of our problems, the true source of our suffering. It is good to use our own experience to understand the cause of our problems.

For example, the immediate cause of our suffering may be someone saying something undesirable to us, or having a disagreeable expression on his or her face. No matter how small the cause is, if it is not desirable to the mind, it can be an immediate cause of our unhappiness.

We can also think about the times when, without any obvious reason, we can feel depressed or sad. Even though we do not know the cause, we feel as though something is missing. There is also the problem of feeling dissatisfied. No matter how many opportunities we have for enjoyment, we are still not satisfied. In fact, there are many times when we find it difficult to be at peace.

If we think about the times when we experience problems, suffering or restlessness, the causes are not something external, something we can point to and say "that is the cause". Rather, the feeling comes from within us. It is important to understand that the true source of all our problems lies within. At least then we can put less blame on external things, and stop saying that our problem is because of such and such a person, or such and such an external object.

According to the great Indian master and practitioner, Shantideva, there is no true peace and happiness for all beings within this worldly existence. He says that they cannot keep happiness for even a short period of time - let alone for a longer time - because their true enemies are right in the centre of their hearts.

So, the next step is to try and identify these true enemies within us. What are these two? What clue about their existence can you find within yourself? One clue to the existence of the self-cherishing mind is that we always have a concern for our own happiness, a concern that is one-sided, just for our self. We disregard the needs or happiness for other beings. This attitude may look like a self-protective mechanism, but is in fact self-destructive. It is an obstacle to achieving the things we want.

We should try to recognise that this self-cherishing mind not only brings harm to our own lives, but also to the lives of many other beings. Because the self-cherishing mind thinks only of oneself, it totally ignores the well-being of others. This self-cherishing mind is a source of unhappiness because the result of any action we undertake out of this mind brings the opposite of what

we want. Because the self-cherishing mind is seeking peace and happiness for oneself, it causes us to think completely about ourselves and do actions that may bring unhappiness to other beings, or disturb their minds. We cannot find any real peace and happiness as a result of any action that causes harm to other beings.

Why does this self-cherishing mind manifest within us? It is because of some kind of negative force within the mind. We have this strong self-centred mind, not because of outer causes, but because of a force within us that gives rise to that mind. The only way to combat that negative force is to cultivate a positive force that directly opposes the self-centred mind. This positive force is the mind of benefiting or helping other beings - the mind that thinks of others' needs, that thinks about their problems and suffering. Not only do we need to think about this, we also need to cultivate a genuine wish for others to be free of suffering.

This mental attitude of thinking about the needs of the others, and sincerely wishing them to be free of any kind of suffering is what we call compassion. We can also cultivate the mental attitude of wishing others to have happiness and joy. Such a mental attitude is called loving kindness.

Even though you are one person, the influence of your self-cherishing mind can cause unhappiness to yourself and many other beings. At the same time, by cultivating love and compassion in their mind, one person has the potential, not only to secure peace and happiness in their own life, but also to extend it to many others. As much as possible, we should try to see the destructiveness of the self-cherishing, selfish mind within us, and see the benefits of cherishing others, of cultivating love and compassion for others. Try to see that the love and compassion that we generate, or that we already have within us, is the true protection for happiness in our future life - protecting us from taking an unfortunate rebirth, and so on.

By practising meditation, we can make progress to the point where we can replace the self-cherishing or self-centred mind with the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta - perfect, universal love and compassion. The practice begins with developing a true appreciation of the faults of the self-cherishing mind on the one hand, and of the qualities and benefits of love and compassion on the other.

As said before, we should try to relate all the problems that arise in the mind - such as our continual dissatisfaction - to this self-cherishing mind. Geshe-la says he mentioned this to someone discussing the problem of drug and alcohol addiction. At the later stages of addiction, it can become so difficult to overcome that, professionally, it is recommended to administer the drug to the addict.

However, if you go back to the initial cause, the person had a choice, and may have initially tried the drug in the hope of finding a new experience, of bringing a new dimension or pleasure into their life. We can see that in developed societies there are many opportunities for people to experience enjoyment - food and drink, travel,

many types of desirable experience. If you have done all of these, you might think that what you haven't done is to try a heavy drug. Initially, you might think it is just for fun, for something different, or you might be influenced by a friend.

Whatever the outer reason, the real reason is that you are in search of some sort of pleasure, because you think that your normal experience is not fulfilling. Therefore, it is important to relate this to the self-cherishing mind.

We'll finish the teaching here and, as usual, spend a few minutes chanting the Buddha's mantra. Could everyone again sit in a meditation posture, relax the body, bring the mind inward, and focus the mind on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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