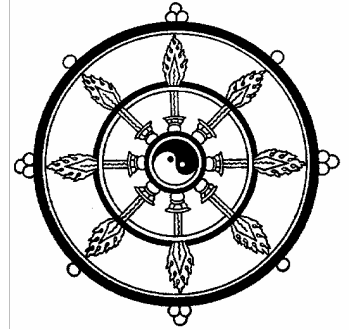


# Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, we will begin with a few minutes breathing meditation. Relax your body and choose a sitting posture that is most comfortable for you.

In meditation practice, we cultivate meditative concentration or stabilisation (of the mind with respect to the object). Meditative concentration should have two qualities with respect to the object – clarity of the object and stability of the object, which is known as single-pointed concentration.

To make progress in our meditation practice, we need to develop these two qualities. The quality of clarity means establishing a vivid image of the object, and intensifying its vivid appearance to the mind. The quality of stability means being able to focus the mind single-pointedly on the object.

To ensure that our meditative stabilisation has these two qualities, we need to understand how to perform meditation practice effectively. For instance, we have to understand the obstacles to possessing these two qualities.

The obstacle to possessing intense clarity in meditative concentration is 'mental sinking' or laxity. The indication that we are succumbing to mental sinking or laxity is that during the meditation practice, although the mind may retain its focus on the object, the object will lack clarity – it does not appear clearly to the mind.

The obstacle to possessing stability or single-pointedness in meditative concentration is mental distraction. Technically, this is some form of excitement. When excitement arises in the mind, our meditative concentration is not stable in the sense that we cannot focus the mind on the object single-pointedly. The indication that we are falling under the influence of excitement or distraction is that, as we engage in meditation practice, an external object such as an object of desire will appear in the mind and, as a result, we lose our focus on the given meditation object.

Both obstacles can take on either a coarse or subtle form. The coarse form of excitement or mental distraction occurs when the mind totally loses the object of meditation and is completely preoccupied with some other object of desire. Whereas, with subtle forms of excitement, our focus may be only half on the meditation object and half on some other object.

It is important to recognise any faults that make our meditation practice less effective. Then, after we recognise such obstacles, we must learn how to prevent them by applying the appropriate remedies.

The main tool we apply in meditation is mindfulness. Mindfulness means that, not only do we familiarise the mind with the given object, but we also train the mind to hold the object in the correct manner – neither too tightly nor too loosely. Through experience, we have to find out the correct way to hold the object in the mind, avoiding the extremes of holding it too tightly or too loosely, which will bring about the obstacles discussed above.

The other tool we apply in meditation is alertness. Alertness means that every now and then we check up on our meditation to see whether either of the two faults (dullness/mental sinking or excitement/distraction) is present. Through alertness, we can detect any influence of excitement or mental sinking on our meditative concentration. You can, if you like, think of alertness as being like an observer that notifies you of any faults, allowing you accordingly to take the next step and overcome that fault.

For example, if through alertness we notice mental sinking or drowsiness, then we have to do something to uplift or refresh the mind. On the other hand, if we see any sign of excitement entering our meditative concentration, we have to do the opposite to what we do for mental sinking, and try to withdraw the mind further inward and calm it down. It is important to understand and apply these things in order to make our meditation practice more effective.

If we proceed to apply these two forces – mindfulness and alertness – to our meditation, we will reach a stage where the two obstacles or faults mentioned above do not keep re-appearing. Then we can continue to use mindfulness-alertness to single-pointedly fix the mind on the object.

As our meditation practice continues to progress without being influenced by the two faults of meditation, we will achieve what is called a state of 'mental pliancy', in which the mind becomes very serviceable and capable. At the same time, the body will also experience a physical pliancy and become serviceable in the sense that the flow of wind energy throughout the body becomes smooth and unobstructed. As a result of this pliancy and the unobstructed flow of subtle wind energy throughout the body, we will even experience a physical sensation of bliss. This physical bliss has arisen as a result of mental pliancy. At this point, your single-pointed concentration will have reached the state of meditation called 'calm abiding'.

This is just a brief summary of some of the essential points on meditation practice. To make progress in our meditation, the duration of our practice is not that important. Rather, even if our meditation time is short, if we do our meditation practice effectively, applying an understanding of the obstacles and remedies discussed above, it will be more effective.

Now, we will try to put a few key things we've just discussed into our short breathing meditation practice. We will begin by choosing the correct posture, making sure that our body is fully relaxed. Then, we need to stop the mind from running after external objects and instead bring its focus inward. Next, we will begin the breathing meditation, focusing on the in-breath and out-breath. As we said before, our focus should be on the object, in this case the breath. As much as possible, we will try to achieve the two qualities of meditative stabilisation – intensity of clarity and intensity of stability. Then, throughout the meditation, we will apply

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mindfulness and alertness to keep the mind single-pointedly focused on the object.

Now, to continue from this text we have been studying, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. The main subject we are studying at the moment is the wisdom of selflessness. It is said that, of all the types of wisdom you can attain, the supreme wisdom is the wisdom that realises the ultimate reality of things, which is selflessness or emptiness.

It is also said that if we do not cultivate the wisdom of the ultimate truth of all things, then we cannot fully develop all the other spiritual realisations such as great compassion and the altruistic mind of enlightenment. Without the support of wisdom, compassion and other qualities cannot be increased limitlessly or developed to a state of perfection.

Therefore, the text here is referring to the wisdom of selflessness or emptiness, which is the ultimate reality of all things, and means that all things do not exist from their own side.

If you take a person as an example, the text here is saying that the person doesn't exist from his or her own side, or doesn't exist inherently or truly. However, in our mind, this person or thing appears to have true or inherent existence. In reality, they do not exist in the way we perceive them to exist, so the text shows us how they actually exist through the use of analogy.

For example, verse 107 reads:

All things are like images found in a mirror,  
And yet we imagine they are real, very real;  
And all things are like mist or like clouds on a mountain,  
And yet we imagine they are stable and firm.

Here the text uses the analogy of an image or reflection in a clear and spotless mirror to show us how things ultimately exist. If we think about it, an image doesn't automatically appear in a mirror; rather, certain conditions need to be present. For example, for our face to appear in a mirror, obviously our face has to be right in front of the mirror, and the mirror has to be completely clear. Only then can we see our face clearly when we look in the mirror. The way our face just appears in the mirror may seem a natural, unconditional phenomenon – the mirror is there, and our face just appears. The face in the mirror appears to be very real. Of course, in reality, not even a tiny portion of our face is to be found in the mirror.

In same way, the text is saying when things appear in our mind, in the same way that a reflection in the mirror looks real and self-existent, everything that appears to our mind looks real and self-existent, as if they existed inherently and substantially from their own side. However, in reality, they do not exist in that way. Not even one atom of any thing exists inherently, from its own side, in its own right.

The way all things exist is in dependence upon other phenomena, upon causes and conditions or upon the various parts that make up that thing. It is similar to the way an image in the mirror appears to be very real but is just a reflection. The things that appear in our mind are totally an illusion, they do not exist. The way things exist in reality, the way they are, is totally different from the way they appear to the mind.

The other example used here is the gathering cloud or mist or fog on a mountain. The meaning here is that the way in which we perceive things – even though they exist conditionally – is that we don't analyse or think about them. We just assume that they will exist forever, that their existence is stable and will never change.

However, if you think about the analogy of thick cloud gathering in the sky – when we see the cloud, we usually think it will be there for a while. It appears to our mind to be quite solid and stable. Likewise, when from a distance we see fog and mist, it may also appear to the mind as if it will last for a long time. But cloud, fog, and mist can disappear at any moment. They can just disappear suddenly, without any trace.

So the text is saying that even though our mind perceives all conditional things to exist permanently, in fact they are changing from one moment to the next and, like these examples, are subject to disintegration.

The point here is that all things are impermanent. We can see this through the changes in our own life and changes in the world around us. Impermanence is not a result of immediate or occasional conditions, but as shown here, all things are subject to this truth of impermanence. It can be of help to us if we can at least understand or recognise that this is why we continually encounter change in our life and in the world around us – because of the impermanent nature of all things.

Of course, when we say that impermanence is the nature of things and that the things that happen to us are the result of our karma or actions, it does not mean that we are not responsible for the changes that happen in our lives. These topics of karma and of impermanence are very profound – after all, they reflect the true nature of all things.

Therefore, we have to contemplate and try to understand their meaning deep down within our mind. This is not just something we talk about – especially in situations where people try to blame things on others, or try to get out of doing something for another because they say that this is his or her karma, or that a problem is occurring because things are impermanent. People can use the teachings of karma and impermanence in the wrong way, rather than using them to develop their personal practice.

We can use these teachings in a positive way. To stop ourselves abusing or scolding other people because we do not agree with them, or because their behaviour upsets us or whatever, we have try to understand the difference between their point of view and ours, and try to accept the differences by applying these teachings, such as impermanence.

Geshe-la just thought of a story to illustrate this. There was a lama or teacher who possessed a clay pot. In Tibet, many people have their own special clay pot. It happened that a student broke the teacher's pot at a time when he was receiving the teachings on impermanence. So, in one of his classes, in order to confess what had happened, he asked the teacher, "Is it true that all things are impermanent?"

"Yes" was the reply. Then the student asked whether the clay pot was also impermanent. "Yes" came the reply again. So the student told him it was broken. Thus, the teacher could not scold the student because the way the student broached the matter in class showed his understanding of the topic. He used this logic to put the teacher on the spot, so the teacher could not tell him off!

Now we will chant the Buddha's mantra. Again, we will sit in meditation posture and, as we chant the mantra, try to focus the mind on its sound.

**TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA**