
Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we will begin by practising a short breathing meditation. Please choose the meditation posture that is most comfortable and try to relax your body.

In general, our discriminating knowledge can tell us what we, as humans, seek in life. As humans we generally wish to be physically happy, enjoying sound health of body with good surrounding conditions and we also wish to possess a relaxed and happy state of mind. But unfortunately we don't always have both the good health of body as well as a peaceful and happy state of mind.

By utilising our discriminating knowledge we can investigate and ask ourselves, "Why can't we always have both a sound mind and sound body? What obstacle is preventing us enjoying, especially, inner peace and happiness?" It is important to utilise our discriminating knowledge and recognise why we lack - even if we are physically happy - mental peace and satisfaction.

If we investigate this, we will find that obstacles to happiness exist because our mind is filled with many various distracting thoughts. So with this mind we should think that the aim of meditation practice is to eradicate the thoughts that disturb our inner peace and happiness.

Through our investigations we will find that being more responsible will help us to ensure the good physical health of our body. So to some extent, whether we enjoy a healthy body or not is in our own hands. Likewise, do we also have some control over our state of our mind?

If we focus on our mind and try to recognise the causes of the various problems we experience (such as emotional disturbance like dissatisfaction, anxiety, stress etc) we see that these problems are created within us by our own mind. We create problems through the process of generating various thoughts, thinking of things concerning one's past, present or future. This process of thinking fills our mind with all sorts of worries, which, through closer analysis, we find are all completely unnecessary. These unnecessary thoughts make our mind anxious and restless and deprive us of any real sense of relaxation. If we go further now, and try to understand how these unnecessary thoughts come into our mind then we see that they come into our mind because we have neglected to control our mind. Because of not controlling the mind we preoccupy our mind with various things, like the events of life, (external objects).

In simple terms, the thoughts that bring imbalance within ourselves and bring unwanted experiences into our lives exist because of the types of objects we hold in our mind. From this point of view, if we ask whether we have the choice of holding these various objects in our mind, then we see that at least in theory we do have a

choice of getting rid of certain objects and replacing them with better ones.

As we know, we have some control over our physical health in as much as we can make our life healthier. Also we have the same control - if we choose to exercise it - to shape and nourish our mind.

We practise meditation to get rid of the disturbing thoughts that we generate within. To gain inner peace means that we have achieved a cessation of all rough and gross states of conceptual thoughts. In fact it says that for a beginner, when we experience inner peace, at that moment one has removed all the gross states of conceptual thought. So we practise meditation because meditation is effective in achieving inner peace. Through the practice of meditation - directing the mind to objects and ways of thinking which enhance peace, - our mind is prevented from being influenced by and wandering after, unnecessary thoughts.

So let us now do a few minutes of breathing meditation. Prevent the mind generating thoughts of external objects thereby allowing it to abide within. As the mind abides within, direct it single pointedly to the breath coming in and going out through the nostrils.

While you meditate, you may ask "What is the practice supposed to do? By practising meditation you decrease and eliminate your faults, the faults that exist in your mind and in your deeds. And at the same time you increase the positive qualities in our mind and in our deeds.

This will then transform a person: we can create a better person, a better human being. This is a good thing. If we have a problem that brings harm and turmoil into our lives then we can change that. Through our meditation, we can reach into the mind and change the rigid patterns of thinking that shape our daily attitude and interaction with life. So if we have some difficulty or problem, if we simply believe that it is our second nature and nothing can be done about it, then even if somebody tries to help us we will not be able to get rid of the problem. If you want to get rid of the various problems that influence your life, you have to apply a discipline that will affect your mind in such a way as to allow you to change your mental outlook. By affecting this change you can then view and interact with life in a less problematic way.

In our discussions last time of the text 'The Wheel of Sharp Weapons' we saw that the Bodhisattvas can transform or utilise the poison of this worldly existence as a means of fulfilling their goal of benefiting other living beings.

The text uses the analogy comparing Bodhisattvas to peacocks for many reasons. For example, many people find peacocks to be very attractive birds. When a

peacock stretches its wings and feathers it is very beautiful and ornate in its colouring. So likewise it is said that a Bodhisattva, as a person, is very inspiring and appealing to the mind of other beings. In addition, because a Bodhisattva always has love, compassion and care for others, so the physical presence of a Bodhisattva is also very appealing to the minds of others. Because of the expressions and gestures of love and compassion, or benevolent attitudes that are held and cultivated within, the outer appearance of the Bodhisattva is very appealing to other beings.

When the peacock is compared with other animals or birds it is said that it is a very harmless bird. Peacocks eat poisonous plants and seeds so they obtain their livelihood without causing harm to the lives of other beings. In that respect they are also likened to Bodhisattvas because Bodhisattvas do not harm other beings.

On the top of a peacock's head there are five feathers. They are likened to Bodhisattvas because the Bodhisattva's path has five divisions, five types. The above examples illustrate the reasons for using a peacock to symbolise Bodhisattvas.

Through the comparison of the peacock being harmless in gaining their livelihood and the Bodhisattvas not causing harm to others, we are encouraged to follow a practice of developing a good heart, which reflects the Bodhisattva's way of life. As we all presently possess some level of good heart, through studying this teaching we are encouraged to develop it further by minimising our harmful actions to others. Even people who do not have any great interest in spiritual practice have great respect or admiration for anyone who is very kind to others, who never cause problems or harm other beings.

So we have to try to focus our mind to see the benefits of making an effort to develop a good heart and prevent harming others. We all hear a lot about the benefits of developing a good heart and of showing tolerance rather than hatred to others, but in reality, what it means is that we practise this amongst those who surround us, like one's family members, one's partner and one's friends.

If we think of what benefits are gained from this practice, we will find that it can bring people closer to us and the people around us closer together. This in turn brings a sense of satisfaction and security to our lives. On the contrary, if instead of showing patience to those close to us, we show hatred or pride then what can be the outcome?

Through this analysis we can see that if we too follow the practice of the Bodhisattvas, then all can benefit, not only in this life but in future lives as well.

We will stop the teaching here. Does anybody have a question to ask?

Question: Is it more important to practise the dharma out there in the world with your neighbours and other society members or is it more important to do the ritual Buddhist practices? Maybe it's a balance between the two?

Answer: If you practise dharma for yourself, then that is a lot less beneficial than if many beings receive the benefits of your practice (because you are the only person who receives the benefit).

The Bodhisattvas have dedicated their lives for the welfare of other beings and so in their deeds there is no selfish reason or self-centred concern. The Bodhisattvas have completely forsaken their own needs and aims and so are totally and completely at the service of other beings. But, by the Bodhisattvas doing this, by engaging and completely giving themselves and devoting their life to others, ironically their own purposes are automatically fulfilled.

In Australia we find that there are people who go to poor and undeveloped countries in order to help needy or desperate people. These people knowingly make the decision to give up all the comforts they have - the wonderful living conditions in this free country - to be surrounded by all those very poor people with infectious diseases etc. They take on all those problems to help those people who are in need. Judging from these outer deeds, we can say that they are practising in accordance with the Bodhisattva's way of life. Of course these people also may actually be a Bodhisattva. So it is without any question that anyone who gives their life to serve society, to serve the many, is truly practising Dharma. Such people are highly respected in the world.

To finish up, we will chant the Buddha's mantra. Choose the correct posture and bring the mind inward. As we chant the mantra, just focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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