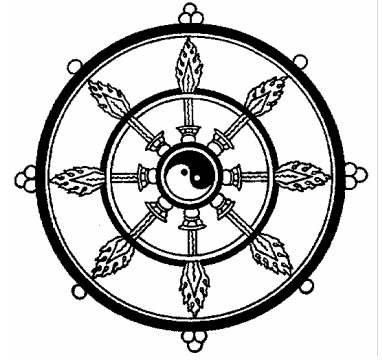


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

འདྲེན་སྐྱོད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



31 May 2000

We will do some breathing meditation first. Sit in a posture that is most comfortable and relaxing for the body. Apart from relaxing the body, we need to relax the mind. It is said that if you have control over your mind, you have control over yourself.

The famous Indian Master, Shantideva, said that of all the austerities we could practise, the supreme one is that of controlling the mind. If the mind is disciplined and controlled, we will naturally find peace and happiness.

What do we mean when we say 'controlling mind'? We mean getting rid of disturbing thoughts. Then we can let the mind dwell within, rather than it remaining under the influence of distracting thoughts. This is important because, if the mind does not rest within, distracting thoughts continually arise unchecked, destroying our peace and happiness.

We know from our own experience how we may sometimes feel peaceful and happy until the situation suddenly changes, and we feel disturbed and annoyed. The main cause of losing the peace and happiness we had before is that we generated a distracting thought. So, whenever we practise meditation, we should try to remove all distracting thoughts, and let the mind settle within. Then, depending on the meditation object you may have chosen, try to place the mind on that object.

We'll begin the breathing meditation. First, try to remove all distracting thoughts from the mind and rest it within. All we need to do in breathing meditation is to direct all of our attention to the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. If any distracting thoughts arise, we immediately try to remove them. We'll now do this for a short time...

We can gain enormous benefit from this practice of controlling the mind. As we become more familiar with it, we will achieve total control over our lives, and be able to clearly see what is right and wrong for us. The outcomes of this mind-training practice are beneficial for everyone. There is no reason for not doing it. Just as we would take steps to achieve other things that benefit us, so we should do this meditation practice to help us transform the mind. It's a very important practice for all of us.

We will go over the verse from the thought transformation text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to verse 90, which reads:

We are never embarrassed when acting disgracefully,
Only respectable deeds cause us shame.

This verse is talking about situations in which people

take pride in doing actions that are negative, immoral, unwholesome, unskilful or degrading. Anyone performing such actions has good reason to feel bad or even ashamed of her- or himself. Nevertheless, whenever we perform a negative action, instead of regarding it as degrading and despicable, we think that we have done something positive. This clearly shows our ignorance about which actions are worthwhile and which are not.

For example, you may do as much as you can to try and hurt or provoke someone whom you hate or dislike. You may speak harshly to them or even physically threaten them. If your actions cause that other person to be hurt or upset, at the end of the day you may feel that you have achieved something, and you may congratulate yourself.

However, because your action has caused harm to another person, it is actually negative - it is totally against the spiritual teachings. This verse is saying that when you have done something wrong like this, you should actually feel a sense of shame.

We should take into account all the negative or harmful actions we have done, not just to our enemies, but to those who are close to us. For instance, a child can do harmful things to his or her parents, or a friend can harm another friend, or one relative another relative.

In a conventional social context, harming your enemy is seen as a reasonable thing to do. It is assumed that an enemy is someone who deserves to be harmed. However, there is absolutely no rationale for harming our friends, those who are close to us. In fact, it is important that we minimise any harmful or immoral actions towards them.

One practice that will help us refrain from acting immorally or harmfully towards our friends is that of feeling shame or embarrassment. When we use the words 'shame' and 'embarrassment', we are talking about feelings that will prevent us from doing wrong actions.

In Tibetan, the word for shame *ngo-tsa yo*, which literally means 'having a sense of shame' or refraining from doing negative actions due to personal beliefs. For example, if you are in a situation where you feel bad towards your parents and are about to hurt them, you might stop and think: "This is not right. They are my parents, I am their child". You can see a reason for refraining from harming them, which comes from your own knowledge, beliefs and values. What has prevented you doing wrong was your sense of shame - that it was inappropriate as their child to hurt your parents.

On the other hand, the Tibetan word for embarrassment

tel.yo literally means that you stop doing negative actions out of concern for the opinion of others. You refrain from harmful actions because you feel that people would dislike you, or that your reputation would be harmed.

So, in order to practise moral ethics and refrain from harmful verbal, physical or mental actions, you need some sense of moral decency, of shame or embarrassment.

This verse points out that, although we sometimes feel shame and embarrassment, it is usually for the wrong reasons. We may feel ashamed about something we don't need to be ashamed of, or don't feel any shame about something we should feel ashamed of. Not only do we have this wrong perspective on our own lives, but we also use this perspective to judge the lives of others.

In the past, in places like Tibet, there were spiritual practitioners who, following the example of the Lord Buddha, embarked on a life of renunciation and poverty. They lived like beggars, because all their time and energy was directed towards enhancing their spiritual practice. Other practitioners, however, took up opportunities to become famous, rich and exalted. So, when someone would renounce worldly life to take up the life of a beggar, other people would often criticise them and look down on them, regarding them as unwise and misguided. Similarly, sometimes we can have a wrong view about others' lives.

Whenever you take spiritual vows, such as vows of morality, in most cases you are required to take them from a special preceptor, or in front of special objects. The purpose of taking the vow in front of a special object or preceptor is that it encourages you to keep those vows, out of a sense of moral shame or embarrassment.

In most religions, when you receive formal vows from a special object, you feel that you have to keep them, because breaking them is like breaking a promise to the person or object from whom you received the vow. You would not want to displease your preceptor or object of refuge, or God, or whoever.

Whatever practice you do, if you regard that practice as special, as advice that has come directly from your object of faith, this feeling will help you whenever you are about to breach that advice. You would feel bad, not only for your own reasons, but also because you would be displeasing the object of your faith. It's like a sense of embarrassment.

Likewise, a member of the sangha – an ordained monk or nun – can prevent him- or herself from doing wrong actions if he or she feels tempted. What stops them is the conscious thought: “I am a member of the sangha, an ordained person”. You remind yourself that the action you are about to do is forbidden for ordained persons. You think: “I am an ordained person and it is not appropriate for me to do that action”. This is the sense of moral shame, which is a powerful force in stopping monks and nuns from breaking their vows.

On the other hand, when children who respect and obey their parents are offered a sweet, they may respond by

saying: “I can't accept that sweet because I have been told by my parents not to eat sweets”. This is based on a sense of embarrassment. You refrain from something you are not supposed to do because you know that it will not please someone else.

To live a wholesome life and avoid unwholesome or non-virtuous actions, we need to have both a sense of shame and a sense of embarrassment. These provide a good basis for refraining from any wrongdoing.

The rest of the verse shows us that the cause of not being able to sustain an appropriate sense of moral shame and embarrassment is this self-centred mind, or self-cherishing attitude within us. We will just read the rest of the verse, which says:

Trample him, trample him, dance on the head
Of this treacherous concept of selfish concern.
Tear out the heart of this self-centred butcher
Who slaughters our chance to gain final release.

That's the teaching for tonight. As usual, we will now chant the Buddha's mantra, again adopting a meditation posture. Make sure that the body is fully relaxed, and that you get rid of all distracting thoughts and rest the mind within. Then focus the mind on the sound of the mantra as you chant it.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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