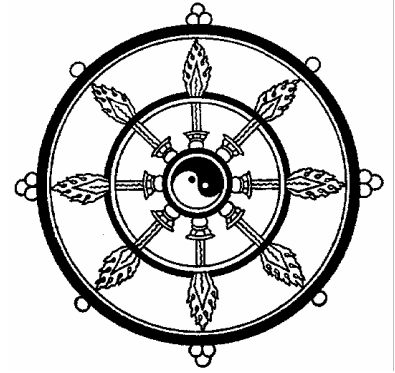


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཨོ ལྷོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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As usual, we will begin with a few minutes breathing meditation together. Choose the sitting posture that is most convenient and relaxing for your body.

As the famous master Atisha said, of all the spiritual instructions, the instruction to watch one's own mind is supreme. Sitting in the meditation posture, we should watch our minds. As a benefit, we can learn how to enhance our inner peace and happiness. Without awareness of the mind, we ignore the fact that some states of mind are like trouble-makers, whereas other states of mind bring inner peace and happiness. However, if we focus inwardly and watch the mind, we can gain an understanding of it.

For example, when we sit in meditation posture we may not feel fully relaxed, because something still bothers us. But if we watch the mind, we can find the thing that is bothering us, and know what it is we have to remove. Even if we are relaxed, if the mind is not controlled it can have many objects within it – pleasant, unpleasant, beautiful, ugly – which can stimulate various conceptual thoughts. We cannot feel fully relaxed, contented and happy because of these distracted thoughts. Therefore, it is important to remove these thoughts from the mind to find peace and happiness, not just physically, but mentally.

Meditation practice should be based on knowledge gained through our own wisdom intelligence. Meditation practice involves directing the mind to an object. We should have faith that, by doing meditation, we can make progress in self-development, and bring more peace and happiness to our lives.

For meditation practice to be effective, we have to have some knowledge of ourselves and our minds. The way to improve our minds is to remove the faults within them. Therefore, as part of the meditation practice, we have to know that there are faults to be cleared from the mind, and that there are qualities we should develop. We have to see our potential to make progress in becoming happier, more contented and positive, and more socially at ease.

In examining the mind, we may identify a force or positive energy that naturally brings more peace and happiness to our lives and to the lives of those around us, which can become a driving force for actions that show our friendliness, our openness and good qualities to others. We may also see certain ways of thinking that disturb our personal peace, satisfaction and happiness – whatever actions we undertake out of such states of

mind are harmful and create a negative impression on those around us. Our motivation for doing meditation practice should be to reduce these negative states of mind, while trying to increase positive ones. The actual meditation practice is about mindfulness – making sure that we generate peaceful and positive states of mind, and trying to prevent negative states of mind arising.

In the short breathing meditation we do here, we just try to focus the mind on the in-breath and out-breath. The way in which we focus depends on your individual capacity. Make sure your focus is neither too tight nor too loose, but at the right degree of concentration. If we focus the mind on the object too tightly, it can be counter-productive and bring distractions to the mind. Whereas, if our focus is too loose, it can cause dullness in our meditation – if you lose your focus, you lose the object. So, we will spend a few minutes doing this breathing meditation.

Does any one have a question to ask?

Q: If breathing is the object of meditation, what happens if it becomes so soft that you can't detect it?

A: In breathing meditation, you don't necessarily have to feel the breath going out and coming in. Rather, if the breath becomes weaker as you relax, becoming so slow that you can hardly hear it, you can still think of it as going out and coming in. In a sense, this meditation is about counting the incoming and outgoing breaths and in this way, you remember to stay fully aware of this process of air coming in and out.

Breathing meditation is considered to be a preliminary practice, which you do before engaging in your main meditation. The whole point of engaging with a meditation object is to fully focus on it so the mind can fully relax. Usually, there are so many thoughts in the mind that, unless we do some breathing meditation and stabilise the mind within, it is very difficult to do the main practice effectively. Through breathing meditation, one can neutralise the mind, especially if the mind is distracted and influenced by negative thoughts.

As said before, breathing meditation is about relaxing the mind. Whether you can physically feel your breath is not that important, but you do have to focus the mind on the breath. You have to be aware that the breath is coming in and going out as if you are counting something. By repeating this mental counting of the breath, suddenly you will find that the process eases or relaxes the mind. Once the mind is relaxed and brought fully inward, you

will find it easier to direct your attention to whatever practice you choose to do.

Geshe Doga says that he has heard some people say that in breathing meditation, you are meant to focus on some kind of subtle sound or flow or vibration. Some even suggest that you practice breathing meditation in the same way that a mouse sniffs at things, that you have to feel or hear the air coming in and going out, like a sniffing action. This is what somebody told Geshe Doga in a discussion, that breathing meditation is like this.

But in Buddhism, breathing meditation is more about mental awareness of the out-breath and in-breath. As said before, it is like counting something – you are fully aware of inhaling and exhaling the breath. Throughout this meditation, that is where your mind resides, the object is the breath. There is no time when the mind is without an object, there is always something in the mind, and when we sit in breathing meditation, the object is the breath.

Q: Before, when I was doing meditation, to place my mind on the breath I was visualising everyone here doing the same, and my family doing the same. That helped me to put my mind back on the object.

Samdup: So you visualised that all you family and friends were doing the same meditation around you? So your question is, sometimes, instead of focusing on your breath, you think of other people.

A (Geshe Doga): Because the aim of your meditation is to bring stability to your mind, it really doesn't matter what object you use to achieve that mental stability.

In relation to your question, it is not necessary to suspect whether the way in which you do this meditation practice is good and beneficial. In your meditation you are not only focusing on the breath, you are also visualising that all other beings are engaging in the same meditation practice. The most important goal of this meditation is to achieve inner stability. Therefore, here it is better for your mind not to be too judgmental – whether the object of your focus is right or wrong, suitable or not. Rather than asking such a question, you should be satisfied that whatever object you have chosen is peaceful, and relaxes your mind and that, itself, increases your mental stability.

As you do breathing meditation, you can incorporate some other meditation technique. For example, you can think of releasing all your negative states of mind with the outgoing breath. Likewise, if you imagine all other beings around you doing the same meditation, you can imagine that they are also releasing their negative states of mind. If you hold any resentment and anger towards another, imagine releasing it with the outgoing and, with the incoming breath, imagine that your mind and the minds of other beings are filled with vast peace and virtuous thoughts. In this way your practice not only increases your concentration and stability, but it also increases your merit and virtue.

However, if your meditation is aimed at achieving single-pointed concentration, the state of calm-abiding, then the object you choose has to be specific, and you

have to consistently use the same object. Even at the beginning of your meditation practice, you have to try to make sure the mind doesn't leave the object you have chosen, that you don't change that object in terms of its colour, shape, size, etc. It is important to use the same object until you achieve calm-abiding.

The object we choose for cultivating single-pointed concentration must be something neutral, not something that can distract the mind and arouse delusions. For instance, if you think of a beautiful or pleasant object in front of you in your meditation, this can cause desire or attachment to arise, which causes distraction. Therefore, it is recommended that in single pointed meditation you choose one object, and make sure that it will not cause any type of delusion to arise. The object one chooses for meditation should be such that, the more one focuses on the object, the more it counteracts and pacifies delusions, or at least doesn't cause delusions to arise.

If you want to go into detail about meditation objects, it is instructed to avoid ten types of objects, or signs. Each one of these signs or objects can distract one's mind. It is said, for example, to avoid thinking of the opposite sex. For a female practitioner, thinking of a man can distract her, while thinking of a female in meditation practice can distract a man's mind. It is also said that each person knows which objects can distract his or her mind. For instance, Geshe Doga says that some mothers who come to teachings and leave their children at home say that, in order to keep their minds focused, they find it effective to take notes during the teachings. Once they stop taking notes, their minds go back to their children at home. So each individual has to work out what is best to stabilise his or her mind.

We will finish by chanting the Buddha's mantra seven times. As before, we will try to relax the body and, directing the mind inward, we will chant the mantra and try to focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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