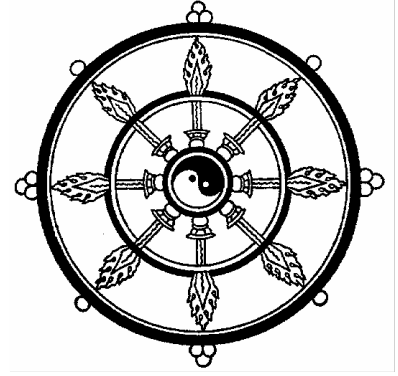

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



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5 February 1997

As usual, we will begin with a short breathing meditation together. The first and most important step in meditation practice is to adopt the correct motivation, i.e. why am I doing this meditation? We practise meditation for one reason - to control and calm our mind. In generating this motivation, it is important to clearly understand that there is no way to bring inner peace and stability to our lives unless we stabilise our mind by taming all unruly and unnecessary thoughts. So we should be saying with determination, 'I am doing this meditation to calm my mind'. We apply meditation as an antidote, in order to calm our mind.

If we just let our minds habitually wander after any object and without control generate any thoughts, we find that we feel restless and lack peace. We can feel like we are losing self control. We can see that if our minds are always dominated by wandering thoughts, then we experience a loss of our peace. These wandering thoughts automatically make us feel uneasy and uncomfortable. The very aim of practising meditation is to cultivate the ability to focus on your state of mind, and to develop single-pointed concentration within the mind.

If you are not used to the practice of keeping the mind inward, then it continually goes outward. It does this even when you decide to bring it back in. So you need to start the breathing meditation before the mind runs outward. Direct the mind onto the breath which goes in and out through the nostrils. Fully concentrate the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath so that it is absolutely absorbed into the breath, rather than watching the movement of the breath coming in and out. Instead of becoming distracted by external objects, the mind is kept inward by maintaining one's focus on a specific object. Let us do this meditation for a few minutes.

As we develop our interest in meditation, we need to develop some understanding about its purpose. We need to ask, who is it that benefits from a meditation practice, and who is it that loses if the practice is ignored. Once we realise that, we can find much benefit from meditating. We then have to ask, "What is the best way to make progress?"

In a meditation practice there is usually some subject or theme, and this is not just based on blind faith. As was mentioned before, meditation is defined as 'the mind having single pointed concentration within a given object or subject'. For the meditation to be effective and stable,

it is said that before engaging in it, we have to gain a firm conviction about the subject matter of the meditation. So thinking is needed before practising meditation.

The thinking process is where we investigate and examine all the ideas we have heard, studied, or learned. Before we can even start this thinking process, we need to master the process of hearing and studying. We need to combine three things:

1. We study the subject of meditation thoroughly and with an open mind
2. We investigate this knowledge by thinking about the subject over and over again, until our knowledge becomes certain
3. When the knowledge is certain, then we can begin our meditation practice.

We can then have a stable meditation practice with less likelihood of being easily distracted by any other factors.

Meditation is the best practice to safeguard our inner peace and well being; as well as safeguarding the other positive aspects of our personalities, such as our good human nature and actions. Since we all want inner peace and happiness, and we all want to maintain our good human nature, there is no reason why we shouldn't take some action to achieve this. Meditation is the action we need to take.

Along with the benefits of meditation come some responsibilities. If we want inner peace and happiness and we want to be good people, then we are responsible for doing something about it. If we already possess some good and admirable qualities, then we need to develop and safeguard them. But if we have no such qualities, how can we develop them? If we think that good and admirable qualities are important, then meditation is a sure path for us to follow.

However, when we meditate we may not experience the full results of these benefits. This may be due to an incorrect focus of the meditation practice. No matter how long we have been following a meditation practice, if there is no decrease in our mental delusions, then we are not achieving our goal of increased inner peace and happiness. We are not progressing in terms of a positive transformation in our lives.

Meditation isn't simply about just sitting and focussing the mind on one object and then achieving some degree of single-pointed concentration. Having the ability to

concentrate as such doesn't necessarily mean that you have overcome your mental delusions. To make real progress we have to integrate meditation into our daily lives, and use it to seek the true cause of our problems. Then the solutions can be found. For instance, we can all think of a time when we were in a happy and peaceful state, but suddenly we lost that inner mental peace, and our whole environment seemed insecure and threatening. The change in our feelings and experiences was such that even others noticed that at one moment we were peaceful and happy and in the next our faces changed.

This may seem as if it happened without any cause or reason. However if you use that moment to investigate the cause thoroughly, and deeply go into your mind, then it is possible to identify the cause. You will see the thought that had arisen to distract your mind toward an external object, making you lose the peace you had been enjoying one moment before.

If we look more closely at this thought which has destroyed our inner peace, then we will find, depending on the circumstances, the thought will be our attachment or desire for certain things, or it could be hatred, pride or wanting to compete with others.

So, in our meditation practice it is most important to recognise this thought, this immediate cause of our problems. Whether it be attachment, anger, pride or whatever, we can then deal with and overcome it. For example, let's say we've recognised desire as the cause of our miseries. It is said that we should then meditate and, in the meditation, develop a strong feeling of resentment towards these desires and even pin-point the specific desire. We should strongly say to it, "I have recognised you, the enemy who steals all my peace and happiness wherever I go, wherever I live or whatever conditions I live in. Even living in the best conditions, the reason I haven't found inner peace and satisfaction is because of you". Similarly, recognise the destructiveness of anger if it is the immediate cause of your misery.

It is said that the more we develop an understanding of the suffering and the effect that these mental delusions have on our lives, the more we can understand others' suffering. For example, when you are faced with someone who is showing you a great force of anger, because of your own experience, you know how anger is destructive and can overpower and torment a person to the point of them losing self control. One can then easily empathise with that person because you can see that they are suffering and are in need of help. Instead of creating negative feelings toward that person, you will feel compassion for them.

After recognising the mental delusion that is the immediate or the main cause of your suffering, then try to look for the relevant remedy for that particular delusion in your meditation practice.

We will finish the teaching here. Do you have questions?

Question: I get very confused with the notion of desire. As an artist I have a very strong desire to express myself. Is this a problem according to Buddhism?

Answer: The way in which we use the term desire or attachment is in reference to a certain state of mind which, whenever it arises in our mind, immediately makes us uneasy and uncomfortable. This kind of desire is your inner enemy and must be overcome.

If we talk of desire in general, there are some things we desire that on the surface appear to bring joy and satisfaction. So it will seem unrealistic to us when we are told to overcome all desires, because overcoming all desire is almost like life itself becoming totally empty. Therefore it is better to begin with overcoming the desire that makes us feel restless and uneasy.

Desire in terms of relationships between men and women has two effects. It can have the immediate effect of fulfilling each other's pleasure, but in the long run this desire doesn't have a good lasting effect.

When the relationship is going smoothly, the desire actually seems like it is supporting the relationship, and that it is the source of mutual happiness. However in a broken relationship where there is no hope of a reconciliation, the desire you had for the other person makes you feel unhappy and frustrated without them. Many people experience great misery and pain because of desire for a person with whom they have lived. So even though desire gives some sort of temporary satisfaction, this has to be weighed up against the amount of suffering and misery it brings in the latter stages of a relationship. In the long term, desire brings far more suffering than satisfaction. Desire, by its nature, is a source of suffering and misery.

I hope to see these teaching nights go very well for the rest of the year, where everyone reaps some benefits, and is friendly and helpful to each other in studying meditation and so forth. We will now finish with reciting the Buddha's mantra seven times. Focus or concentrate your mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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