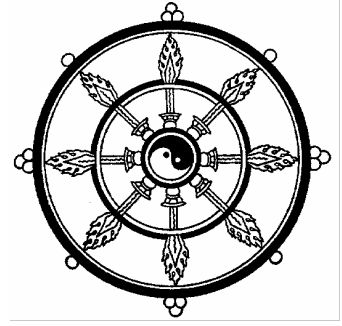


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

འཇིགས་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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We will do some breathing meditation first. Make sure that you are comfortable in the sitting position, and try to fully relax the body.

You can only feel truly at peace if you put your mind at rest at the same time. The purpose of engaging in meditation practice is to understand our mind's habits, so that we can gain control over them. Meditation also enables us to understand how the type of attitude that we cultivate day to day determines whether we regard our experiences as enjoyable or miserable.

Through meditation practice, we are trying to develop an understanding of how to bring about peace in the mind, how to develop the knowledge that will bring us lasting peace and happiness.

One of the famous thought transformation masters once said that anyone who has a correct understanding of the mind, in terms of knowing where the mind should go and where it should not, will have control over it and thus will always be able to maintain a state of peace and happiness. Even if such a person faced some adverse situation, they would be able to transform that situation into a cause of happiness rather than suffering.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that when we bring the mind to rest within ourselves, it is like a relaxing holiday for the mind. What he means is that if our mind always goes outwards, it will be difficult for it to rest.

We can see this clearly when we examine our own mind. If it is always preoccupied with external objects, then the number of distractions is potentially infinite, resulting in an unending stream of disturbing thoughts. This makes the mind restless. If we check why this occurs, we will see that certain thoughts sometimes leave a feeling of discomfort or anxiety. If we actually examine which thoughts cause this, it is really only just a mental image of some concrete or abstract object. Even though it is just a mental image, it can disturb the mind.

Now we can see why we have to engage in meditation practice and gain control over the mind. Our mind needs to be independent and free. Of course, this implies that our mind is not free, that we have no control over it.

So we need to ask ourselves what rules the mind? It is the conceptual thinking that continuously overpowers it. When the mind is completely controlled by conceptual thinking, it lacks peace and stability. We need to know exactly where the mind should be, and where it should not be, in terms of knowing which thoughts enhance our inner peace and which ones disturb us. In this way, we will gain control over the mind, so that it is not always overpowered by disturbing thoughts.

Most of us, because we lack the control over the mind, never even think of utilising its potential when we need to. So at times when our mind should be courageous, positive and optimistic, we generate a state of mind that is totally opposite to this.

For example, whenever we confront an unfavourable situation, this is the very time we need to generate courage, strength and spirit. When things are going fine, it is not so critical to have a positive mind – even though we may feel very positive about

our situation, the time we really need to produce a positive mind is in the face of unfavourable circumstances. At such times, we can find ourselves generating a negative state of mind such as discouragement, instead of feeling positive.

Not only do we feel shocked at being in an unwelcome situation, we even let the mind start to project *more* things could go wrong in future – instead of focusing on what needs to be done to overcome the situation. As we entertain more such thoughts, of course, we will begin to feel panic arising in the mind and we will start to lose all hope and courage. You may let the unfavourable situation completely suppress the mind to the point that it cannot think properly, and it becomes impossible for you to see the situation with wisdom and intelligence, resulting in depression.

However, in such a situation, we can instead maintain a positive state of mind. We need to remind ourselves, "in this situation, I need to be more determined, and not let myself down". Try to confront the situation and tolerate it rather than run away from it. Then you can focus on resolving the immediate problem, instead of worrying about any further problems that might arise. And, as a result of meeting with an unfavourable situation, you might have gained some important knowledge, and transformed it into a favourable one.

If you face a bad situation and challenge it, then when you look back, you will in fact view the situation as having been beneficial, because it gave you the opportunity to learn and achieve something.

As we said before, the benefit of practising meditation is that we can achieve such knowledge and such self-confidence, that whenever we face difficulties, we will always have a determined and courageous mind, and be in a position to accept and face that situation.

Now, we will do a few minutes breathing meditation. Keep in mind what we have discussed about why we do meditation practice. Before beginning this breathing meditation, we try to overcome all outgoing thoughts and make sure that the mind is brought fully inward. After having done this, we engage in the breathing meditation, focusing the mind on the outgoing and incoming breath with single-pointed concentration. [*Pause for meditation*].

Has anyone got a question to ask?

Question: When doing breathing meditation I become aware of mental and physical sensations. Is this normal?

Answer: When you use the word 'sensations' ... in this meditation, normally your object is the breathing ... in and out ... So when you say 'sensation', what do you exactly mean? Do you mean a feeling or what?

'Energy' you said? 'Energy' or 'force'? Then, of course, again you have to know the force of what? The force of the mind? Your feeling about the force of the mind? Or a force in your physical body, or what?

As Geshe-la said, in meditation, because we are utilising our mind with mental concentration, obviously we can feel the mental energy, the mental force.

In terms of concentrating, in meditation it refers to how fully your mind is aware of a particular object. If our meditation practice is going very well, this not only benefits us in terms of enhancing the sense of peace and joy in our mind, but it also benefits our physical well-being in terms of the 'sensations' you mentioned, the physical sensation of feeling very relaxed. When we engage in meditation practice, we feel physically sound, healthy and relaxed.

It is also said that, on top of overcoming negativities within our minds, meditation practice also purifies impurities in our bodies. When these are purified, no matter how long we sit in meditation practice, we will not experience any aches or bodily discomfort. So, as we make progress in our meditation practice, even our body becomes healthier.

We can even achieve what is known as 'pliancy' – both mental and physical – as a result of developing mental concentration. Physically, this manifests as a suppleness that allows the body to move around very easily. So when we make progress in meditation practice, not only does our mind benefit, but also our body becomes very serviceable.

Further, along with mental and physical pliancy, meditation practice can also produce a sort of bliss associated with the mind as well as the body. Through meditation practice, the wind energy in our bodies becomes purified and very refined. At the point when this refined wind energy pervades all parts of the body, a person can physically experience bliss.

So meditation practice supports our physical well-being, which in turn supports our further progress in meditation. If, however, our body has not been purified of obstacles, it will not be so serviceable. For example, if you over-extend the mind by focusing it on a particular subject for a long time, this can result in physical tension, and even aching in some part of the body.

To summarise, Lama Tsong Khapa said that meditative concentration is like a king that rules over the mind. Through it, our mind will become unmovable like the Mount Meru; but when released, it can go after any virtuous object. Also, meditation practice can bring about the bliss of mental and physical pliancy.

Question: I am having trouble focussing during meditating after the break up of a long-term relationship. How do I go about letting go of this and focusing on meditation?

Answer: Of course, the obvious problem here is that one's mind is distracted by the problem you have. In such cases, we have to try to reduce the force of this distraction. As the distraction is very strong, even if you engaged in meditation practice, in the beginning you could not expect your mind to be completely focused on the object for very long. Therefore, you must at least realise the need to overcome these distractions.

The cause of the problem is letting your mind hold onto the image of your object of distraction. So to reduce the distraction, you should try to find some way to forget that object of distraction and minimise the appearance of that object in your mind. Of course, meditation practice is for that very purpose. So, you could start by seeing whether you can focus the mind on a meditation object for a very short time, say 1 or 2 minutes. If you make a continuous effort slowly, then you can extend the length of your meditation session.

In this case, you cannot settle the mind because it is still craving for a past relationship. An obvious reason why this situation causes pain and suffering is that you still have desire for that person who has finished their relationship with you. So, mentally the person has left you and has left the relationship, but your mind still holds on and still desires that person.

You need to consider meditation practice can help you to

overcome this desire. What is the basis of having such strong, forceful desire or attachment towards that person? To overcome desire, there are many specific meditation practices. One of them requires you to actually try and think of your desired object in a completely opposite way to your usual perception of it as being something attractive and beautiful. In this meditation practice, you try to imagine all the ugly aspects of that object and its downside. The more you think about this, the more it will help you.

You can also consider the actual reality of our relationships with others. The reality is that there are no certainties about our relationships – about who is friend, enemy or stranger. We don't even have to think about previous or future lives. Just looking at this very lifetime, we can see how quickly our relationships with other people change from friend to enemy, enemy to friend, enemy to stranger, and so forth. Think about someone you consider to be your friend. All it takes for that friend to become one's enemy is a few harsh words from you, or some slanderous words from others.

Try to understand the truth of the impermanence of relationships. There is no friend who can be your friend forever; there is no enemy who is your enemy forever. Rather, the friend could become your enemy, or the enemy could become your friend at any moment.

As we cultivate this kind of knowledge, it helps us reduce the strong discrimination we make between friends and enemies, based on attachment or hatred. The uncertainty of the 'friend', 'enemy' or 'stranger' is the truth of your relationships with all other beings. As the famous Tibetan master Gung-thang Tenpa said, "Someone whom I regard as my dearest friend this evening will, as a result of some negative thoughts, turn into my true enemy by sunrise next day. Therefore, I completely lost interest in holding some people as friends and others as enemies".

Geshe-la says that once a woman came to seek his advice because she was devastated after her husband had left her. When she first mentioned it to Geshe-la, he said: "That's good news." Geshe-la saw in her face that she was shocked to hear such a comment from him! He went on to explain: "It is good news because this rubbish friend, rubbish husband has left you, has gone from your life". Then he went further and said: "Think about what you have lost, and about what is most important to you. The most important thing to you is your independence, your freedom."

The point is that when we face such disturbing and painful situations, we should train our mind to change its perception of the situation. This can help us reduce the problem. Geshe-la says that, in the student understood what Geshe-la was trying to say. She said her ex-husband was not quite rubbish, but at the same time appreciated Geshe-la's advice, and Geshe-la replied, "I know that".

We will now finish by chanting the Buddha's mantra. Again could we sit in meditation posture and bring the mind inward, then as we chant, the mind should be focussed on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYA SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Gabrielle Thomson
Edited by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit checked by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version*

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