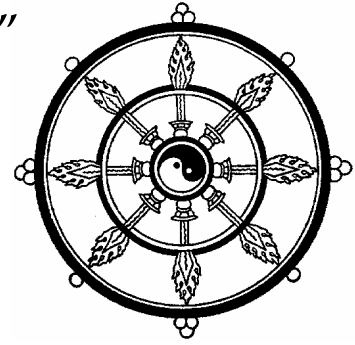

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

འཇིགས་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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We'll begin with breathing meditation. Choose a sitting posture which is most relaxing for you and then also try to bring the mind fully inward by overcoming or removing all outgoing thoughts. Having brought the mind inward, without losing the mind to any external distractions, begin trying to engage in this breathing meditation. Direct the mind on one's breath, which comes in and out. *Pause for Meditation.*

The benefit of meditation practice lies in the fact that it's the most effective means of bringing inner strength, stability, wisdom and inner clarity within our mind. Through meditation practice we'll be able to develop all these positive qualities within our mind. We'll have more control over our mind to such an extent that if there is some sudden event or external circumstance which we find very disturbing, or have difficulty handling or coping with, then we can just shut our mind from those events or circumstances.

On the contrary, when inwardly we lack those qualities of inner strength, power and stability – who controls us? Is it external objects, like people? Think how just a few words said to you can have such an overwhelming effect on you, determining whether you become happy or unhappy. Without such positive qualities within, you become completely vulnerable to external events or things. When we consider our overall experience of our life, for example all the different types of problems and difficulties we experience, most are in fact not due to, for example, physical illness, disease or punishment. Quite often our suffering is like an internal disease. It's in our mind. We cannot ignore that disease, even if right now we don't have it. We can recall times in our life where we are physically fit, in sound health and with good material conditions – everything is fine – but we might still have something in our mind which causes us to suffer a lot. There are certain states of mind and types of thoughts that can be so devastating to oneself, to the point where one finds it difficult to cope with life.

How do we overcome these mental problems from controlling us? We may get help from other people or do all kinds of different things, apply different remedies. However this problem can only be solved when you have completely replaced that disturbing thought or state of mind within yourself. If you are very familiar with even a simple meditation practice like we just did before, instead of being preoccupied with all the problems you can simply decide to preoccupy yourself with meditation practice.

Again, it is not easy to engage in meditation practice if you are not used to the practice of controlling or settling

your mind. Of course, it's not easy. It is possible to become more familiar by practising the meditation for a long period of time. If you are used to it, meditation practice can in fact be the best and most useful thing, especially in times of emotional chaos. You will find it very beneficial.

When we talk about the benefits of meditation practice or of spiritual practice in one's life, we can learn about these things by listening to other people talk, and so on. But whatever knowledge and faith we develop or gain in our spiritual practice or in meditation practice, this way is not really enough. Such faith in spiritual practice can be very unstable. Introducing oneself to spiritual practice or the dharma in this way is not a stable way of following the dharma. In order to truly appreciate the value of spiritual practice one has to apply or test the spiritual teachings in one's practice. For example, we have to try to actually make the effort to understand one's mind and then replace all the negative states of mind with positive ones. Then if one is asked what effect this practice has on one's life, then you can actually truly see its benefit, even immediately. Sustaining a positive state of mind can bring more happiness in one's life and also bring happiness to other people.

We have to familiarise or train ourselves in this spiritual practice on a daily basis. We can then reach the point where we will be able to continue or undertake spiritual practice even at the last moment of our life. If we practice dharma at this moment, not only are there tremendous benefits in this life, it may even benefit many future lives.

Now we'll discuss *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to Verse 106 which begins with the first two lines saying:

There is nothing substantial to anyone's life force -
It crumbles apart like a water-soaked log;

The following lines of the text present the view of selflessness, which is the ultimate nature of things. It present this view by using various examples – a water-soaked log, a plant or tree – to show the reality of all things. It is saying that in reality there is no essence as such in anything, even, for example, if we take our life. In reality, as it says, our life is like 'a water-soaked log', which can be very easily collapsed or broken down. When that happens, it has no essence or value. There's absolutely no use for it. Despite this true reality, our life to our mind appears to be something very solid with some sort of very concrete meaning, essence and status. In our own view of ourselves it seems like our life has some inherent, concrete existence from its own side. However, it lacks such an existence.

All the examples used here are to show that things do not exist inherently or from their own side. The next lines of text give another example, which says;

And there is nothing substantial to anyone's lifespan -
It bursts in an instant like bubbles of foam.

As we just discussed in the preceding teachings, all phenomena do not have any inherent or self-sufficient existence. This is because all phenomena are dependent arising. Dependent arising means their existence is dependent upon other phenomena. Their existence is dependent upon causes or conditions, or upon parts and the composites of various parts. If our life is like a foam bubble, despite looking as if it has some concrete existence, it only takes a slight touch of your finger for it to vanish.

The text is saying that even if our lifespan is sustained by all the right causes and conditions, as soon as those conditions are missing it disappears. When it meets unfavourable conditions, just as quickly as bubbles of water can disappear, it takes only a very small cause or condition for life to disappear.

If you take the example of life, then it is so obvious that as a phenomena it doesn't exist or have inherent existence of its own. It doesn't have that independently or self-sufficient existent status. Rather, as phenomena it is impermanent and dependent arising in the sense that its existence depends on the collection of various causes and conditions.

So therefore, in reality life doesn't exist. There isn't any inherently existing self. Even if life has some meaning, then that meaning is also not something which inherently exists. There's no inherently existent purpose or meaning of life. Even though that is reality, we are trying to see how we perceive ourselves, our life, and all our perceptions as if they exist inherently from their own side.

Again, the lines say;

And there is nothing substantial to anyone's lifespan -
It bursts in an instant like bubbles of foam.

In this example a bubble of foam refers to the lifespan, which in Tibetan is *tse*, meaning lifespan or longevity. It's more like what we also call *tsok*, which means life force. In this context you could use the term lifespan or life force, as both have the same meaning in Tibetan. According to the Abhidharma text *The Treasury of Knowledge*, it says that the life force refers to some kind of qualities which people possess when alive. It is not a consciousness or a form, but belongs to the category of phenomena called 'non associated compounded phenomena'.

This lifespan serves as a basis for the consciousness and heat of the human body. In this way, all the living beings who are born in what we call a form realm would have that so-called life force which continues as long as life is sustained. When that disintegrates, it is the end of that life.

We say that the body of a living person possesses consciousness and heat due to this life force within us. Without this life force our body cannot possess either.

This life force is like energy without which the body won't last a day, but will start to rot and smell. The consciousness also can't exist in our body without life force. Without it the body won't have any feelings. For example, at the moment the reason why we feel pain or pleasure or whatever when something contacts our body is because of consciousness. Without the life force, consciousness can't be sustained in our body. In fact, when our body becomes a corpse, it's no different from a rock or any inanimate object without any feelings. This shows how important life force is for the sustenance of life. As said before, it is life force, which serves as a basis for the consciousness and heat of the body to be sustained.

Consciousness or life force are things we cannot see, however it's possible to measure their influence on our life. For example, our consciousness, which is abstract and something we can't see, as an energy or force is quite amazing, in that because of it we in fact begin life. When we are first conceived in a mother's womb it is because of the force or energy of the mind which causes the egg, embryo and foetus to evolve into a full human being. Without that energy or force it doesn't happen. If we consider that at the first moment of conception, in terms of the physical world, we are just a tiny drop of the combination of egg and semen, which you can clearly see through using a microscope. Even if you cannot see consciousness this way we can see the influence of it in the sense that the moment it enters into it (the egg) then you can say conception has occurred, and the whole development of the foetus begins. Even though things like consciousness and life force may be abstract, as a force or energy they're quite amazing.

It's like when we cut our hair, cutting off just the top part—there's no feeling that affects us. However if somebody pulls the hair from its root it can cause pain. Pain arises because the root of the hair is included within the perimeter of consciousness. Again, that tells us a little bit about consciousness.

Geshe-la said that at the root of the hair there's a white bit we call the 'constituent' or 'element' of the hair. It's said that the greater that white bit, the better the chance of growing healthy and long hair. If you have very few you go bald! This was just mentioned because if anyone here is following the tantric practice of Vajrayogini, there is a commentary some are studying which mentions the 'element' of hair. This is referring to that white bit at the end of hair.

Now we'll just finish with chanting the Buddha's mantra. Again, try to sit in meditation posture, making yourself comfortable and very relaxed. Then just get rid of all outgoing thoughts and let the mind stabilise inward. Then as we begin the chanting, try to focus the mind just on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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