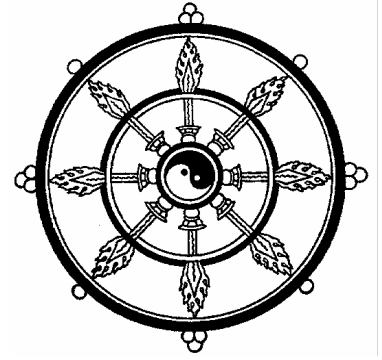


# Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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15 September 1999

We will begin with a short breathing meditation. Please adopt a relaxed sitting posture. Bring the mind inward by letting go of all outgoing thoughts. With the mind focused on the in-breath and out-breath, we will sit in this meditation for the next few minutes.

There are many benefits to integrating meditation practice into our everyday lives. The aim of our meditation, however, should always be to remove negative thoughts and develop positive thoughts within the mind. Meditation practice is not simply about finding a quiet place, and resting the mind. It is a matter of developing mental concentration and stability, as well as wisdom knowledge and clarity in the mind. It involves us being constantly aware of our thoughts so that we can recognise any negativities which, as part of our practice, we should eliminate. If, however, you identify your state of mind as being positive or beneficial, you should try to maintain it.

By understanding more about your mind, you can understand more about your own capabilities, strength, and potential. Sometimes we view ourselves in a very negative way. You may think back over your life and feel bad about it, rather than feeling positive. But just as we have many weaknesses and faults, we also have positive qualities. We may feel hopeless about our potential to achieve things, because we recollect the many jobs and other things that we have started but never completed or achieved. As a result, we think that we lack the ability to be successful. This affects our self-esteem and self-confidence.

If we lack confidence in our own self-potential and inner qualities, there is little chance of us getting it from others. We need to recognise our own positive inner qualities by understanding more about the positive potential of the mind. We need to acknowledge our own inherently good human nature. While it is important to identify our bad attitudes and deeds, we must also acknowledge our positive qualities - our good human nature and the mind's creative potential. Then, one can at least feel some hope about becoming a better person, and feel more confident about one's potential. When we develop an understanding of our potential and our good human nature, we can begin to think about how it can benefit us.

This good human potential can bring us more happiness and make us more self-sufficient. By believing in your own potential you can be more successful, because you are prepared to take on more responsibility. If you set yourself a goal, you have to be positive about your ability to reach that goal by yourself if you are going to achieve it.

Briefly, these are some of the benefits of practising meditation. Now, we will continue our discussion on the text called *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to verse 67, which reads:

We talk about theories and the most advanced teachings,

Yet our everyday conduct is worse than a dog's.

We are learned, intelligent, versed in great knowledge,  
Yet cast to the wind wisdom's ethical base.

Of course, this does not apply to everyone who claims to be a scholar or very learned. But some people claim to have superior realisations, or to be great experts in certain fields of knowledge, or masters of certain teachings. Yet, in the eyes of the world, the knowledge and realisations they claim to have do not accord with their outer deeds. To others, these people appear morally reckless. They are also careless about keeping promises, vows, or commitments.

For instance, they may continually engage in adultery or intoxicated drinking. If their outer deeds are immoral, it doesn't make sense for them to claim inner realisations. In fact, they do not actually possess the true knowledge or realisations they claim to have. To a large extent, a person's outer deeds reflect their state of mind. For example, you can tell when somebody is angry because they frown. Similarly, if the effect of a person's outer deeds is negative, then we can infer that the person is also inwardly immoral. As the verse says, these people are just 'casting to the wind' all their good deeds, which means that they are also casting away the sources of their happiness in this life and beyond this life.

The reason that people do this - that is, claim to have many inner qualities that they do not have, while their deeds actually contradict their claim - can be traced to the self-cherishing mind. The text continues:

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.

The main problem is our lack of skilful means and wisdom. Skilful means and wisdom refer to the two types of bodhicitta or bodhi mind - the conventional bodhi mind, and the ultimate bodhi mind. The conventional bodhi mind is the altruistic mind of enlightenment, which is basically a mind that thinks about the needs of others and of caring for others. When we lack such a thought, we commit many unskilful, negative actions. The ultimate bodhi mind refers to the view or understanding of the ultimate truth of emptiness, of how things actually exist. Skilful means and wisdom are the most important qualities for making progress in our spiritual practice.

We will finish the teaching here. Geshe Doga wants to know if anyone has a question.

Student: Relating to the point Geshela made about self-confidence, is it just thinking about the qualities you have that's important in developing such confidence?

Answer: As we engage in meditation practice, we have to realise the good qualities lying within us. If we are able to

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see these qualities through meditation practice, then we can develop self-confidence. In ordinary life, one of the main reasons we lose interest in completing our work and any other responsibilities is that the mind is not there with our actions. If the mind paid full attention to our actions, letting nothing else distract it, our actions would be more productive and fruitful. As a result, we would feel more positive and develop more confidence in our abilities.

Meditation can help us develop concentration and mental control by concentrating the energy of the mind. When this energy is concentrated, whatever action you do will have more power because your mind is fully there with that action. It's like channelling water in one direction - the current will be a lot stronger.

When we practise meditation, we are trying to stabilise the mind so that we can have more control over it. Having recognised the mind's potential through meditation, we can apply this understanding by making sure the mind is always focused on our present actions.

For example, say that someone undertaking a course of study had some specific topic to cover as part of his or her course. Instead of learning about the topic step by step, or chapter by chapter, they might try to learn it all at once, without properly focusing on the first chapter, and moving on to the next chapter. Instead, they might just browse through all the chapters and feel - as some people have said to Geshe Doga - that the topic is too hard, and they may not finish the course. His suggestion is that you make sure you thoroughly understand the first chapter before going on to the next chapter. Then, you can proceed without having to worry about the previous chapter. In this way, you can be sure of passing the course.

It is important to approach study with a relaxed frame of mind. You have to expect to make progress step by step, rather than rapidly. If you are not relaxed about the course, before you finish it you will start thinking about doing another course. But when you go on to study the next course, because you didn't finish the first properly, you will think back to it. Thus, as you study, your mind is continually distracted and unfocused. So it is important to have the right frame of mind, even when you are studying or completing a course.

*Question:* In relation to skillful means, if my parents are about to kill some insects and I can't stop them - should I kill them myself?

*Answer:* Regarding your question - if your motivation to do that action for the other person is genuine bodhicitta, then it is a worthy and brave action, because with a true bodhicitta mind you say to yourself "I would rather go to hell myself than this other being". This type of bodhicitta motivation is very courageous. But being able to skilfully do such brave actions for other beings depends on your level of spiritual realisation. If you are a person with a high level of spiritual realisation, then undertaking such actions for other beings, even if they are negative actions, is a quick means of gathering merit.

In one of his earlier lives, the Lord Buddha once boarded a boat carrying 500 merchants. Among them was a merchant who held a grudge and wanted to kill the others. The Buddha perceived this person's motivation and the consequences of the action he was planning, and he felt compassion - not just for the merchants about to face death, but for the person who wanted to kill all the others. He saw

that the consequence of the action was to be born in the hell realms. So, out of his great compassion, he killed that person. This story is told to illustrate how Lord Buddha gathered enormous merit in order to achieve great enlightenment.

This story is about the Buddha killing one person to save the lives of many. In these days though, it is different. In order to protect one person, we kill thousands.

Sometimes, when you're trying to explain to others why you should not kill ants or mosquitoes or whatever, from their point of view what you are saying does not make any sense. From their point of view, you are completely crazy.

Of course, the cause of such actions comes back to the self-centred mind. You want to kill the ant or the mosquito because you can't bear it eating you or whatever. Geshe Doga says that even he sometimes gets angry when sees ants. You have to think that these ants have not come to harm you or to cause trouble, but they are just looking for food. If you were starving to death, you would go anywhere in search of food. Sometimes, if you try to cultivate an understanding of the true situation of the other beings, that helps to avoid negative actions and is of benefit to others.

Of course there are many such instances where you can't do much. The best you can do is feel compassion, feel sympathy and pity about it.

Another thing we can do is to generate prayers. Pray that, although the person doing such actions may lack enough understanding, compassion, and love at the moment, in future may they find love and compassion for all beings in their mind. You can even pray for your own actions. Right now, you feel some restraint, but if you think back to when you were a child, you may have killed other beings. Try to make the strong prayer "May I cultivate genuine compassion for all beings, and never commit such actions in the future". Thus, if we cannot benefit other beings directly, we can still benefit them indirectly by praying for their welfare. In this way, you benefit them.

If you truly believe that actions such as refraining from killing other beings are positive and worthy, you must realise that your understanding of this moral practice is because of your connection with the Buddha's teachings. You can use such instances to feel gratitude for the kindness of the Lord Buddha, and think of his qualities and the effect that the Buddha's teachings have had on oneself and on this world, in terms of promoting peace, and so forth.

We will finish the talk here, and as usual we will chant the Buddha's mantra for seven rounds. Once again, could people sit in the meditation posture, relax the body, and bring the mind inward. When we start chanting, we should single-pointedly focus the mind on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Rita Feldmann  
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