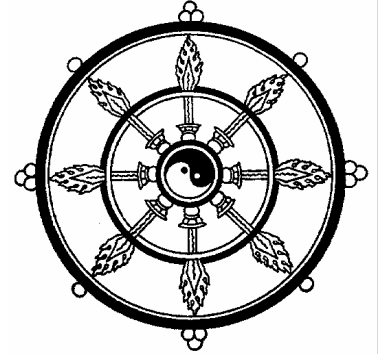


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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3 November 1999

Geshe Doga would like to begin with the usual breathing meditation. Please sit in the meditation posture, making sure that your body is fully relaxed and that you rest the mind inward by removing all distracting thoughts.

Then we will begin the breathing meditation, where we fix the mind on the in-breath and out-breath, trying not to be distracted and preventing any other thought or object from entering the mind.

We will continue with our discussion of the famous thought transformation text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to verse 73. The first two lines read:

Discarding our practice to reach liberation,
We drift about searching for pleasure or trade.

In these two lines, the main topic is the spiritual practice that we call 'Dharma'. The practice of Dharma is regarded as the path, or door, to the state of liberation. If we take into account the broader meaning of the term dharma, it means something that holds its own nature. From this point of view everything is dharma, because every phenomenon has its own unique characteristics or qualities.

But in the above context, the term refers to something that must be put into practice. We call it 'holy Dharma' or 'noble Dharma', which is really spiritual practice. If we interpret Dharma as being something that holds or maintains its nature, then in this sense we can understand it as being something that can 'hold' the mind. Specifically, it means any spiritual practice that directs the mind away from a negative way of thinking to a correct view or direction.

Because it relates to the mind, the practice of Dharma is something we must integrate internally. Dharma practice is about knowing the mind, and solving or eliminating problems through understanding and changing the mind. It is also about finding more happiness - having access to the happiness and peace within us through understanding and transforming the mind.

Therefore, when we practice Dharma, we must understand the mind and the various states of mind and emotions we continually generate. The main practice is mindfulness and alertness. If we develop these skills, naturally we will develop an understanding of the mind - the way it operates and the way it is connected to our actions. We can learn to relate the causes of the different situations we face in life to the mind.

Even though we generate many different types of

emotion, we can classify them into two types, depending on their outcomes:

1. Those states of mind that have a bad outcome and disturb the mind. They either cause stress depression, discouragement, or loss of self-confidence; or they drive us to carry out destructive actions that harm others as well as ourselves.
2. Those states of mind that bring inner peace and joy, which are evident to others and which lead to actions that help others. We can see that the thoughts behind such actions are positive.

These two states of mind - positive and negative - are opposite and mutually exclusive, in the sense that if we hold a positive state of mind, we cannot hold a negative one at the same time. So, even though our spiritual practice takes some effort and understanding, if it enables us to generate a positive state of mind, this will reduce the occurrence of negative states of mind. For example, the minds of attachment and of non-attachment are opposites.

Our different states of mind determine our feelings, as well as our actions of body, speech, and mind. So, we also need to be able to exert some control over our mental continuum. If we develop an understanding of Dharma and gain experience of integrating Dharma practice into our lives, we know that we will be able to solve many of the problems we face in life. We can see that, by applying the practice of Dharma, we are able to secure more peace and happiness.

However, when we examine the mind, we see many faults and negativities. Because there is so much negativity, we see that we have much work to do before being able to control our emotions. But we should not be discouraged about the practice of transforming the mind. Why not? Because the basic nature of the mind is flexible. No matter how much wrong we see in the mind, we know that it has the ability to adapt to new ways of thinking. It is not inherently fixed to negative thoughts. No matter how bad we think things are, the mind can always be trained, because the way it works at the moment is that it follows or is influenced by any type of thought. When the mind is presented with a positive object, it automatically goes after it. Likewise, it will also go after a negative object, if it is present.

If we can make an effort to train the mind and cultivate positive mental habits, this will enhance our feelings of happiness and peace. When peace and happiness arise in

you mind, you feel more positive about your life and whatever you want to achieve. The more we experience this inner peace and happiness, the more we will open up to our own courage, clarity, and positive states of mind.

It is good to gain some experience of inner peace and happiness through the practice of Dharma, and to see how this inner peace and happiness can make a difference to your outlook on life. If, through spiritual practice, you gain a positive experience of Dharma, it will motivate you to do more practice.

The line that says "Discarding our practice to reach liberation" refers to our discussion of how the holy Dharma is a worthy practice for us. Nevertheless, we ignore it, devoting our time instead to acquiring things, or working, or doing things for a temporary sense of pleasure. We devote all of our time to worldly activities, and not to listening or studying the teachings from the spiritual teachers, or making some time for our spiritual practice. The next half of this verse explains that the cause for us not to practise Dharma and to waste our life pursuing temporary pleasures is the self-cherishing mind.

We will stop the teaching here. Geshe Doga wonders if anyone has a question.

Q. What meditation can a person do who is very ill and not able to concentrate very well?

A. The answer is that you have to take into account the different obstacles associated with losing concentration in meditation. There are two main obstacles- we call them mental sinking and excitement.

Q. What if the person is suffering from a mental or physical disease?

A. That is a very difficult question to answer, because for someone with a mental disease it is extremely hard to concentrate, unless that person had become thoroughly familiar with meditation beforehand. If you were familiar with meditation before becoming ill, it would still be possible to do the practice, even if you were physically sick and undergoing severe pain. Because of your understanding of Dharma and of spiritual practice, it would be easier to cope. But it would be hard to teach someone undergoing extreme pain a new concept or something new, especially if that person did not have any faith in the practice. The physical pain can overtake one's concentration, making it very hard.

Geshe-Doga says he remembers once hearing the Dalai Lama tell his audience at a very long teaching that they should stretch their legs, because otherwise all their concentration would go into their knees! Strong physical pain can be a real obstacle to meditation.

If you can't concentrate on the object of meditation because your mind is strongly influenced by distractions, then you have to work to overcome those distractions before beginning your meditation practice. To do meditation practice well, your mind has to be focused fully inward. So, before beginning meditation, it is

important to spend some time watching your mind, identifying any negative thoughts and finding a way to remove them. Once your mind is fully relaxed inwards, it is easier to concentrate on the meditation practice.

Each mental distraction is caused by a particular type of delusion or afflictive emotion. Different meditation practices exist to counteract distractions, depending on the type of delusion. For instance, if you are continually distracted by attachment to some object whenever you sit in meditation practice, it is important to apply a specific meditation to counteract attachment or desire. For example, you can apply a meditation on the ugliness or unattractiveness of the object. After you have diminished the mind of attachment, you will find it easier to concentrate on the meditation object. Likewise, if the main cause of distraction is a disturbing thought about an external object or a vague sense of unease, breathing meditation is said to be very effective in removing such distractions.

We will finish this session here. As usual, we will chant the Buddha's mantra. Again, sit in the meditation posture and try to calm the mind inward, removing all outgoing thoughts and trying to focus the mind on the chanting of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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