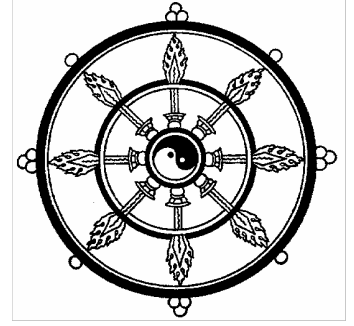


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



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Let us first do a breathing meditation to stabilise the mind. Choose a suitable posture and release all the tension in the body - feel your body at rest.

The meditation posture is significant and has many benefits. The posture symbolises the pure action of the body, as it ensures that no unskilful or negative physical action is done through speech or other physical activity. Sitting in this posture also enhances physical relaxation, and creates some balance in the systems of our body.

At the same time we should also recognise the importance of disciplining our mind. Just as the lack of discipline in our physical actions can bring unnecessary problems in our lives, our undisciplined mind can also be a source of problems. Therefore, as we sit in this meditation posture, we should realise the importance and benefits of controlling the mind, and generate the strong intention, through this meditation, to try to gain control of the mind in order to prevent problems or difficulties from arising.

To be successful in controlling or calming the mind, we need to be aware of how our minds function. We need to watch the mind all the time. As the famous teacher Atisha said, 'when alone, watch your mind'. Most problems are mentally created, and by watching the mind we can see that this is true. That's why the very first thing in meditation is to focus on the mind.

We should develop a very clear awareness of the workings of our minds, to the point where we can gain some understanding of the positive and negative states that determine our happiness or unhappiness. We can develop such close awareness of the mind that it appears as almost a tangible object. Then we can clearly see how particular negative patterns of thought have given us a great deal of suffering and unhappiness.

Furthermore, if these patterns are not removed, they will become a future cause of suffering. If this negative mind is with you in the present moment, then you can see that it causes the experience of some discomfort and unease. Even if you enjoy favourable external conditions like good food, drink, clothing or living environment, whenever this pattern of a negative state mind overpowers your mind, you cannot be happy, you cannot be at peace. Nothing will satisfy you.

It is important to see this mind as dangerous. You have to be cautious of this mind, because of its potential to destroy your life, and what you seek. So with this understanding of the shortcomings of the negative mind, try to target your meditation practice to challenge and counteract this negative mind.

Now, get rid of all thoughts and let the mind fully dwell within. Then do the breathing meditation where we direct all our mental attention on the incoming and outgoing breath.

To emphasise the importance of knowing one's mind, Shantideva said that if you don't know the reality of the mind, then you will never achieve what you want to achieve. We can understand from this instruction that happiness or unhappiness is not just a result of external conditions, but

depends on internal mental factors. So it is important to create the right internal conditions, as well as the outer ones. If you completely ignore the internal factors and only devote your life to improving your external conditions, then you will never achieve your goal and you will have wasted your time and effort.

If we think in terms of our well-being in this life, we need to develop our knowledge of the world as well as our knowledge of the spiritual teachings. By virtue of knowing the world we can find outer security in life. However outer security alone is not enough, we need to find security within ourselves. There are internal causes that bring results, including the suffering and misery in our lives.

If we can combine both the practices of spiritual knowledge and world knowledge, then our lives will be fulfilling. We can even make material possessions something meaningful and fulfilling, if we minimise our desire and learn to be content with what we have.

It doesn't matter what we do in our lives, we are all the same in seeking mental and physical happiness, so we have to take responsibility for the care of our minds and bodies. When we observe animals, we can see that they seek mental and physical happiness, and they too have some sense of responsibility. They react decisively when something threatens their lives. For example, if you give poisonous food to a dog or cat, they can smell it, and are then cautious and alert. They will stay away from the food and refuse to take it.

As human beings, the power of our intellect is enormous, and one of the things we learn from the spiritual teachings is to utilise the potential of our own mind. For instance, your mind has the natural ability to discern between right and wrong, beneficial and harmful. And the more you utilise this ability, the more you can be certain about how this applies to your own daily actions and thoughts. If we apply the intellect to our stream of thoughts, we can discriminate two types - the positive, creative, beneficial type, and the negative, destructive, harmful type. It is best to develop self-knowledge as much as possible. When we've identified the meaningful, beneficial thought, then the practice is to cultivate that knowledge, to try and develop and sustain that thought all the time. We should try to live our lives by those actions that have the result of bringing benefit to both ourselves and others.

In this way, we can make substantial improvements to the quality of our life, and in the way we live our life day-by-day. However, if we ignore the directions of our true wisdom and knowledge, and live our daily lives with negative states of mind, then we act without any consideration for the outcome. Then our actions will bring us just more suffering, and unending, unwanted problems.

We won't discuss the text tonight, but if anybody has any questions, they are welcome to ask.

Question 1: Geshe la has said that the purpose of meditation is about ridding the mind of certain afflictions. I have been introduced to shamatha practice which says to let go of the negativity, let it fall back into the mind, the natural state of the

mind, let it dissipate. I am confused by the difference in the approaches.

Samdup: So is your question asking whether we should just watch the mind, not bothering what type of thought is in the mind, whether or not they are positive or negative - just let them flow naturally, or, as we understood from the teaching, just to watch the mind and, at the same time, use your intellect and try to know and investigate the mind?

Answer: I am not sure about the other meditation technique that you mention, but you mentioned that in this technique the good and the bad thoughts that flow in the mind are like the natural part of the mind. Is that what you said, something natural?

Questioner: I'm really not sure. If everything is empty of inherent existence, then why label our thoughts good and bad etc. Isn't that just perpetuating the problem?

Answer: I am interested in your use of the term 'natural'. You talk about the nature of the mind, the stream of thought flowing. What do you mean when you use the term 'nature'? Does nature mean something that you can't do anything about, that, in a sense it is inherent? Like the stream of thought a wave is not always the same, it is always changing, flowing. By referring to the nature of the mind, are you saying that there are no causes and conditions?

If you watch the mind, differing types of thoughts arise. Why? These different thoughts arise due to causes and conditions. So, if the condition is there, then there is also a remedy. If there is a condition for a negative mind to arise, then there is a remedy to overcome it. For example, if you are a patient with a disease, and the doctor can identify the cause of the disease, then they can diagnose and treat the disease. But if there is no cause for the disease, then nothing can be done.

Some people also talk about meditations where you don't even bother to observe the mind, you just sit there trying to experience some sort of nothingness in your meditation. Here you don't even examine the mind. Perhaps the meditation you speak of is of this kind.

Here we are talking about transformation of the mind. This is possible because of the fact that our mind can be influenced by the type of object we choose. When we choose a certain object, a certain thought and a certain state of mind with certain emotions arises. But when we forget about that object, that particular mind also goes away. From this point of view, it is possible to work on a disturbing, problematic state of mind and remove it.

Question 2: Are you saying that in Buddhist meditation we actively change negative thoughts in our meditation?

Answer: That is an important part of the meditation, and generally it is recommended that you should use your meditation to challenge or to destroy any negative state of mind that is immediately harmful and disturbing to your mind and to your life. It is important for someone who is confused and disturbed by, say, strong desire to practise meditation to overcome or diminish it. Without diminishing a negative state of mind, it is almost impossible for that person to find rest in life.

For instance, it is difficult to calm down a child whose mind is fixed on a certain desirable object. The parents can say as many nice things as possible to the child, and try to compromise, or offer another nice object, but sometimes the child is so driven by desire to have the object in their mind, that they can't even begin to understand that the parents are trying to do something positive for them.

This is the same for someone overpowered by anger. It is hard to communicate with them. You try to say something helpful, but it won't work because of their angry state of mind. The

person won't find any peace or rest until he or she removes that angry mind. It doesn't matter whether they try to relax or rest, or sit in one place, or go out - driven by the mind of anger, they cannot rest. However, once that angry mind is calmed down and diminished, that person can certainly find peace, and can certainly talk sensibly to others. Then they will find inner peace and rest.

It is said that the success of our meditation depends on our state of being. We have to be physically and mentally relaxed and stable. So it is important that we first overcome any negative states of mind that we may have, especially the ones that are the most powerful and intense within the mind.

1st Questioner again: Is it also possible to look at it from a different perspective? Instead of trying to overcome the negativities, which makes the task seem to be a burden, what about sitting with the problem, such as anger, utilising it as a resource and sitting with it, letting it soften and finding compassion within it? Can we utilise the resource of the negativities to find positive qualities.

Answer: I'm not sure in what sense you mean 'utilising' anger. Generally anger is the impetus to make you do something destructive. For example, in worldly affairs people say that it is important to show anger towards your enemies and to seek revenge. There was a man who shot many people and then killed himself. Later, they found in his diary that it was all too much for him. He had kept anger in his mind over many years and he could not contain it any longer. So everything he did was to get rid of this anger. In this sense, using the anger has only destructive consequences. There could be another sense you're referring to, but I don't know

Shantideva also said that the only remedy, or antidote to anger is love and compassion. Anger cannot be destroyed by anger. Also, even though many people say that the only way to finish with an enemy is to kill them, anger cannot destroy or finish off the enemy. When one enemy is killed, another one arises in his place. So there is no end to it. Furthermore, the consequence of such an action can bring more threats to your life, and perhaps make your own living environment insecure. So, even if in worldly terms you want defeat the enemy, it's really done through showing love and friendliness. Only through this we can completely rid ourselves of enemies.

To defeat outer enemies, we should think about this teaching by Shantideva. Then the friendlier we are the closer they become to us. However it is the opposite with the inner enemy of anger. If you are lenient with the anger and don't do anything about it, then it will become stronger, and more powerful, and cause you harm.

Many of you may already have heard of this story about when I was 12 or 13 years old. In the monastery I used to fight a lot with another monk, and many times we injured each other. I am not sure at what point it happened, but somewhere during the fighting the other monk couldn't beat me, and I gave him a present. Shortly after this the other monk responded in the same way and from then onwards we became so close that the other monk even asked me to never leave him behind and such like.

So we will now chant the Buddha's mantra and just try to focus the mind on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Final version
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