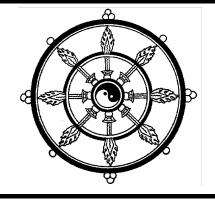
Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons" A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Samdup Tsering



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As usual, we will begin the teaching with a few minutes breathing meditation. Please make yourself comfortable in the sitting posture and relax every part of your body.

First, to get an idea about what we are trying to achieve and what we should be doing during meditation, we need to look at the object of our meditation practice. In the teachings it says that the object of our practice is internal and it is important that our mind is familiar with the object we choose for meditation. This familiarity can be achieved by just observing the object before we begin our meditation practice. If the object we are using is something visual, you can look at that object very closely and try to familiarize yourself with as much detail of it as possible.

Alternatively, we can become familiar with the object through listening to the teachings or studying the chosen object. Even if the object that you focus your mind upon during meditation is something physical, for instance a statue or painting, the object of your focus during meditation is an internal mental image. Therefore, it is important to have a clear mental image and recognition of that object to help the mind become familiar with it.

It is also important to take notice of the way we focus our mind on the object during meditation. The way we should focus is by dissolving our mind into the object, so that our mind and the object are as if one. It should not be like we are here and the object is there - as if the object was in the distance and there is a gap between our mind and the object. Instead, we should try to make the mind and the object the one entity, as much as we possibly can.

In order for our mind to fully focus on the meditation object, the mind must focus fully within. It is important to remove all distracting thoughts from the mind, because if we have distracted thoughts in our mind, we cannot properly focus the mind.

Therefore, whenever we begin our meditation practice in the physical meditation posture, it is important to get rid of all outgoing thoughts and completely settle our mind inward. Once we have brought the mind fully inward, we will do the breathing meditation for a few minutes, letting our mind focus on the movement of the in-breath and the out-breath.

As we did not discuss the text last week, we will continue this week's teaching with verse Sixty Three from the Wheel of Sharp Weapons, starting with the first few lines:

We promise to do many glorious deeds, Yet in practice we give others minimal help. When it says 'we promise to do many glorious deeds', the text is talking about all the glorious promises and vows we have taken and are supposed to safeguard and keep as part of our spiritual practice. When we take these vows, whether they are the Pratimoshka (Individual Liberation), Bodhisattva or Tantric vows, our motivation and intention is to generate the mind of Bodhicitta and, ultimately, to achieve the goal of full enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. It is like we are being witnessed by all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and enlightened beings when we take these vows.

If we think of the type of vow we have taken, our motivation for taking them, and from whom we have taken vows, we can see that we have promised ourselves to undertake a very great practice and accomplishing great deeds. However, if after taking these vows, we fall behind in our practice and completely disregard almost every single vow, this is what the first line of the verse is referring to.

We should only undertake more vows or commitments if we are prepared to devote more of our time towards practice. If we do not increase the practice or do not do the practice at all, then there is not much point or benefit in taking these vows and commitments. What is most important is putting the knowledge of the Dharma teachings into practice. We do not necessarily need to do a lot of study - commonsense tells us what we should and should not do, and tells us that certain actions can be either beneficial or harmful to ourselves and to others.

It is said that the most beneficial and true spiritual practice is one that can enhance or increase positive mental attitudes and actions. This is most easily achieved if we simply put into practice what our commonsense tells us. We can simply and naturally develop more loving compassion and kindness towards other beings, for example. It doesn't matter whether or not you consider yourself to be a spiritual believer, or have formally undertaken spiritual commitments or vows - the qualities of loving kindness and compassion begin to arise in our mind when we follow our common sense. You are making progress towards reaching the ultimate goal of full enlightenment, because you are getting closer to generating the Bodhicitta mind.

In the same way, we can also think of our practice in terms of increasing the ten virtuous actions and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions - which are not hard to remember and understand. It is very clear that there is enough knowledge and good in us to guide us in our practice and help us develop our spiritual progress.

On an everyday basis, we can put what we know about Dharma and the ten non-virtuous actions into practice and think about increasing the qualities of love and compassion within us, for other beings. In this way, what we are actually doing is performing true Dharma, with very positive actions. Ultimately, these actions will benefit us, both in this life and in our future lives.

Whatever spiritual path we chose, it is important that we carefully consider whether or not those teachings benefit us. Even if we already have a practice, we must make sure that we are receiving some benefit. Also, it is especially important to check if these teachings will benefit or help us in the worst times of our life, for instance, at the time of death, which we consider to be the worst thing that could happen to us. If we take these things into account, then we will see that the spiritual teachings can definitely provide some benefit in our everyday lives.

It is said that if you make good progress in your spiritual practice, then death should not necessarily be a frightening thing. Rather, death can be experienced with a very joyful mind. Through spiritual practice it is possible to meet death with the same feeling that a child has when meeting his beloved parents. Also, spiritual practice can help us to avoid regret or fear when we are dying. These are just some examples of the benefits of practicing the spiritual teachings.

It is important that we see the connection between what we learn about the spiritual teachings and the results of actually putting these teachings into practice. For example, in the Buddhist teachings there is strong and continuous emphasis on lessening desire or attachment towards objects such as our body, other people or material possessions. The way to bring lasting peace and happiness to our mind is to overcome our attachment or desire towards these objects. This makes a lot of sense when we think of the suffering, confusion and problems we go through when we have a mind of desire or attachment.

The cause of mental anguish or problems in the mind, such as frustration or anxiety, is usually related to unfulfilled desire and attachment in the mind. For example, if we do not have such attachment and desire towards our body and friends, we can at least have some notion of enjoyment, of lasting peace in our mind. We must not only get rid of this desire and attachment, but we should also try to cultivate a different state of mind or attitude to replace it with. What we need as a replacement is a mind of kindness and compassion towards others.

In saying that we should not become obsessed with things, the teaching is not suggesting we should throw away what we are attached to, or minimize the number of material possessions or friends we have. Also it is not saying that when we think of our body with attachment, we should degrade it or make it ugly. Instead, by replacing the mind of attachment with loving kindness, we might find that we have more friends and even become richer. These are things we can do right now as part of our spiritual practice.

One way of knowing and appreciating the benefit of spiritual beliefs and teachings is to consider that, when we come to the end of this life, all the external objects that support our life and give us security will be useless. When we get closer to death, the value of these things will fade. So ultimately there is a need to have some system of belief. Without such a belief system, all external things can fail to support us and we can feel very completely unhappy and hopeless, like there is nothing to turn to.

It doesn't matter what system or school of religion you follow because they all teach something beyond the value of material objects, like, for example, the concept of God. If you have some sort of belief system, then you have something to believe in when all external objects fail. Spiritual teachings can provide something to help you find peace and hope, so the experience of dying is not completely empty and frightening.

Now we will continue with the next few lines of the verse which say:

Our spiritual fame has been spread far and wide, Yet inwardly all of our thoughts are repulsive, Not only to gods but to demons and ghosts.

This is saying that no matter who a person is, whether a highly renowned Lama or Geshe, or a high reincarnation or scholar, when that person focuses attention on his own mind and deeds and finds many flaws and faults, they are not only repulsive to gods, but also to evil forces like demons. As explained earlier in the text, the root cause of this, and of our failure to fulfill the practices of our vows and commitments, is our self-cherishing mind.

The next few lines of the text support this by saying:

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.

We will leave the teaching here and as usual, we will chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. Please try to sit in the meditation posture, fully relaxing your body and letting go of all the distracting thoughts, letting the mind turn inward. When we begin chanting, try to focus the mind on the mantra without getting distracted by outer objects.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

Transcribed from the tapes by Rita Feldmann Edited by Rita Feldmann Edit checked against the tapes by Dianne McDonald Edited Version

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