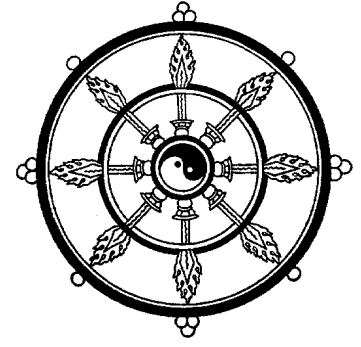

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



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First of all, we'll do a breathing meditation together. Choose the sitting posture that is most comfortable and relax your body.

When deciding which meditation we should use, we should choose the one that targets our most immediate and pressing problem.

If our immediate problem is with unfulfilled desire, then we should employ the meditations that guide us to view the desired object from a different perspective- from a perspective, in fact, completely opposite to our present one. If our problem is due to ignorance, then we should use the meditations that acquaint our minds with the way things exist in reality, as ultimately empty of inherent existence. So there are different meditations we can use, and we should employ them according to our needs.

As the famous Indian master Shantideva recommended, we should view the mind as a wild elephant that needs to be disciplined and tamed. Extending the analogy, Shantideva described the havoc a wild elephant can cause, and the method a trainer would use to tame even a mad elephant, making it obedient and useful. An elephant trainer needs knowledge and equipment - a chain, a firm, strong pole and a metal hook. With the chain he tethers the beast to the pole to begin the training. The hook is used to discipline the elephant if it becomes unruly. Applying the analogy to our minds, with mindfulness we can chain the mind to the pole of the meditation object and, if the mind will not stay focussed on its object, we hook it back to its task with conscientious alertness. In this way, we can retain our focus on the various meditation objects so that the mind can be tamed.

When we engage in meditation practice it is good to reflect on analogies such as the taming of the elephant. Just as the wild elephant can be very useful once it is tamed, so a trained mind brings us lots of benefits.

Its very important that we don't discourage ourselves with thinking that parts of our personalities are unchangeable, that its in our nature to be, for instance, short tempered or in the grip of strong attachment. We should be positive about our practice of meditation and reject the thought that we cannot bring our minds under control.

There are tremendous benefits we can gain from meditation. Just as a trainer has full command over a trained elephant, a trained meditator has full command

over their mind. When we tell it to stay, it stays! And when we let it go, it can go forth to show love and compassion to other beings.

So, continuing with our meditation, seated in the meditation posture, try to remove all thoughts concerned with external objects. By doing this, we'll find the mind resting within. Now, direct one's whole mental focus to the incoming and outgoing breath. With full mindfulness and alertness, try to maintain this focus.

Pause for meditation

We'll now continue the teaching on the text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* at verse 9 .

Should the impulse arise now to seek our own
pleasure

We must turn it aside to please others instead;
For even if loved ones should rise up against us,

We must blame our self-interest and feel its our due.

This verse describes the practice of bodhisattvas, those great beings who have cultivated the mind of enlightenment. With that mind they hold the welfare of others more dear than their own. When a bodhisattva generates bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, he or she completely reverses the habitual attitudes towards self and others.

Before, the self-cherishing attitude was completely dominant. With that self-cherishing attitude we always place our interest first. Our main concern is with our peace and our happiness, so we completely neglect the welfare of other beings.

When bodhicitta is generated, the attitude the bodhisattvas previously reserved for themselves they now hold towards others. They now have the attitude of cherishing other beings. Where previously they neglected others, they now reserve this attitude for themselves. There is no self-interest in their minds.

Bodhisattvas, however, will still find residues or impulses towards self-interest arising in their minds. As it says in the text, "should the impulse arise now to seek our own pleasure....". So, to counter these impulses, they need to reinforce their thoughts of others' welfare, and immediately try to give away all their happiness and virtue to other beings.

We might ask, "What is the good of showing love to others and offering our help to them?". We're trying here to understand that if we take responsibility for others, for benefiting others, then its not just the other beings who benefit but, at the same time, all our own wishes will be fulfilled. This is why the examples of bodhisattva practice are so important, why we value loving kindness, the caring thought towards others, and doing service for others. If we benefit other beings then indirectly the benefits will come to us - automatically.

We can see how this happens if we think closely about what we observe. We can think of a family situation, where, all for the benefit of his family, the father is dedicated to working hard. He is self-motivated and, of course, it is in his own interest. His family benefits materially and are appreciative of his actions. For that father there's fulfilment, because his mind is free of conflicting emotions and, because of his attitude, he can enjoy harmony and happiness within his family.

The attitude adopted by a schoolteacher, for example, can make a great difference to his or her experience of work. Sometimes we can see that, for the success of his or her students, a teacher's academic qualifications are not as important as a true concern for the future of those children, a recognition of the importance of their education and their needs.

Those teachers who just fulfil their obligations and pass their days in the classroom get little pleasure from their occupation, and receive little appreciation from their students. A teacher, however, who always focuses on the needs of the students and who does his or her best to make the class interesting, whose facial expression is always smiling and positive will enjoy a similar response from his or her students. The environment will be relaxed, and the students will make good progress.

Geshe Doga says that when he was a student, after sitting many examinations, he learnt that some teachers, having shirked their responsibility, would put more and more pressure on the students as the exams got closer, which would make the exams very frightening. That only caused problems - the students and the teacher gained less from this approach.

So, if we look at our day-to-day life, we can see that if we change our attitude to others and offer benefit to them, then we also benefit ourselves. If we look at how we interact with others, we can see that with a change of attitude, with the thought of others' welfare, there are many opportunities to show more care. Trying to adopt the attitude of caring for others, and trying more to serve them - even in the way we communicate - gives us the opportunity to see the result of caring for other beings.

So we can see benefit to our day-to-day life by generating love for other beings. From the spiritual viewpoint of course, if one offers even a small meal in charity, then that becomes the cause of one's wealth in the future.

The caring thought that wishes to benefit the lives of others is the most important thing, because it is the cause of giving benefit to others. If we've cultivated this caring thought then, whenever we meet with another in need, someone hungry for instance, naturally, automatically, we'll be moved to share what food we have. Without such a thought of care and concern for another's well-being then automatically we'll refuse to share, thinking something along the lines of, "If I don't eat this meal, I'll starve." Immediately we place our needs and interests, first.

We'll leave the teaching here. Are there any questions?

Question: Geshe-la, would you mind being specific and outline a meditation to deal with unfulfilled desire?

Answer: The main cause of desire is perceiving the object as possessing some quality of attractiveness or beauty. To overcome that desire we have to destroy that way of perceiving the object. This is achieved by seeing the other side of the object, the ugly or unattractive side, even if its just in our imagination.

Say you're very attracted to anything white and despise everything that is black. By imagining in our meditation

all those white objects to be black, we can overcome our desire for the white objects. By changing our perspective, we can change our feelings towards desired objects. Desire usually depends on attraction to a particular aspect of an object - its colour, shape and feel.

If it's the colour then we imagine a different one, if it is the shape or form, say, of a human body, then we imagine it as a corpse. Or we can think of it as deformed or disfigured, or covered in maggots, or excrement. If it's the feel of a body we crave, then we can see it without its flesh, as a skeleton. Thus we diminish the quality of attractiveness we see in the object and, in this way we will diminish desire.

In Tibetan, the word for meditation, 'gom', literally translates as 'to get used to'. This of course implies what we ought to be aiming for in meditation. If we're meditating to overcome desire, then we're getting the mind used to seeing objects of desire from a different perspective. We can begin to ask ourselves whether the quality of attractiveness we see actually inherently exists in the object, or if it is just something we have mentally projected.

If we investigate, we'll see that our own thought is the main cause of seeing the object in the aspect of beauty. Further, we will understand that beyond our desire, we don't see the true nature of the object. We desire the object because we believe it can bring some satisfaction, happiness or joy. Because of this, the strong desire for the object is sustained.

The consequence is that for as long as the object is unobtained, there is suffering. Once it is obtained, we still suffer because there's the fear of losing it. That fear itself is a direct result of desire. In our meditations, then, we should recognise that our desire sees the object of strong attachment as a source of satisfaction, as a cause of some sort of security in our lives, as a promise of enjoyment. Then we can get used to seeing the object in the opposite way; and see how, in actuality, the object lacks the quality of beauty that we impute to it; how that object cannot be a source of lasting satisfaction and so forth. So if, as the term 'meditation' implies, we train the mind, it can be changed into any form we could wish for.

We'll now recite the Buddha's mantra seven times. Choose the right posture, and making sure the mind is not distracted to external objects, focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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