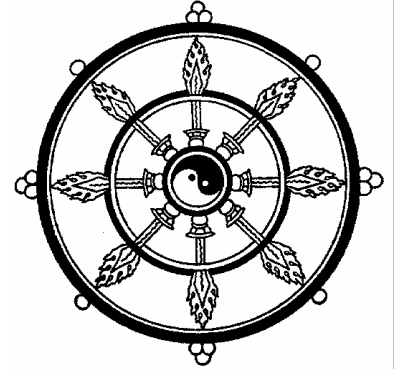


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཨོ ལྷོ་གླུང་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



11 March 1998

Let us first do some breathing meditation together. Choose the meditation posture that is the most comfortable and relaxing for your body.

Before we begin the meditation, we have to reflect on the reason for practising it. We need some understanding of our mind, because the practice we do is to calm our mind, to bring it under control. What we need to understand about our mind is that it rules over all our actions, all the results of our actions, and thus our destiny or future direction in life. As we examine the kind of mind that guides us, the actions we do and so forth, we may see that some kind of negative or uncontrolled thought or emotion overpowers the mind that rules over us. The mind that guides us has no control of its own, but is controlled or overpowered by some kind of disturbing thought or mental delusion. Therefore all our actions and all that we achieve in life do not truly satisfy us. The mind that rules our life misleads and confuses us, and is a source of frustration. Even the good things that we have achieved in life, like good living conditions, are not a source of true happiness and satisfaction.

If we don't do anything to change or transform our mind, and get rid of the delusions or disturbing thoughts that overpower it, we can see that life will have no meaning and become wasteful. So before meditation it is important to generate the strong motivation, strong courage, strong determination that 'I must overcome this unruly mind or delusions that have polluted my mind'. With this motivation in mind, at the beginning of the meditation, we try to remove all distracting thoughts and let the mind rest inwardly.

It is more important to look for quality than length of time when one engages in meditation practice. It is said that in the initial period, when our mind is not used to concentrating on a single object like the inhalation and exhalation of breath, if we try too hard to meditate for a long time, it doesn't help us develop concentration. Even if you think you are doing meditation, the mind may have already slipped away from the meditation object. When you realise it has slipped away, you try to bring it back, and again the mind gets easily distracted. If you do this continuously, you don't make any progress. Further, later on, when you engage in meditation, the mind will get distracted easily, because it has become a mental habit to get distracted.

Therefore, you make the sessions short, but whatever the length of time, you make sure you put all your effort into

fully calming the mind and resting it within for a short time immediately before starting the meditation. If you are doing breathing meditation, focus the mind on the breath as it passes in and out of your nostrils. It doesn't matter if you can't do this for a long time, you just stop. So when we begin, it is good to try to look for quality in our meditation. It is better to make the sessions short and frequent, rather than doing one long session throughout which you do not meditate properly. We don't have much time, but in this short period, try to focus the mind on the breath.

As we discussed before, meditation practice is about safeguarding our mind. In the meditation process, we have to continually observe our mind, because it is said that most of our problems are created by our mind, by a certain way of thinking, by not safeguarding or controlling our mind. If we could control our mind, we could prevent or solve a lot of the unnecessary problems we encounter. As we observe our mind in meditation, we have to know what sort of object occupies our mind. If we do this, we can easily recognise the state of mind we are in, whether positive or negative, happy or unhappy. To sum up, we can know the type of mind or emotion we have by familiarising ourselves with the type of object occupying our mind, knowing that when we think certain thoughts, like memories of past events, we can become sad and depressed, inviting stress and tension. However, when our mind is away from these bad experiences and bad feelings, the direct outcome of our mental attitude is obvious. We can therefore see that there is some benefit in disciplining or gaining more control over our mind, so that we can decide what thoughts we will have. We can distance ourselves from those objects that arouse bad thoughts or experiences, while choosing the causes or conditions for our mind to experience positive, good feelings.

For instance, when we first get up in the morning, if we are not aware of our mind, as soon as we lift our head from the pillow we may think about some recent or past problem. The mind thinks of that problem because we have let it remember the bad event or other bad things. If you start the day with a sad and depressed mind, it is likely that that this will continue the whole day. So day in, day out, we will finish our whole life with problems, bad memories, and depression in our mind. On the other hand, there are many things we can do to reduce this problem. Even if you don't deal with the root of the problem, temporarily you can distance yourself, put aside the problem. It is better to not have the problem

even for a short time.

So when you get up in the morning, if you have some daily spiritual practice as a commitment, like reciting a mantra or doing Sadhanas such as the Tara Sadhana, it is good to start the day with the thought of fulfilling this spiritual commitment. You prepare yourself for the practice and chant the mantra, then pray to Tara. Try to begin the day with some meditation practice. In the meditation practice, you try to see as said before, what you want to achieve through meditation—you want control of your mind, of your life. So you try to pray to Tara that you can succeed in achieving your spiritual goal. If you don't do such a spiritual practice, there are many ways through which you can lift your mind and feelings, like getting up and singing a song, or doing something relaxing. Even if we can temporarily put aside the problem mind, that is beneficial.

For instance, if you have strong attachment, the temporary solution is to try not to think of the object that you desire so much, try to forget that object. The way to do that is to direct your energy into whatever you have to do. Likewise, if you have the problem of anger or hatred, the immediate cause is thinking of the object of anger or hatred. Although we may think that this is not solving the problem at its root, it does help us to reduce the problem so that it doesn't become bigger. Sometimes it is possible that—because you forget the object for one day, then the next, and direct your attention to other things that you have to do in your life—slowly, day by day, you will have completely forgotten about the object. Afterwards, even if you remember that object, it no longer arouses desire or attachment or hatred.

There are many instances where we may face a serious problem, the actual cause of which is our own way of thinking—there isn't any real cause. Some people may worry a lot about losing a small amount of money, even 10 or 20 dollars, and can't stop worrying about it. This is due to a narrow way of thinking. Rather, you could think that it is a small amount that can be made up for, and that the money already lost cannot be recovered, so why worry? You just do some extra work for an hour and recover the amount, rather than thinking of the problem and what you can do to solve it. It is essential that we always take responsibility for ourselves in this life and in the future. This is the best way to solve problems and achieve what we want to achieve in life. The Lord Buddha said that you are the master of your own self—other than yourself, who can be your master? While we all want to achieve some things, and avoid other things, the Buddha said that what is most important is to take responsibility, to try and stop thinking that someone else will rescue us from the problem, and grant our wish—there is no such thing as help from outside.

With this determination or strong sense of self-responsibility, we also have to prepare ourselves for whatever work we undertake to improve our life or solve our problems. Whether that work is big or small, there are two factors—favourable factors and hindrances—that

we have to face. The most important factor in challenging hindrance is our own inner tolerance or patience, which is like a strength. If we have that, we are able to face problems. Whereas if we do not have much endurance or tolerance, even the minor difficulties we face can be overwhelming. Even if the work you undertake is minor, you will find it difficult to accomplish its purpose.

In following the Buddha's advice that you are your own master, you have to know that what you want and do not want does not merely come from outside material conditions, that is one of the main implications of the Buddha's teaching. It mostly comes from within us, and depends on our mind.

That is the end of the teaching tonight, so as usual we will chant the Buddha's mantra. Like before, we try to adopt the meditation posture and, making sure that our body is relaxed and the mind is inward, we focus the mind on the breath.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from the tapes by Jenny Brooks
Edited by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit checked against the tapes by Richard Garward
Edited Version
© Tara Institute