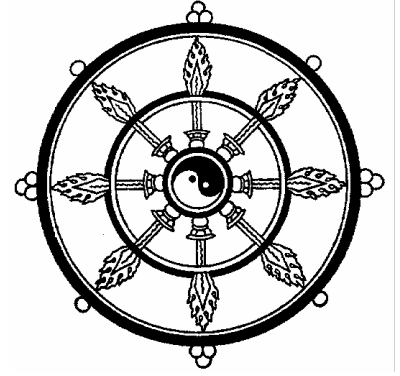


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཨོ ལྷ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ཀ་འཁོར་ལོ།



16 April 1997

We will do some breathing meditation first. Relax your body and choose a suitable meditation posture. Focus your attention on the mind. If your thoughts start to wander, then gently and not too forcefully bring the mind inward, and direct it to the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. Make every effort to prevent being distracted in this meditation. We will meditate in this way for a short time.

You will find this breathing meditation beneficial. It is effective in immediately removing any thoughts and mental agitation that can bring mental unease. It is also effective in disciplining our mind, because it gives us a break from the normally unruly patterns of our thoughts. It is recommended that you do this breathing meditation first, to get your mind fully settled inward. After that you can go ahead with other types meditations or practices.

You will find that in the beginning it is better to make your meditation session short. The most important thing in meditation is to achieve some level of mental stability, or control of the mind. As our mind is not trained to concentrate on a given object, it is natural that whenever we meditate, our mind just drifts towards other objects. If our meditation session is too long, then we find that our mind wanders on and off the chosen object, and the only result is a mind increasingly used to being unsettled. It will sit on a particular object for a short time, lose it almost immediately, and find some other object. By doing this we will never achieve anything.

If, instead, we make the session short, making our mind stay on the chosen object even for just one minute, then we will have achieved something. Don't be too concerned about your concentration, but at the same time it is important to not let the mind completely wander off and be distracted by external objects. If, after a while, it becomes too hard to keep the mind on its object, then just relax, try to feel at ease and experience a mind with no thoughts, or no object, for a short while. Then, refreshed, you can return the mind to the meditation object.

Through meditation we are trying to develop mental concentration. So, when we practise meditation we should expect some improvement in our ability to concentrate. If we focus on the length of time we spend in a session rather than on developing concentration, then it may be that when we test our concentration, we're unable to hold it for even a minute. So, in the beginning, by making our meditation sessions short, we're able to exert all our efforts towards doing the meditation session properly, with full concentration. By adopting this

approach we can make gradual progress.

At first we are able to concentrate on an object fully for one minute, then two minutes, and before long we can fully concentrate on the object for an hour and then longer. By practising in this way all our meditation sessions will be beneficial.

It is similar to studying as a part of a course. When we study, we can learn more by choosing the topics we think are the key ones, and then focus our mind fully on those. At the end of our study we will know these subjects well, and there will be no doubt left in our mind about these topics. However if we focus on or keep referring to other subjects, then we can't learn any of them fully. It is the same for meditation, it is important to fully focus on the practice, and not let the mind drift from one object to another.

We will continue with the teachings from the *Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to Verse 10, which says:

When our bodies are racked with great torment
Of dreadful disease we cannot endure,
This is the wheel of sharp weapons returning
Full circle upon us from wrongs we have done.
Till now we have injured the bodies of others;
Hereafter let's take on what sickness is theirs.

These instructions show us what to think when we undergo any painful diseases, or physical pain as a result of receiving harm. Obviously no-one wants physical pain, but, by the very fact of not wanting it, we put ourselves through mental pain. This verse suggests that this 'mental pain' is an additional, unnecessary pain. Its useful to recognise this.

The famous Indian master Shantideva said in his text that: 'if something can be done then why not do something, but if nothing can be done then worrying won't help'. There is no point worrying if something can be done - just do it. But if nothing can be done, then just say to yourself, 'why should I worry?' Such advice can help us to reduce or even prevent us experiencing mental pain.

Basically we are learning here how a spiritual practice helps us to maintain inner peace and happiness, even under conditions of physical pain or suffering. It is this, what we might call our 'mental capacity', that sorts those who engage in spiritual practice from those who don't. Spiritual practice affects our mind, our 'mental capacity'. It helps us to develop positive qualities. So we should check to see whether we have made any mental progress

by comparing our mind before we began following the teachings, with our mind now. Is there any difference?

If we have practised the spiritual teaching properly, then we should see an improvement in our mental capacity and outlook. For instance, of two people who are in the same amount of physical pain, the one who has the spiritual understanding, and has undertaken spiritual practice should be able to maintain some peace and relaxation despite the pain. The other person, who has no spiritual understanding or practice, will not only be going through physical pain, but he or she will be suffering mental pain as well. It is said that it is possible to maintain constant peace and joy, irrespective of conditions. This is the benefit and strength which can be gained from your spiritual practice.

I experienced great pain as a result of a very high fever when I was staying in Buxa, the transit camp in India for all the monks who escaped from Tibet. At that time I had a serious fever, and according to the doctor my temperature went to 105°F or 106°F. I heard all my friends saying that I would not survive, and saw a lot of anxiety in their faces. The fever also caused me pain in my joints and head. However I was able to remember my spiritual practice, and through this, even though I saw great fear and sadness in my friends, I could endure that pain. I can still remember the effectiveness of integrating spiritual advice to reduce my fear and suffering.

No matter how serious the pain is, the experience of it is largely determined by the mental capacity or spirit of the person. Even if we find it hard to imagine that pain in our bodies can be overcome by a calm mind, it is still true to say that spiritual practice will help us endure the pain and stop it from affecting our mind.

I recall a time in hospital when I could not sleep, and went without sleep night after night. Yet even though I was physically very sick, my mental outlook was the same as if I were well. When I finally fell asleep and one of my close friends visited me, he thought that I was dead. I was just having a good sleep, but if I had died then I would have died peacefully. I am sure that spiritual practice can help us to die peacefully ... even delightedly!

The meditation to practise when we face pain and suffering is to contemplate the karmic cause and effect which created our situation. We should recall our past actions, motivated by the selfish mind intending to gain happiness and satisfaction for ourselves alone. We might have caused harm to others merely to satisfy this selfish mind. Due to this selfish mind, we may have caused others injuries by hitting, imprisoning or even killing them. This physical pain that we experience now is nothing but the result of our own harmful actions. This is the meaning of the line, 'this is the wheel of sharp weapons returning full circle upon us for wrongs we have done'.

Our past harmful actions are like sharp weapons which destroy and harm others, and now we are experiencing the resulting suffering and pain. Think of this experience of pain as a result of harmful actions we have committed

in the past. It is said that this type of thinking is effective in spiritual terms, and effective in purifying our past negative karmas, while at the same time accumulating merit. So, there are contemplative meditations that we can do - we shouldn't simply cry, or bewail the pain we undergo.

I will add a bit more commentary to this verse in next week's teaching. We will finish tonight's teaching here and as usual we will recite the Buddha's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Final Version

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