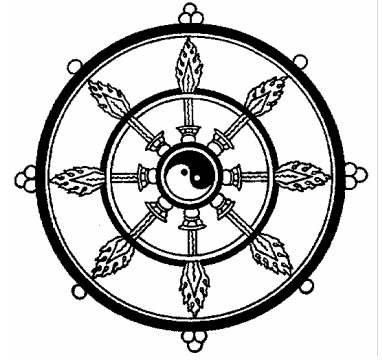


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ཨོ ལྷོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



9 February 2000

For the last six weeks we've had a teaching break while we've all been away. So first of all, Geshe Doga would like to say *Tashi delek* (which is 'good wishes' in Tibetan) to all - old friends and new. The English translation for *Tashi Delek* is auspiciousness (*tashi*), happiness (*de*) and goodness (*-lek*). We use the first syllables, *tashi*, to wish someone 'good luck'.

Although Geshe Doga hasn't taught for the last few weeks on Monday and Wednesday nights, there have been some discussion and meditation sessions. The reports from these evenings have been very good, so he is extremely pleased with this.

Before we begin the teaching, we will do a few minutes breathing meditation. First of all, could people sit in the meditation posture and relax their body. It is important to keep in mind the purpose for doing this meditation practice - that is, to train our mind. What we are trying to cultivate are more positive states of mind. In fact, in Tibetan terms, meditation (*gom*) literally means 'to get used to'. So in the context of the literal meaning, meditation practice is the process of trying to get our mind used to thinking with a positive attitude. This involves the process of breaking all the negative patterns in our mind and replacing them with positive mental habits.

To achieve the goals of our meditation, it is of foremost importance that we clearly recognise what the obstacles are that hinder our mind from being wholesome and positive. If we examine closely, we find that the main hindrances are distracting thoughts. Because of these distracting thoughts or states of mind, our mind does not rest and stay within our self and we are unable to achieve enough of the wholesome and peaceful states of mind. Therefore, as we engage in this meditation practice, the most important thing is to challenge the distracting states of mind and make an effort to remove the associated thoughts. We need to fully settle our mind within ourselves.

Having settled the mind inward, we then begin the actual meditation practice. This involves simply directing our mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. When distracting thoughts arise, the aim is to stop our mind from wandering away with them and return the concentration single-pointedly back to the breath.

When we consider what truly brings us happiness and meaning in our day-to-day lives, we will see that it is not just the external conditions. Likewise, when we consider the problems that occur in our lives, we will see that they

don't all arise from external conditions. So we can see that if we are successful in cultivating a positive state of mind or mental attitude, our lives can be benefited, even in a single day. For instance, in the morning if we wake up with a positive state of mind, then as an effect of that we would find our mind more stable and happy throughout the day.

If we examine the difference in making progress internally in our mental attitude, rather than just focussing on improving our external conditions, then we can see how we can bring about a great difference to the amount of happiness we experience in our life. Of course, we cannot ignore the fact that good material conditions bring comfort and advantages to our life. But if we examine closely, we will find that the most important thing for making our life happier and our living environment more conducive to satisfaction, is our own state of mind. Even happiness and satisfaction derived from the achievement of material gain depends on our mental attitude or way of thinking.

What we are talking about here is not something philosophically complicated. It is something very simple. It is obvious that we all love ourselves, we are all concerned about the security of our own life and finding happiness. But normally, we do not think too much about the role our mind plays in the pursuit of happiness. So if we make an effort to inwardly cultivate and sustain a very positive state of mind, then we will see that what we are saying here is the best means to show some care towards ourselves and our future.

If we have a negative state of mind like always getting angry easily, feeling jealous of others, wanting to compete or generally feeling pride within ourselves, instead of sustaining a positive state of mind in our daily life, then it is obvious that no one is going to like us. It can be hard to trust that kind of person. Relationship problems, people criticizing and hating you, general tension between people - all creates more suffering and problems in your life. Whether or not we enjoy very good living conditions or lead a very affluent lifestyle, these problems still occur if a person maintains a negative state of mind.

On the contrary, if we think of how positive states of mind can contribute to our lives, such as showing love, compassion and patience to others and having a mind that is free of jealousy and anger, we can see a big difference. In terms of the benefits of positive states of mind and the shortcomings of negative states of mind, we can see that even if one person in a family has a

negative state of mind, the whole family is affected. Simply giving some more thought to examining the benefits of positive states of mind and the drawbacks of negative states of mind enables us to develop a great understanding about how to bring happiness and avoid damage in our lives.

In short, if a person sustains a positive state of mind to other people they appear to have dignity, be trustworthy and appear as someone who would make a good friend. Naturally, such a person has few problems in their relationships with others. Of course, when we talk about changing our mental attitude, it is not something we can expect overnight. Rather, we need to bear in mind that change has to take place gradually. If we embark on this practice of mind training, it is important that our effort is very consistent and we have to think of making this effort over a very long period of time.

Essentially, meditation practice is a means to sustain mental peace and happiness within ourselves. We should also understand how important this inner peace and happiness is to our lives. Every being, whether rich or poor, desires happiness, both internally or externally in their lives. But what we have to recognise here is that between internal and external happiness, internal happiness is more important. In other words, we can live our lives happily without external happiness, but not without internal happiness. We should also try to see how lacking internal happiness can be a cause of losing or failing to achieve external happiness.

We can think of many instances where, due to some problem or confusion in their mind, people harm their own bodies. Not only do they end up with a disordered state of mind, but also disordered physical health. On the other hand, it is generally true that people who mentally enjoy lasting peace and happiness, generally also enjoy good physical health. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, everyone has only one body. Just because you become very rich, it doesn't mean that you can consume more food! If you consume more, then you'll get sick. When we really think about our external needs then there is not much reason for us to worry too much because we have only one mouth to feed, one body to clothe and to shelter. In other word, externally we may have all the suitable conditions of living a happy life. We can be still very unhappy and dissatisfied with life just because of certain neurotic thoughts. Therefore, the practice of mind training is indispensable. If our mind is unhappy we are unhappy likewise if our mind is happy we are happy too. Ultimately happiness that we want and suffering that we do not want derive from the mind.

If we think of the various problems we encounter in our lives we will see that although the cause of such may be identified as something externally, often we have so much additional worry and stress in our mind that the problem is exaggerated. On top of those external conditions that are creating problems, just thinking about them our mind conjures even more conditions for more problems to arise! Through this process of thinking, our mind projects and superimposes various ideas on our problem, filling our heads with thoughts and suspicions

that make the situation seem worse than it is.

When we understand this, we understand how the problems we experience are not just because of external conditions, but also because of some internal way of thinking, some type of unnecessary thought that fills our minds. When we understand this, we can appreciate that properly engaging in meditation practice can be of benefit to us. As we said earlier, when we engage in meditation practice, our main focus is cleansing our mind of unnecessary thoughts. As we do more meditation, we can actually remove or get rid of these thoughts, leaving us more at ease, more peaceful. By removing such problematic thoughts we are removing the root cause of our suffering.

If we do not do anything about the unnecessary thoughts that bring unhappiness, we can feel depressed and hopeless. It can become very harmful and destructive. What is important here is to utilise one's own intelligent mind to test whether what we have been talking about makes sense or not. Can the meditation we have been talking about have some benefit to one's life or not? It is important that we understand this through our own wisdom or our own sense of discrimination.

Geshe Doga wants to say that he has just come back from a pilgrimage to India with a group of students from Tara Institute. During the pilgrimage, after seeing all the poverty and difficulty and suffering people in India experience, one of the students made a remark to Geshe Doga about how lucky we are here in Australia. We need to recognise this. Generally in Australia, there are no real problems like extreme poverty. We do not experience the desperate shortage of material needs which people on the other side of the world face daily. When we talk of the physical conditions of our life, including physical health, we can say that we enjoy very healthy bodies and healthy lives. There is really nothing to complain about.

So what is important now is to complement this spiritual practice with whatever good material life that we enjoy. We have to understand that although we enjoy very good outer conditions, it is important to practise meditation, do some spiritual practice so that we can also enjoy good internal happiness. When Geshe Doga recommends meditation practice to other people, he says it not only because he finds his own practice very beneficial, but also because there are many people who have studied under him, and other teachers, who find what they learn beneficial. Meditation helps them to go through their life. Therefore, he feels confident recommending the benefits of meditation practice to other people.

We will now finish tonight's teaching with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra seven times. Like at the start, please adjust your physical posture so that you feel fully relaxed, and try to calm the mind inward. Then, focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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