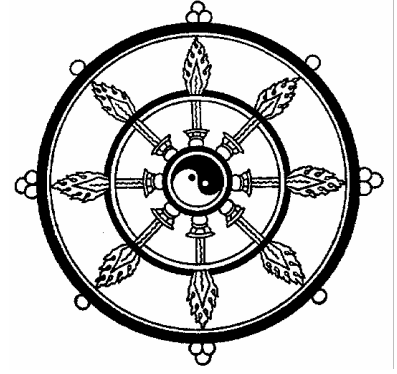


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཨྲ སྤྱིང་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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As usual, we will begin with a few minutes breathing meditation together. Make yourself more comfortable in your sitting posture.

Resting the mind is more important than resting our bodies. We may stop doing physical work and rest, but if the mind is not rested and is instead occupied with many thoughts, we don't feel fully relaxed. Even feeling tension in the body after we stop doing physical activity is related to the mind being overworked.

Resting the mind means we have to tame it, making sure that it is not occupied with various thoughts, or that it is not wandering outside. As the aim of this sitting meditation is to find a true sense of peace and relaxation, after relaxing our bodies we should also try to relax our minds by bringing them inward and removing all distracting thoughts.

The most important factor in making our meditation practice effective is single-pointed concentration. When we engage in meditation practice, the mind should not be undisciplined as it usually is. If one's mind is not completely focused on the object, the effort we put in won't be that strong, or won't be that effective. It is the same for our daily actions - the degree of effectiveness of any activity we undertake is determined by whether we are fully concentrating on our present actions or not. If distracting thoughts of other things influence our minds, our inner energy is scattered between these things, and not fully directed towards what we are trying to achieve.

It is beneficial for us to train our minds to be more focused, and to maintain that focus for longer periods of time. If you are doing meditation practice, the mind must be able to sit on the object for long periods of time without being distracted or agitated by outside objects. If we are doing any other activity like work, the mind should be able to focus on it fully. If we had a mind that was fully focused on what we were doing, there is no doubt about the benefits we would experience. With a fully focused mind, we would find our work to be less difficult. Experiencing less hardship, we could direct more energy into present actions. As a result, the success of our actions would be assured.

However, when our mind is not fully focused - say there are different types of thoughts about various things going on at the same time - we can't put much energy into what we are doing, and we are not able to do it properly. We might find the action even more difficult to perform because of the disturbance in the mind.

Having realised the benefits of developing concentration,

we have to develop the strong motivation to train the mind, because it lacks concentration. For instance, if you try to place your mind on one object single-pointedly, you may be lucky to keep it there for one minute; no sooner do you focus on an object, than the mind goes out to another object. We have this built-in habit of getting distracted. By engaging in meditation practice, however, we try to train our minds to develop single-pointed concentration.

The meditation we will be doing is breathing meditation. After removing all outgoing thoughts and bringing the mind fully inward, you begin this meditation in which the outgoing and incoming breath is the only object of the mind. Feeling fully relaxed, physically and mentally, be aware of the in-breath and out-breath and try not to have any other thoughts.

One of the aims of meditation practice is to achieve mental stability. Achieving mental stability is said to have many benefits, whereas not having mental stability has many disadvantages. It is a disadvantage if you undertake some course of study, and it is also a disadvantage if you practise meditation. If the mind is not stable, it continually goes from one object to another, as a result of which you feel stress, anxiety or tension. Even if you sit in meditation posture, if your mind is not stabilised, then your practice will not bring any peace or make you feel relaxed. Therefore, it is important to make some effort. Of course, there is no need to force ourselves, but if we are consistent in our meditation practice, in training the mind, then slowly we can develop more concentration.

Now we will continue the teaching from the thought transformation text called *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to the Verse 40, which reads:

When success in our practices always eludes us,
This is the wheel of sharp weapons returning
Full circle upon us from wrongs we have done
Till now, deep within, we have clung to our ego,
Fully immersed in self-cherishing ways;
Hereafter let's dedicate all of the virtuous
Actions we do, so that others may thrive.

This verse shows us the cause of failure in our spiritual practice, such as the practice of the Lam Rim (meditation on the stages of the path), or a secret mantra practice. If our practice does not achieve any result, we have to think about the cause of the failure. In this verse, the text is saying that 'this is the wheel of sharp weapons returning' - here the difficulty you face with your practice should

be understood as the outcome of your past actions. Specifically, it is the outcome of holding the wrong view of self-cherishing, not only over many past lifetimes, but also throughout this lifetime.

It is because of this self-centered view that you do not make any progress with your practice; rather, you find it extremely difficult. So try now to cultivate the strong determination to overcome this self-cherishing attitude, realising that if you don't challenge or reduce it, whatever you do will not bring any good result. Instead of holding onto this self-centered view, think of the welfare of all other beings. We try to change our whole mental attitude from before, when we always held this self-centered mind and always ignored the well-being of others and were careless towards them. Rather, instead of cherishing oneself, we try to cherish the welfare of other beings.

We thus think about engaging in the practice of 'giving and taking' in order to develop love and compassion for other beings. We train our minds by imagining giving all our virtues, our wealth, and even one's body to other beings. Through this 'giving' you imagine bringing happiness to all other beings; this part of the practice is associated with developing impartial love for all beings. Likewise, you practice 'taking' by imagining taking all the sufferings or problems of other beings- together with the causes of the problems- upon yourself, thereby freeing all beings from suffering and the causes of suffering. This practice of 'taking' intensifies our compassion for all other beings.

To further appreciate the benefit of the practice of cultivating love and compassion towards others, and to understand the shortcomings of the self-cherishing mind- for ourselves as well as other beings- we have to think of our own experience. At moments when our selfish mind or ego feels strong, it is like we shut the door to all other beings, not only our enemies or people we hate, but also those who are very close to us, who have always been kind and supportive to us. Even for these people, we won't show any care or concern for their needs. Even if our close friends or parents are having great difficulties, we won't think of helping them, we won't think about how we can help them. If we have resources or money to offer them as help, we won't do that because of the self-cherishing mind, which says to us 'if we provide this help to them, then what about me?'. There is worry and concern when the ego is only concerned about the self.

Because of this ego, we may lose the trust of our friends. Our friend might always have hoped that surely, at a time of need, you would come to his or her aid. However, if there is a strong ego, we won't help our friend. Through not helping a friend at a time of need, we damage the trust in the relationship. Normally, we don't consider how the actions we do under the influence of this selfish mind can damage our relationships. However, we can say that all the problems we experience- whether it is conflict in a relationship, or whether you have been receiving loss or harm from other beings- all result from this self-cherishing mind. However, if we think carefully, we can recognise our real

enemy as being this self-cherishing mind, as the source of all our problems.

Even for spiritual practitioners following the stages of the path to enlightenment, it is difficult for them to cultivate spiritual qualities like love and compassion for other beings because of this self-cherishing mind. As instructed in this verse, try to cultivate the determination that from now onward, no matter what actions or spiritual practice you undertake, you will think that 'I am doing it all for the sake of the well-being of other beings and merely for the sake of all other beings, without any self-interest'.

With compassion towards other beings, if you were wealthy, naturally you would help many others. In Tibet, beggars take shelter near very wealthy families, who show a lot of care and sympathy for them; everything is freely given. In this country too, not only very rich people but people having some care and compassion for others - regardless of what others have done for them - provide help, even to their neighbours. Wherever they see a need, they naturally help. Helping other beings is the outcome of compassion cultivated in one's mind; when we do something like this, it is something to look back on and rejoice in. The actions we do out of compassion, such as helping others, brings lasting satisfaction, lasting joy to us; when we remember these actions, we can always rejoice and feel delighted.

We will finish the teaching here. As usual, we will chant the Buddha's mantra for seven times. As before, try to sit in the meditation posture, relaxing both mind and body and, as we chant it, focus the mind on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Jenny Brooks
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