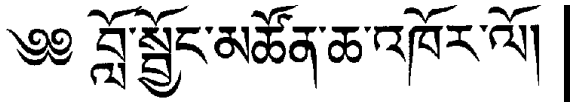

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



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To quote the Buddha: "You are your own master, who else can be your master?" This implies that each person can be fully, self guided. You can be your own master, or in Sanskrit terms, you can be your own guru.

In general when we talk of a master, teacher or guru, we are talking about another person with all the necessary qualifications. To some extent we can be guided by an outside person such as our guru, but within us there is also a guru. The inner guru is the qualities within us which have the possibility to direct our life onto the right path, showing what we should accept and reject in life.

By relying on our inner guru, we can acquire knowledge and skills, not from others, but from within ourselves. By fully utilising this inner knowledge and potential, we can bring maximum happiness to our lives, and we can make sure that our actions in life bring the most benefit to ourselves and others.

In other words, it is more important to listen to your own clear sense of discrimination rather than always following the guidance and opinions of others. This means that any decisions or actions that you need to make in life, even choosing a job, the most important thing is to think about the advantages and disadvantages of making that decision, or doing that action. In this way you utilise your knowledge to the best of your ability. After you go through this thorough thinking process and you are clear about what you should do, then the next decision is finding the best means to implement your decision.

In this process, whatever you decide to do is all based on your own knowledge and reasoning; it is not something influenced by some other outside person or event. If we get used to making our own decisions, then we can achieve more stability in our lives.

The most important thing, in terms of making spiritual progress, is to know your own mind by using your own knowledge through self observation and self investigation. You will then be able to see within the mind, what positive and destructive influences there are. As our natural instinct in life is to always seek what is good, it is important to develop a clear sense of discrimination before you begin an action, and to identify the good and harmful implications of that action.

By doing so, we not only become clear about our motivation, but we also gain a positive and joyful mental

attitude. With the strength and joy we gain through following this path of action we can fulfil the goal of our spiritual practice. We understand that it is entirely up to ourselves to achieve those things. What we are learning here is that the most important factor of success is our own self motivation, enthusiasm and courage, along with the clear knowledge of discrimination in what we are doing.

Our meditation practice is another way of being our own master or guru. In meditation we focus on an object, and our mind becomes familiar with it. So when we engage in meditation, our mind is free of overpowering influences such as delusions and disturbing thoughts. We can all appreciate these experiences where our mind is peaceful and clear.

However, we can also see that if our mind is clouded with distorted thoughts or filled with negative emotions, then we cannot think properly, and we lose the clarity of our discriminating mind. Without a clear mind, we also lose the power of our memory. When our mind is disturbed we are weak. We can't do anything properly and we can't achieve much.

However when we engage in meditation, we are helping ourselves. We are healing ourselves by ridding ourselves of negative emotions and disturbing thoughts. This is the way we try to enhance the peace and stability within ourselves. It is easy to develop knowledge by first having created such a calm and clear environment within ourselves. With a clear mind, intelligence can easily develop and our memory can stabilise as well.

With these things in mind, we shall now do some meditation. First of all, make sure that your sitting posture is comfortable, and relax your body by releasing all tension. Then make an effort to fully calm the mind inwards, so that the mind is not influenced by any outer objects. Having brought the mind inward, we can start the breathing meditation where we direct all our mental focus to the flow of the breath at the nostrils. Try to make sure that you maintain some awareness or mindfulness of keeping your focus on the object of the breath rather than letting the mind be distracted by outer objects.

There will be no more lecturing tonight! (*It was a very hot night*). However I welcome a question from anyone.

First Questioner

Question: A lot of teachings infer that the path of a monk is superior to being a lay person. What is your comment?

Answer: When any text encourages celibacy, it is because this has more advantage on the spiritual path. It refers to someone who is, not just by title or by looks, truly what we call a Sangha or truly a spiritual novice. The true novice is someone who has the qualifications of being a novice monk or nun as described in the various scriptures, i.e. someone who chose to become a novice because of a strong feeling of renunciation towards a worldly lifestyle, and the main desire to achieve liberation from this worldly existence. In order to achieve liberation, the training involves the path of three-fold training or three fold precepts of morality, concentration and wisdom.

Of these three trainings, the training of morality is the foundation. Without the training of morality you can't be successful in the training of concentration. And without success in the training of concentration, there can't be success in the training of wisdom. A true Sangha, a true novice, sees the importance of their celibacy vow in the training that leads to the state of liberation.

Generally speaking, as a Sangha you are distant from society, including your own family and relatives. You are not supposed to have less feelings for some and stronger attachment to others. This distance will cause less problems in the life of a Sangha, and will allow them more time to engage in spiritual practice.

Because morality and ethics are important to the practice of achieving liberation, there is a lot of encouragement made to take the vow of celibacy. This is an opportunity to practice pure morality. But if the Sangha or novice break their vows or the vows are not observed properly, it is said that the negativities from breaking a moral precept have more gravity for Sangha than for lay people who break the same moral code.

However, as the Buddha said, there is also liberation in the household. This means that even for a householder or lay person, there is an opportunity to practise morality and engage in the training of concentration and wisdom in order to achieve liberation. This liberation is quicker than the liberation for any celibate person who doesn't keep their vows properly. Sangha and novices don't necessarily achieve liberation first. We look to the benefits of becoming Sangha from the point of view of making progress in the practice of the three trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom to attain liberation.

Generally speaking, we are advised to respect or admire the celibate person or Sangha. Why? Because they possess pure morality. And as was said, the spiritual foundations are built on morality.

So we go to one more question?

Next Questioner

Question: Is there a conflict between being successful in a worldly sense and being successful in a spiritual sense?

Answer: It's not easy, but it is possible that one person can integrate into their life both spiritual and worldly activities. A person can make progress in both levels. One person can be knowledgeable of the world, and of the spiritual. But this doesn't mean that these two activities - worldly and spiritual - are the same.

Your question is similar to a question which was raised to the Buddha by an ancient King who said that, because of being a king with the responsibility of the affairs of the state, there is not much opportunity to just sit and meditate. In the King's mind there was this conflict of interests, so he asked whether or not it was possible to do both, run worldly affairs and do the spiritual practice together.

In reply, the Buddha told the King that he should try to include the motivation of the Bodhicitta, i.e. the altruistic attitude in whatever action you do. With this motivation you do not have to give up worldly affairs, and at same time you are not away from the spiritual practice.

A famous Tibetan Master also said that whether something is worldly or spiritual is up to your mental outlook.

We will stop the teaching here. Just to finish up, once again sit in a comfortable posture with the mind drawing inward. We will then chant the Buddha's mantra. You should focus the mind on the chanting. Feel peaceful and positive about the chanting.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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