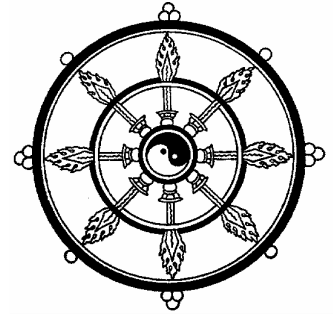


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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13 December 2000

We will now do the usual meditation. First, sit in a comfortable posture, making sure that your body is fully relaxed.

Bear in mind that meditation practice – which in Tibetan is called *gom*, which means ‘getting used to’ – mainly involves getting your mind used to the right way of thinking, the virtuous or positive states of mind. Through meditation practice, we can calm and control the mind. We need to control the mind because the causes of all the problems and difficulties we face are found within our mind.

So, to minimise further suffering, we need to gain control over the mind. Normally, the situation is reversed – we are controlled by the mind. All of our experience is predetermined by the mind. If we look closely, our state of mind is often negative, influenced by some kind of afflictive emotion. Meditation practice will help us to overcome the overwhelming influence of these negative states of mind and gain full control over the mind.

After choosing the correct physical posture, we should try to direct our attention to the mind. If there are any outer distractions, we should remove them from the mind, and make sure that the mind is fully settled within us. Having brought the mind inward, we should begin the breathing meditation, focusing the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath, and making sure that the focus is as single-pointed as possible by preventing any distractions from arising. (*Pause for meditation.*)

The great master, Sakya Pandit, said that freedom is happiness. But what is the meaning of freedom? True freedom occurs when our mind is free. However, our mind cannot be free if it is always preoccupied and overpowered by distracting thoughts. When we engage in meditation practice, we can free our mind by overcoming distracting thoughts.

As Lama Tsong Khapa said, when we achieve a state of single-pointed concentration, our mind becomes so serviceable that it can sit immovably, like a mountain. In such a state, if we direct the mind to any virtuous object, it can reach the profound depths of truth. Also, as a result of single-pointed concentration, mentally and physically we experience a pervasive sense of bliss.

Even if we do not achieve a state of single-pointed concentration, it's tremendously beneficial if we can at least try to understand the mind in terms of its positive and negative aspects. It's even beneficial for us to learn how to discriminate between positive and negative actions of our ‘three doors’ of body, speech and mind. Developing such a sense of discrimination would provide us with very good guidance and direction.

In our daily life, we must know how to apply spiritual practice, and know how it benefits us. Whatever spiritual practice we follow, we want to experience a result or benefit that other people will also perceive as beneficial. Otherwise, if you do not see any benefit, then whatever spiritual teaching you try to follow – even if you claim to be studying something regarded as a high or profound level of spiritual knowledge – whatever the spiritual practice, if you do not benefit from it, and if other people do not receive any benefit then it is not helping us. We need to follow a practice that is beneficial, and that brings more

stability, peace, and happiness to our life.

When we talk of a spiritual practice or meditation practice, the most important thing is that it has some effect on the actions of our three doors (of body, speech, and mind). As a result of following a spiritual practice, these actions should become more positive and creative. If, through following a spiritual practice, we see that our actions of body, speech and mind are becoming more positive, bring us more satisfaction, and are pleasant to the eyes of others – in worldly terms, we refer to this as good manners – then this is very important to us.

To increase our positive actions and diminish negative ones, the most important step for us is to always, every single day, assess our thoughts and actions using our sense of *discrimination*. As you do this, you further develop your sense of discrimination, and also get some idea of what sort of person you are – what type of actions of body, speech and mind you habitually perform, and whether they are good or bad.

To integrate more positive actions into our daily life, and to avoid negative ones, we have to apply *mindfulness*. Here, mindfulness really means constantly recalling the positive actions that you ought to be doing, in terms of speech, physical action, and mental attitude. With mindfulness, at least you are aware of your actions.

Otherwise, if we do not attempt to be mindful and just engage mindlessly in negative actions, in a sense we are being absent-minded. Consequently, our actions of body, speech, and mind can become harmful to ourselves and others. Further, by continually engaging in such negative actions, we establish a behavioural pattern to automatically create that kind of action. As a result, we bring continual harm to one's own life and to other beings.

Therefore, we must determine to make our actions more positive by applying mindfulness, along with another tool that we can develop through meditation – alertness. Alertness means always maintaining a sense of discrimination, whatever we are doing. Through alertness, if you are about to do a negative action, you alert yourself or become aware of the danger and can thus avoid it.

Therefore, we can see that the most beneficial action for us to do is to utilise our spiritual knowledge or meditation practice as much as possible in order to influence our daily actions positively. As a result, one becomes a happier person, living a more peaceful and stable life; we become less susceptible to outer fluctuations.

There is a saying in Tibet that if you do not have inner stability, then your mind will be as changeable as the weather in summer (in Tibet). Your mind will be continuously changing – just like Melbourne's weather! – and you will have no control over it. The point of applying any spiritual practice is to achieve inner stability, by continuously working on one's own thoughts and actions, knowing clearly what should be done, and what should be avoided. With this clear direction, we can then achieve a stable mind that will bring us lasting peace and happiness.

It's important that we always relate spiritual practice or

Dharma to our life, and regard it as a guide for living life in the most meaningful way. We are not practising Dharma correctly if we regard the time and effort we put into acquiring spiritual knowledge or into meditation practice as something outside of our day-to-day life. The Dharma teachings are merely guidelines for showing us how to live our lives skillfully. If we live according to the Dharma, then we will find satisfaction, peace, and meaning to our existence.

When we talk about Dharma, we have to understand that we are simply talking about the actions of our three doors, of mind, speech, and body. A Dharma practitioner does not necessarily have to be an outwardly 'religious' person. Rather, a true Dharma practitioner is someone who has adopted a right way of thinking. Whenever they communicate with others, they always try to do it in as skilful and proper a manner as possible. They also take others into account when carrying out any action, considering the effects of that action in the light of the views and needs of others. In fact, such a person is always practising Dharma.

On the other hand, someone else can outwardly appear to be a good Dharma practitioner, a very religious person. However, in reality, the way that person lives their life in terms of their attitude and interactions with others may be very negative. They may have very little or no concern at all for others. At the same time, they may be living a life full of suffering – not only causing suffering to others, but also causing him- or herself continual suffering, and living a life lacking in self-control and stability.

The practice of Dharma is really about living a good life. When we apply Dharma to our way of living, we are not just focused on our external development, but are more concerned about our inner development, particularly the development of the mind. We realise that inner and outer development must go hand in hand for us to live a meaningful, happy and stable life.

Furthermore, we are able to realise that inner development is the more important factor in achieving happiness, because if we develop our mind, even if we are a bit behind in our outer development, we can still have a happy and stable life. On the other hand, if you neglect inner development, but outwardly strive to achieve material wealth and so on, then no matter how much your wealth increases, you will experience a feeling of dissatisfaction. You will always feel empty, as if something is missing in your life.

The actual practice of Dharma is very simple and clear. If we look at our own experience, at how we alternately feel up or down, we can see that the main source of this instability is our own mind. Whenever we generate a negative attitude, such as hatred towards others, that attitude can make us appear harsh to others – anything we say to them will sound harsh. Even our facial expressions appear harsh, harmful, and unpleasant. On the other hand, if we generate a positive mental attitude, this makes our verbal and physical actions beneficial to others, bringing happiness to their minds.

The source of everything we experience is our mind. For example, one evening you might find yourself really enjoying the companionship of the person you live with, and sharing a good conversation with them. However, the next morning, under the influence of some negative thought, you might say a few harsh words to your friend. This one moment can change that whole relationship.

The cause of this negative experience is just a few words and a negative thought that you generated within you. Yet those few words can cause tremendous suffering over a long period of time because, after hearing those harsh words, your friend will feel hurt and will not be able to keep those words out of their thoughts all day and for many days afterwards. Those thoughts will keep going round and round in their mind.

So, what it comes down to, is not so much knowing about the practice of Dharma, but what is behind is the actual practice. The Lord Buddha himself said, "Even if I have taught this perfect Dharma well, and even if you have heard it well, if you do not put this Dharma into practice, your knowledge will not benefit you".

It is like a patient who, instead of taking his or her medicine, puts the medicine under their pillow and sleeps on it; unfortunately, this patient will never recover from their illness. Buddha went on to say that such a patient would not be able to blame the medicine nor to the doctor. In the same way, if we do not apply the Dharma to our problems, then we cannot blame the 'medicine' of Dharma nor our spiritual teacher when we do not find happiness and continue to suffer.

That's all for the teaching tonight. Geshe-la would like to thank all of you for making the effort to come to these teachings throughout the year.

Geshe-la would also like to announce that before we begin next year's Wednesday night teachings by Geshe-la, Damien will be giving a series of Monday night talks in January, and is also leading some Wednesday night meditations and talks. Geshe-la would like encourage you to attend these, because many people have said that they find it good to begin the New Year with some peaceful meditation practice, and some reflection on spiritual topics. Most of you already know Damien, and he has been studying the Buddhism for many years. So he's undoubtedly fully qualified to teach it to others.

Geshe-la would also like to say, before these annual celebrations over Christmas and New Years with gatherings of family and friends, a lot of things are happening. Sometimes, if we are not careful, when all the celebrations finish, you feel as if you need a month or two or even a whole year to recover!

We have to be aware that a lot of things happen around this time, because it's a big celebration, and we take it for granted that we can do anything we feel like doing – catching up with others for a chat, drinking and eating, and so on. You might find that your friends will keep encouraging you by saying, "It's OK, it's Christmas" and so on. However, a lot of people find that afterwards, when everything is finished, they have many new problems resulting from all those friendly offers of a chat, especially over a lot of drinks. Geshe-la says he's not sure, but it seems to him that it is a very enjoyable thing to chat to others with a glass of alcohol in one's hand. Is that right?

Of course, by all means, Geshe-la is not saying that you should not celebrate Christmas and New Year. Of course, it is a good opportunity to find some rest and go on holidays. However, because there is so much excitement and so much to do, we can forget about our own health.

No matter how important the celebration or the event is, the most important thing in your life is to be happy. Geshe-la says that the main cause of happiness is avoiding suffering. Enjoying good physical health and a clear, alert mind is important to our happiness. If we can maintain these, we will create the right conditions for finding happiness.

That's all for tonight. We would like to wish you all Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year. On Christmas Day, as a tradition, first you will be served roast turkey, and finish with Christmas pudding. Sometimes, those two together can be good cause for stomach pains!

Now we will just finish by chanting of the Buddha's mantra seven times. Could we all again sit in meditation posture, and with the mind focused inward, begin the chanting, trying to maintain the focus on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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