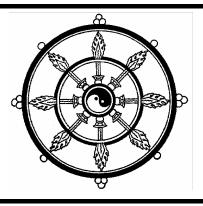
Dharmarakshita's "*The* Wheel *of* Sharp Weapons" A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Sandup Tsering

৩৩ ব্ৰাস্থ্ৰ-জেক্সকল্বেশ্বনাথ



10 May 2000

As usual, we'll do breathing meditation for a few minutes. The first thing you need to do is sit in a comfortable posture in which you can fully relax your body.

Next, you need to rest your mind. This means getting rid of disturbing and distracted thoughts and letting the mind rest within. If we check up, we can see that all of our worries, anxiety and unhappiness are caused by such thoughts. Therefore, to find real inner peace, we must get rid of them.

The reason our mind is always occupied by these thoughts is that we 'feed' them by continuously dwelling on external objects and events. As a result, our mind gets used to being distracted. This makes the mind tense, anxious, confused and unable to think clearly. Because of this, it is beneficial to sometimes try and forget these thoughts.

When the mind becomes absorbed by certain thoughts, it begins to take them seriously, and we become emotionally caught up with them. Does this help us? We can, of course, see that such a response is of no benefit whatsoever. The aim of meditation practice is to try and break the mind's habit of always being distracted. Meditation benefits us because it enables us to remove disturbing thoughts and bring the mind fully inward.

When we have calmed our disturbing thoughts and allowed the mind to rest within, we can engage in the meditation practice. Here, the practice is to focus on the in-breath and out-breath as the meditation object. So try, as much as possible, to focus single-pointedly on the breath.

As we will learn from experience, meditation practice prevents disturbing thoughts, or gross states of mind, from arising. The mind is then free to rest within. When the mind is calm and at rest, we can experience inner peace and happiness. As a result, when we emerge from meditation practice, we feel like a different person – more positive, self-confident, and energetic. This is how we can understand meditation practice as being a method for finding true inner peace and happiness.

When we learn about meditation practice, we gain some conviction about its benefits. Then, when we face adverse situations, we don't need to feel that our life is completely empty and that there is no hope of finding any peace and happiness. Meditation practice proves to us that we can create the causes for our own peace and happiness.

Of course, when you engage in meditation practice, you

will see that it is not easy to achieve lasting peace and happiness straight away. Therefore, we need to remember the advice of the great Indian master, Shantideva. He said that there is nothing that will not become easier when we become used to it. So, when we first try this breathing meditation, we will find it difficult to do properly, even if we have a good understanding of the practice.

We face a lot of obstacles to doing the practice properly. However, Shantideva said that we should not let these obstacles cause us to give up our practice, or think that doing the practice is not benefiting us. Rather, it is important to be consistent. We have to understand that the practice seems hard at first because we are not used to doing it. Whether a practice is easy or difficult for you is really a matter of how familiar you are with it. And the degree of familiarity is a matter of how often and for how long you have done that practice.

Shantideva used the analogy of encountering a person whom you dislike so much that even the mention of his or her name frightens you. However, later, after that person becomes a friend, you become so fond of that person that you cannot be happy for even a moment in his or her absence. Shantideva used this example to demonstrate how the mind is flexible and can change.

When we first hear about meditation practice, it sounds like a logical way of finding true peace and happiness. But there is a difference between knowing about the benefits of meditation practice and actually experiencing them through regular practice.

Now we will continue our commentary on the thought transformation text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. Verse 88 reads:

We fail to explain what the 'Three Baskets' teach, But instead dwell on theories we have made up ourselves.

We lack deep conviction and faith in the teachings, Whatever we say leaves disciples confused.

This verse points out how, these days, there are many followers of spiritual traditions who are really not true followers of the tradition they claim to follow. Rather, they only pretend to follow that tradition in order to promote their own cause. They tell other people outright lies, saying they have supernatural qualities such as the ability to perform miracles, or the ability to directly perceive higher beings and channel messages from them. Or they lie about having visions in their dreams or in their practice, such as a vision of a god or deity. What they are actually doing is contradicting the spiritual tradition – and the founder of that tradition – which they claim to follow. If you look at the founders of the world's major religions, their motivation and aspiration was to benefit and bring peace to humankind through their spiritual teachings. They taught solely to benefit other beings. Thus, if spiritual teachers or preachers teach with a self-centred motivation, this completely contradicts their traditions.

For example, as a follower of Lord Buddha, your duty is to spread the teaching of the Buddha, which are largely contained in what we call the 'Three Baskets' of scriptures. One basket of the scriptures mainly deals with the training or the practice of moral ethics. The next basket deals with the topic of cultivating single-pointed concentration. The third basket deals with metaphysical topics.

Therefore, the teachings of a follower of the Buddha should accord with the Three Baskets. These are also called 'inside teachings', in the sense that they are mainly concerned with mental development. Further, when teaching the Buddhadharma to others, your motivation should be as pure as possible. The purest motivation is that of wanting to wholeheartedly benefit other beings.

This verse also refers to how, apart from having the above-mentioned defects in their motivation and teachings, people who claim to be spiritual teachers can be cynical about or critical of other belief systems. This causes disharmony between different religious traditions.

We can also relate the meaning of this verse to ourselves, and see it as an instruction for our practice. It clearly points out that the most important thing we can do is TO maintain a positive state of mind. If we want to improve our behaviour, we need to first improve the thoughts that precede our actions. So, the best way to benefit and show care to other beings is to cultivate an altruistic attitude or the constant thought of benefiting other beings.

Shantideva advised that before we perform any action of speech or body, we should first check our intention. We may be just talking with someone or giving them advice, or moving our body to perform some action. Whatever we do, the force our speech and bodily movements is the mind. So, if we check the mind prior to speaking or doing something and notice some anger, obsessive desire and so forth, we should try to replace that negative mind with a positive state of mind before we act.

This process of checking our attitude depends on how much we understand about the effects of negative states of mind. For example, what happens when you act from a negative state of mind such as hatred or obsessive desire? Check up on what happens when you then talk with others or even try to advise them. Whatever action you do, you can just observe the faults that follow from actions motivated by a negative state of mind. This helps us gain a deeper understanding of the shortcomings of negative states of mind and the actions they trigger. Consequently, we will be more deeply motivated to get rid of negative states of mind and their associated harmful actions.

This verse is also clearly warning us to make sure that our actions benefit others and don't harm them. We do this by making sure, for instance, that our speech is not deceptive, unpleasant, harsh or in any way hurtful to other beings. That includes not criticising others or putting them down. The practice we need to apply here is cultivating positive states of mind, which bring more peace and happiness to one's life. With such an outlook, you will benefit other beings, or at least refrain from harming them.

One of the benefits of studying texts such as this one is that they encourage you to investigate the link between your mind and your actions. Whether your state of mind is positive or negative will determine whether any ensuing actions are beneficial or harmful. The benefit of such study is that it gives rise to discriminating wisdom. This enables you to be clearer about which actions are worth doing, and which ones should be avoided or are potentially harmful.

To finish off the commentary on this verse, the text goes on to identify the main cause of all the faulty actions of the followers of all spiritual traditions. The main cause is holding the attitude of self-cherishing. As the next half of the verse says:

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.

That's all for teaching tonight. Now we will chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. Adopt a meditation posture again, and try to fully stabilise the mind by removing all distracting thoughts. Then as the chanting begins, try to focus the mind single-pointedly on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from the tapes by Gabrielle Thomson Edited by Mary-Lou Considine Edited checked by Sandup Tsering Edited Version © Tara Institute