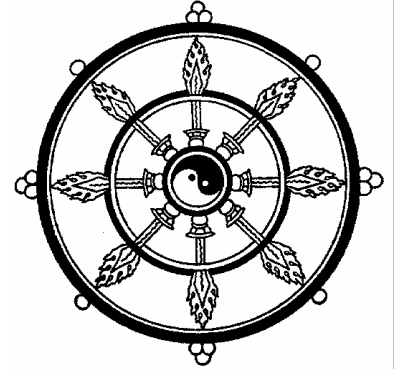


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

འདྲེན་སྐྱོད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



30 June 1999

First, we will do some breathing meditation. Choose the most convenient posture, making sure that your body is fully relaxed. Then generate the motivation of doing this meditation to discipline or gain control over the mind. You want your mind to be stable, calm and fully under your control, so that it can function in the way you want it to.

The first thing you should do before beginning the meditation is to bring the mind fully inward. This is done by getting rid of all thoughts of external objects, which normally cause your mind to wander, rather than staying focused within. However, when the mind is brought inward, it still needs an object on which to focus. So, once you have brought the mind inward, immediately direct it to the breath, using the breath as an object on which your mind can rest. After this, try to prevent any thoughts that distract your mental focus from the breath.

To quote from the thought transformation text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*, verse 59:

With comparative ease, we develop new friendships,
Yet since we are callous, not one of them lasts.
We are filled with desire for food and fine clothing,
Yet failing to earn them we steal and we scheme.

The meaning of these lines is quite clear – we should not be too quick to form relationships with others and, similarly, we should not be too quick to end them. When the text says 'develop new friendships', this can be taken to mean different types of friendships – for example, teacher and student, or guru and disciple. In this case, our attitude should be to not cultivate such a friendship too quickly, without checking properly.

We can also talk about friendship in terms of partners. If you do not thoroughly check the person you are making some sort of friendship with in the beginning, the friendship may be intense, but afterwards when the friendship ends, you may not even want to look at that person. In relation to choosing a friend, the famous Sakya master, Sakya Pandit, said that it is very rare to find someone who possesses all the positive qualities, and someone who possesses none.

We must know the best way to form and maintain a relationship. First, we need to understand that we depend on each other, in the same way that a spiritual teacher depends on his or her students. The teacher must have the right students in order to pass on his or her knowledge and experience. Likewise, the student must find a teacher who possesses more qualities and more

knowledge than he or she has.

As ordinary sentient beings, our happiness and survival depend on others. Therefore, there is no doubt that whoever you form a friendship with should be the right person. We have to change our approach to choosing a friend. When we are young, this approach is external. When we see someone with a beautiful face, we become attracted and may consequently make friends with him or her.

When we do this, we are not taking the time to consider that person's good and bad sides. Often, we lack an understanding of another's true nature. Due to this, our relationship with a person can end quickly, as soon as we see a fault that we do not like or do not agree with. So you should make an effort to understand the other person, to get to know them, before entering a friendship with them. Then, you should put time and effort into maintaining your relationship with them.

If we look at the right way to make a friend, there are many factors to consider. As said before, we must know someone well before becoming friends. If, after thinking about the person, you are still fond of them, it means that you've seen some good qualities, something in that person that pleases you. Likewise, the other person may have thought about you and also found good reason to like you.

After you have become friends, you have a responsibility to maintain and stabilise this joy, this foundation that you have established. What is the right way to maintain a friendship? It is important to adopt the right view – that, like yourself, your friend is not perfect and has faults. As long as you have faults in your own mind, no matter who you befriend, you will see faults. And as long as you have faults, you will never meet another person who is totally free of faults. Therefore, you have to see your friend as being like yourself, as a person who has both strengths and weaknesses.

In a good friendship, you should keep in mind that your friend is prone to undesirable actions. Then, if your friend does something unskillful or harmful, you can try your best to remember that such behaviour is possible, and that the best response is patience and tolerance. When someone is influenced by anger or confusion, their mind is not stable or happy. If you understand that friend's behaviour under such circumstances, you can respond by helping them to overcome emotional instability, or at least not make the situation worse.

We should also consider what it is in a person that we should befriend. We should be friends with that person's positive qualities, in the sense that we should try to emulate those qualities. On the other hand, we should not be influenced by their negative side. As said before, the person you befriend will have both faults and good qualities. Because you spend a lot of time around your friend, you have to try and learn their good qualities, and try not to pick up their bad ones. Then, whether you spend your entire life with that person or not, your time with them will have benefited you.

If you do not do this, they could adversely influence you. For example, if your friend has a short temper, you could become the same as that person after being with them for a while, even if you had been different beforehand. If your friend has a habit of speaking harshly or using swear words, you could also become like that.

It is also important that you try, as much as possible, to develop loving kindness and a compassionate attitude towards your friend. This compassionate attitude should be the reason that you feel close to your friend, the reason to love them. On the other hand, you should reduce strong, desirous, emotional attachment. Emotionally, you can become so attached to a person that your joy and happiness will depend on them, and you have a strong desire for them.

In most cases, a relationship starts with two people strongly desiring each other. For the relationship to last, however, instead of increasing your desire, you have to replace it with more love, more mutual benefit, support, and care for each other. The true meaning of being friends is to help and support each other in times of need – when the other person is unhappy or experiencing stress from work or some other cause.

When everything is fine, neither of you will need help from each other. But one of the major causes of problems in relationships is that we are not able to support our friends in times of need. Instead of supporting them, we simply feel threatened. For example, when a friend comes home or comes to you with a problem, you feel that your inner peace and happiness is threatened. When they get angry, you feel you cannot accept it, so you get annoyed and also get angry, not helping your friend at all. Furthermore, you blame the problem onto your friend's angry nature, which is not an honest response.

Essentially, the practice of the law of karma is about being honest with other human beings, honest with your friends. If you are honest, just as you see problems of anger and so on in your friend, you will see the same problems within yourself. It is not right to speak openly about the problems of others if you have problems yourself. Normally, it is hard for us to recognise our own faults. But if we could recognise all our faults, we could understand other beings better.

Geshe Doga says that whenever people ask him about choosing a friend, like a boyfriend or girlfriend, he may tell them to go with that man or woman. But he also tells them that whether or not the relationship will last depends entirely on them. He is not able to tell them whether the decision is good or bad, but he does advise

them to consider it from their own side.

The next two lines say:

We are filled with desire for food and fine clothing,
Yet failing to earn them we steal and we scheme.

This is saying that we enjoy finding excellent food, clothing, power and so forth. However, we do not create the respective causes, particularly the internal causes of gathering merit from making offerings to the Three Jewels, or giving charity to the poor, etc. In fact, we do the contrary, like stealing things that belong to others. Even if we do not do that, our strong desires are never fulfilled, and we are kept busy with unfinished work. On top of this, as said in the two earlier lines on developing new friends, we are quick to make friends and quick to lose them. The text says that all this is caused by the self-cherishing mind within us. The root text goes on (note – 'him' refers to the self-cherishing mind):

Trample him, trample him, dance on the head
Of this treacherous concept of selfish concern.
Tear out the heart of this self-centred butcher
Who slaughters our chance to gain final release.

Once again, we will adopt the meditation posture, calm the mind and body, and chant the Buddha's mantra, making sure that the mind is single-pointedly focused on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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