
Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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We will begin with a short breathing meditation. Choose the correct meditation posture with the back straight and fully relax every part of the body.

The reason why we practise meditation is to bring clarity and peace to our mind. With clarity and peace within, our mind will function much better. We have to understand that if our mind is always overpowered or distracted by wandering thoughts, then it is like a piece of paper being blown here and there by the wind. We will find that unless we rid our mind of the influence of unnecessary or wandering thoughts, then our mind will lack the ability to think clearly and to focus on an object, or whatever we are doing. With this in mind, choose the right posture and try to remove all distracting thoughts of external objects, merely let the mind abide within yourself.

It is like we are bringing the mind back home. But even then we will notice that the mind still needs an object. In this case we will use our breath as the object. Without our mind being distracted by any other objects, we will focus, or place the mind, on the outgoing and incoming breath.

To sum up the benefits of practising meditation, as one Master said, 'the benefit is reducing the amount of mental delusions or negative states of mind that exist within'.

Thinking of the actual purpose of meditation, we can understand that when we practise we have to focus on our own mind and we have to focus within ourselves. Through this meditation practice we try to develop more positive qualities within the continuum of our mindstream, such as developing love, compassion and the good heart, while also trying to minimise the negative states of mind such as hatred and so on.

So if we have been following the meditation practice, we can gauge the progress of our practice by noticing how much we have changed within ourselves, and within our mind. We have to ask ourselves what our mental state of being was like before we practised meditation. Have we developed more love and compassion towards other beings? Have we reduced negative states of mind or delusions? If we can see that meditation is helping us to be kinder, more tolerant and more patient, then we know we are achieving results from our practice.

We have to try to integrate meditation into our thoughts and into our actions. We can appreciate meditation in our daily actions when we see the benefits for ourselves, and others, especially when we focus our meditation to develop love and compassion towards our relatives and others who are close to us. If we try to show more love and tolerance then our meditation practice will benefit everyone, as the meditation will bring harmony, meaning and joy to all our relationships.

Before we see the long-term benefits of meditation, we need to see the immediate benefits so that we can be more inspired to practise it. As said before, if we

practise meditation sincerely and effectively then it has immediate benefits. Relationships with others are very important for most people because the nature of life is interdependent. It is difficult for us to live without friendship, without some love from others.

So what is the most important cause to establish a harmonious relationship? Is the most important cause a material object? In general, is the cause of our conflicts with others due to material objects? Upon examination, it is not material objects as such. Rather it is the lack of true care and true feeling of love towards each other. Whereas, when feelings of love and care are present then naturally there will be closeness in the relationship.

With this in mind we can see that it is important for us, and for the sake of others, that we develop love and compassion within our mind. So we try to make an effort to develop that love and compassion within ourselves. From that we can make an effort to express our feelings of love and compassion towards others. This is expressed through our actions, such as our facial gestures, and other actions of communication. Our efforts will naturally make for more harmonious living with others.

For all of us, harmony with other people is important and something we all cherish in our minds. The Buddha said that the main cause of happiness within the monastic community is harmony. Even in our own life, which is very different from the monastic lifestyle, if we enjoy a harmonious relationship with all our friends and family, then anything we do is not as difficult - even going to work is easier. Whatever we do, mentally we are fulfilled and happy.

We need to look into what brings this harmony into our relationships. As mentioned before, it is mainly our mental attitude towards others that determines our level of harmony. Some attitudes can make us more distant to others, maybe even causing them harm. For instance, if we hold anger in our minds, then when we speak to others in a harsh or abusive manner, and if our face is dark with anger, then naturally the consequences of these actions cause harm to our relationships.

Another more positive attitude can make us closer towards others, even providing aid and benefit to them. If we inwardly hold loving and caring thoughts toward others and, as an outcome of this motivation, we speak to others with pleasant speech and gestures, then naturally this is a cause for harmony in our relationships. If we practise like this, and we think of the benefits of practising tolerance, especially towards our nearest friends, then we - and others - can notice the benefits immediately.

So in practising meditation we always try to think and make an effort to recognise what faults and qualities are within us. On the basis of this understanding, we can then make more of an effort in our meditation to

eliminate faults and develop positive qualities.

Now we will discuss the text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to Verse 4 which says:

Now desire is the jungle of poisonous plants here.
So only brave for ones, like peacocks, can thrive on such fare.
If cowardly beings, like crows, were to try it,
Because they are greedy they might lose their lives.

The first line of this verse says that desire is like a poisonous plant. Yet if we contemplate the nature of desire then we can see that in our experience it is difficult to find any fault in desire. Desire is very easy to generate in our mind. We may have a desire for various animate and inanimate objects. It is so easy to desire things, to desire a person or to desire just inanimate objects like food, drinks, clothes and so on. Sometimes the object doesn't even need to be very pleasant, or the food to be very tasty or the amount of the desired object to be very large. It is so easy to merely desire things. It is difficult for us to renounce this desire because it is hard for us to recognise any fault in it.

It is hard to see fault in desiring things because of the delusions that desire brings to our mind with regard to those things. When we desire something then that object appears to our mind as being very attractive, very pleasant, and it makes us want to have it. Desire gives us the perception that the object of desire is a means to our happiness. As the verse says, desire is like a poisonous plant to someone who doesn't know its faults, and who doesn't know how to transform it. To such a person desire is like a poison, in the sense that it can kill the opportunity for that person to achieve liberation. However, as it says in the next line, only for the fully brave ones or those with an altruistic mind know how to utilise desire and take it as a path to enlightenment. For them desire is not an obstruction, but becomes a means to reach the ultimate spiritual goal.

Questions

First question

Q: Is it true that the type of karma that ripens depends upon the type of mind present at the time, e.g. that the mind ripens the karma?

A: Not necessarily. It doesn't depend on your state of mind.

Q: Like when you have a really bad day you might create negative actions.

A: You can be sitting in meditation posture with your mind in a very virtuous state and then you can suddenly have a stomach pain and that pain is the result, or ripening of the result, of one of your past karmas.

Q: But it says that at the time of death if the mind is positive then you get a good result and a better rebirth.

A: This is a different issue because when we talk of the type of next rebirth it is said that to know where you are going in your next life, you look into your present mind, and to know your past mind you look to your present life.

The specific body that you have now is the outcome of your type of mind or your past life karma or actions. So

in other words, the person in the present life hasn't done anything and doesn't deserve any credit for this particular body. Maybe the entire credit goes to your parents, but that's not necessarily true because you may have a sister who is not exactly the same as you. On top of that there is also your past life, and the past karma of the individual person that also determines this present life.

Q: If you meditate and you feel happy afterwards then it's not necessarily the outcome of the meditation?

A: The result is the combination of your immediate meditation and your previous life karmas. The immediate action is also not necessarily the only cause. If you think of your immediate actions, sometimes it is hard to practise meditation whereas other times it's a bit easier. Whether our current actions are easy or difficult also reflects our familiarity with that practice in the past.

New question

Q: Is it the actual desire, or is it the attachment to the desire that causes the problems? One can desire things, but if one is attached to those things then it is the attachment that causes the problems?

A: When we talk of the fault of desire or attachment we are not talking of the fault of the object. If we see fault in the object it means that we are not recognising the actual fault of the desire. So it is the mind, which desires the objects, that has the fault or negative aspect.

Consider the example where people are separated from their close friend or partner. In such a case some people become emotionally disturbed and very upset, but such a separation may not upset other people. If the cause is just the object of separation, then the other person also has to experience the same sadness as they are also separating from their friend. So it is the mind. If you have desire then, even after you are separated, you still are mentally holding onto that person in your mind. You are still not accepting the separation, and so you are still mentally clinging to the object. Because of that there is some unhappiness in the mind. If you completely accepted the separation there is no clinging or no holding onto the other, and then there should be no reason to feel sadness.

So, again, we chant the Buddha's mantra. As at the beginning of the session, adopt the right posture, turn the mind inward, and calm it. As we begin the chanting focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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