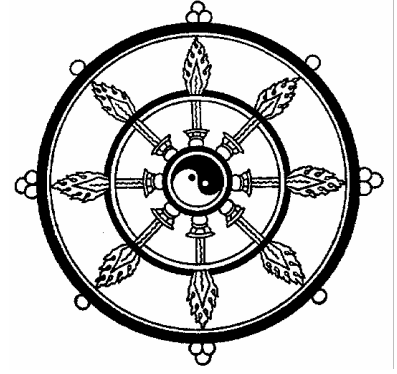


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

འཇིགས་མེད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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As usual we will begin with a short breathing meditation together. Try to sit in a comfortable posture, making sure that your body is fully relaxed. Unless we succeed in bringing some calmness and relaxation to our minds, then we can't truly find peace. Just relaxing the body and finding a peaceful external environment is not enough cause to bring about a true sense of peace within us.

What does it mean to control the mind? It means bringing the mind to the point where we can determine and control where it goes. The ability to control the mind is a cause of inner peace.

If we just watched the mind, without trying to control it, then we'd see our minds go out into the external world, resulting in many thoughts filling it up. We can see just how much influence our minds have over us, and how much it does control us. When the mind is busy wandering outside, then we also become busy following the mind around. Even if we are physically relaxed, if our mind is busy and not relaxed, then we can't feel relaxed.

So it is important to think about the shortcomings of not being able to control the mind, and of always being agitated by external objects. The effect of distraction to external objects can find us uneasy and even disturbed. In understanding all these points, we can see that the practice of meditation will stop the mental habit of always wandering outside, and it will train the mind to sit and rest on a single object. We can gain control over our minds through meditation practice.

Now, try to rest the mind inward, forgetting all outer objects. When the mind becomes inwardly still, then we can start this breathing meditation. One's mind is aware only of the breath going out and coming in through the nostrils. Make sure there are no objects which can distract us from focussing on our breath.

A daily meditation practice is very beneficial. Just as we are responsible for the health of our bodies, we are also responsible for the well being of our own minds. If we enjoy good physical health, there is more happiness in our lives. Likewise, enjoying a sound and healthy mind results in more happiness in our lives. The best thing for us in life is to have lasting peace and happiness, and inner satisfaction. If we found this lasting peace and happiness within us, then nothing else in our lives matters so much any more. It doesn't matter then if everything outside ceases to exist for us, or whether the outside world is too busy for us. However, when we

don't enjoy inner peace and happiness, then no matter what we find in life, no matter what success or achievements we've made, it doesn't bring any satisfaction and it brings no meaning to one's life.

We have an understanding of these issues through our own experience, or by following a meditation practice. If we have made some progress in our practice, especially in terms of mental calmness or subduing the mind, then this inner control brings us lasting peace and happiness. If we live alone, we are content; there is no disturbance or mental restlessness. But if the mind isn't under control, especially if we are on our own, then we can't enjoy ourselves. We can't just sit and enjoy time alone, we feel that we have to go out and find a companion.

Controlling the mind through meditation serves us like a companion. When we have this inner companion, we don't need to look for external support and external comfort. Control over the mind makes a difference to our lives, especially when we are living with others or when we are interacting with the outside world. With a calm and controlled mind we can present ourselves as a good person and speak and act in a wholesome manner. The benefit of controlling the mind is that we will find more happiness in our lives. If we have no control over our minds, then we end up in conflict and disputes. We are quick to lose our temper and end up having problems with others. When we have more of an understanding of the benefits of having control over our own minds, then we can really appreciate how priceless the spiritual teaching is in guiding and inspiring us in our practice.

Verse 33 from the 'Wheel of Sharp Weapons':

When none of the wishes we make reach fulfilment,
Although we have made prayers to the Three
Precious Gems,
This is the wheel of sharp weapons returning
Full circle upon us from wrongs we have done.
'Til now we have had an imperfect commitment
To Buddha whose teachings deserve complete trust;
Hereafter let's place our exclusive reliance
On Buddha, His teachings and those in His fold.

This verse talks about the three objects of refuge in Buddhism, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. We are encouraged to take refuge in, or to entrust ourselves to these three objects. Why do we have to do this? It is said that we are suffering from the illness of mental delusion. If someone has been suffering from a disease over a long period of time, then a qualified doctor, nurse

and correct medication is needed in order to cure them. They will also need friends to help administer the medicine, and to support them. Then there is a hope of curing the disease. Likewise, we have to cure ourselves of the chronic disease of mental delusion by relying on somebody like the Buddha, a perfect being, to be our guide and teacher. We need to rely on the medicine of the teachings, or the Dharma. We also need to rely on the spiritual friends that are the Sangha, who support us in our practice of the Dharma.

Of these three refuge objects, it is the Dharma that actually gives us refuge and protection. In the analogy just used, where the real antidote to the disease is the medicine, the real antidote to mental delusions is the Dharma, or the noble teachings taught by the Buddha. However, the important point is that we have to understand that the Dharma, or the teaching of the Buddha, is only beneficial to us if we put it into practice. The medicine is only useful if the patient takes it, otherwise it won't help to cure the disease. The Dharma, which is our real refuge and protection, has the potential to save us from many problems, both in the short and longer term- even from the problem of falling to a lower rebirth. So we need to contemplate the Dharma we have heard and gain what we call the wisdom arising from thinking and contemplating. This is further developed by meditating on the Dharma. The wisdom that we cultivate within us becomes the direct antidote, or the remedy, to cut through the root of our delusion - the self-grasping.

Sometimes it is said that the Dharma means to lift the mind from the grip of self-grasping. Then we are free from the source of suffering. We are free from all the forms of suffering and misery that we experience within this cyclic existence. Buddhism is unique in that the ultimate source of refuge is found within one's own mind. We reach that quality of Dharma by putting all the teachings of the Buddha into practice. It then serves as a real refuge for us. So it makes sense that the Dharma is only an object of refuge when we put it into practice. The Buddha cannot with his own hand pull us out of our suffering, or prevent us from falling into a lower rebirth. However, the Buddha has given many teachings to help us solve all our problems, and their causes - like uncontrolled desire for possession of some object. The Buddha taught us that to cure these mental diseases, we need to meditate on the more undesirable or ugly aspects of the objects we are obsessed with. If we follow this meditation practice, then slowly we will overcome and remove the desire.

Ultimately, our practice is the most important thing if we are to reap some benefit from the teaching. If the patient didn't take his medicine, and just used it as a pillow, then it would be of no use at all. Likewise, if we don't practise the Dharma, we won't be able to minimise the suffering and reduce the problems in our life. Who is to blame when the problem isn't reduced and the suffering isn't eased? The patient who sleeps on his medicine can't blame the doctor, and we can't say that the Buddha or the teaching is wrong. It is important to understand that, as far as the teaching of the Buddha's goes, it is the

perfect unfailing truth. So we have to have a stronger motivation and stronger belief in the teaching and follow that in our practice.

Our practice has to be very consistent, and we have to sustain it for a long period of time. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that the aim of our spiritual practice is to overcome our delusions, but the amount of delusions that we have within us is like a gigantic tree which has a very bitter taste. To transform the taste of the tree into something sweet, if we apply just a drop of water to the root everyday, would we see any change? Even a three-year retreat may not be effective in reducing delusions. We might find that no sooner have we finished, than all the bad thoughts and delusions arise again in our minds. So it is important to approach our practice in terms of making consistent progress. First try to learn the Dharma through listening to the teachings, and cultivate some belief in them. Belief is further developed through investigating and analysing the teachings with one's own rational mind. Even the Buddha said to his followers not to accept his teachings out of respect, but accept them only after thoroughly checking and investigating with their own discrimination.

If the teachings sound logical and make sense to us, then our understanding and belief becomes firm. The belief is more firm when our understanding doesn't come from an external force, but is based on our own reasoning mind. It also gives us more impetus to continue practising for a long time. The progress that we should be making is in the area of our own daily way of thinking or daily mental attitude. So, whether you talk of well being in this existence or in a future life, everything depends upon our daily mental attitude. As Buddhists we try to make sure that all our attitudes and ways of thinking accord with the teachings of the Buddha. In this way we can find the Dharma directly beneficial to our everyday life.

We will finish with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra. As before we should try to relax both mentally and physically. Use the sound of the mantra as the object of focus for the mind.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Jenny Brooks
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Edited Version*

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