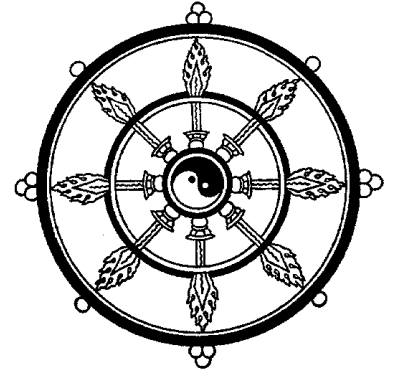

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



7 May 1997

As usual we will do some breathing meditation together. Fully relax your body and choose a suitable sitting posture. Try to stop the mind wandering after external objects and just let it rest inward. Make sure that the mind is clear when beginning this breathing meditation. We will focus the mind on the breath which leaves and comes in through the nostrils. Make an effort to maintain this focus without being influenced by any distracting thoughts. It is good to practice meditation like this whenever you find the time, because it's important to have some stability and concentration in our mind.

We will now continue the teachings on mind training called the 'Wheel of Sharp Weapons'. Last week we finished at verse 10, where the last line reads:

Hereafter let's take on what sickness is theirs.

There is a meditation technique called 'giving and taking' and this particular line shows the technique of 'taking'.

The main aim of this practice is to cultivate compassion and love towards others. As these feelings of love and compassion don't arise naturally, we have to train our mind by developing an understanding of others' situations as well as our own. The verse we looked at last week said that all the misery and physical pain we experience is the result of having caused harm to other beings. And, upon examination, we can see that the driving force behind these harmful actions is the self cherishing mind, the root cause of not only the harm that we have caused others, but also the harm that we receive now in our own lives.

This teaching helps us to see the faults of the self-cherishing mind and, as well, the benefits of cultivating the thought to cherish others. There is a lot of emphasis on understanding suffering, based on our own experience. This is an important factor when cultivating compassion or empathy towards others. Compassion arises towards other beings out of our own experience of suffering, like the physical pain that can make our bodies hurt and ache. Understanding your own suffering helps you to understand the suffering of others; you can feel more sympathy and compassion for others when you can recognise that you've shared their suffering.

It is important to recognise the compassionate mind very clearly, otherwise we may confuse it with some other emotion, like desire or attachment. We produce all sorts of feelings and emotions; and, when we want to, we can

increase a particular feeling or emotion and make it very strong. It is important to make the distinction between compassion and other emotions.

Examine compassion and notice what its unique and distinctive features are. The one very distinctive feature of the mind of compassion is that it arises when others are in need or suffering, for example, from poverty. Compassion arises with the understanding that someone is in need of help. Compassion is a mental attitude, a sincere willingness to free others from their problems and to release them from their suffering.

So, showing compassion towards others is very different from showing desire or attachment. Showing desire and attachment is the result of perceiving beautiful and attractive qualities in others. You perceive them as a giver of happiness, as a cause of pleasure. On that basis, your mind will hold onto the other and this grasping is what we call desire or attachment.

We are talking about cultivating a compassionate mind because, if we could utilise such a mind in our daily life with friends, partners and families, then there would be great benefits for all. With compassion in our relationships there will be help and support for each other. When people in a relationship have the mind of compassion, then naturally one will help the other when they are in need or facing some problem. Compassion has the potential to benefit others and make us closer to them. Even if we show a compassionate mind to a stranger, we can become close to that person. Compassion is a cause for bringing harmony, strength and closeness in relationships

Along with compassion, we need to show loving kindness to each other. Loving kindness is different to a compassionate mind in that loving kindness is the mental attitude of giving, of wishing others to be happy. Both compassion and loving kindness are alike in that, when cultivated in our minds, they give our mind an energy, a sort of mental propensity which enables us to help others, to give them happiness and free them from suffering.

Even if we have all the resources to benefit others, if we lack love and compassion, then we can't utilise this resource effectively. We generate love and compassion in our minds towards others through training the mind in meditation, through making the mind familiar with an attitude of compassion. It is said that with a mind trained

in compassion, whenever we see another being caught up in suffering in desperate need of help, it is natural, almost instinctive for us to feel sympathy, to show compassion and help them.

So there are many reasons why it is important for us to cultivate and develop a strong, compassionate mind. Our own life is dependent upon the support and friendship of others, we'd find our lives very difficult if we had to live completely alone. We can see how much we benefit when we enjoy harmonious relationships with others. This harmony brings joy to us as well as to others.

On the other hand, disharmony or disputes within relationships can be a great source of problems in ours and in others' lives. With this in mind, we should examine and investigate the causes that brings harmony or disharmony within our relationships. The causes have much to do with our mental attitudes and the actions they cause, which determines the state of our relationships. We have to think of what we can do to improve our daily actions. The best thing we can do is to show true love and compassion towards others. We have to understand that we learn this text and we study the teachings as a means to bring more compassion into our day to day life.

For example, we are upset when hearing abuse from a friend, and this is because we have used abusive words to them - and others - in the past. If you think about your own personality when you get angry at others and abuse them, then you can come to understand that your friend has a similar problem to you in getting angry and speaking harshly. Even if you were to look for a new companion, you'd be unable to find one who doesn't get angry and who can completely discipline his or her speech.

Another way of thinking is to focus on the situation of the other person. The fact that your friend is in a bad mood or in a bad temper is a clear indication that they are not happy. It is clear that there is some need that is not being fulfilled in the mind of your friend. As you begin to see their desperate situation, it is possible to feel sympathy and show some compassion. Instead of being concerned about yourself, you start to feel concerned about your friend's situation. At the least, you don't want to make it worse. Having some understanding of your friend's situation makes it possible for you to be calmer and more mindful to not over-react.

If your friend's main problem is a short temper, then the best way to help the person is to always show gentleness in your mental attitude and in your actions. Sometimes the short temper of a friend is calmed down by the offering of a delicious meal, or even just creating a pleasant environment.

The most important reason to practise cultivating compassion is that compassion is the root cause of our joy and happiness. Even peace in the world has to come from the promotion of compassion in the mind of all the beings living in the world.

So we will finish the teaching here, and as usual we will chant the Buddha's mantra. So please choose a relaxing meditation posture, try to stabilise the mind inward and then focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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