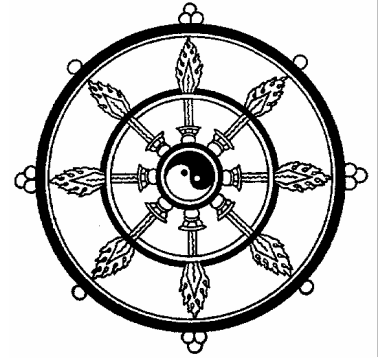


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

འཇིགས་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



13 September 2000

First of all, we will do some breathing meditation together. Make yourself comfortable in the sitting posture, or whatever posture you have chosen, and ensure that you are fully relaxed.

As well as disciplining the body through this meditation posture, in order to find inner peace and rest we need to discipline the mind. When we engage in meditation practice, it is essential that our mind is able to focus on the meditation object.

In fact, if we focus mind fully on any activity we do, we can expect that activity to be more productive. If we can place the mind wherever we wish to place it, this is definitely an advantage for us. When our mind is focused on one object or action, then all our energy, capacity and enthusiasm is directed towards that one action.

When we have such control over the mind, it becomes very serviceable to us, in the sense that it 'listens' to what we say. Meditation is about training the mind to do this, and it involves discipline and effort. As we make an effort to discipline the mind through meditation practice, it becomes more and more used to 'sitting' on a given object.

By 'discipline' we mean that when we engage in meditation practice, after checking our physical posture, we need to check our mind. As we check our mind, we may see that it is under the influence of distracting thoughts. Discipline means to remove the distracting thoughts, and replace them with a more stable and peaceful state of mind.

So, to begin the breathing meditation, first try as much as possible to remove all distracting thoughts and let the mind fully rest within. And having done this, we should start the breathing meditation - instead of letting the mind go out again after objects or distractions, one directs it to the in-breath and out-breath with single-pointed concentration. (*Pause for meditation.*)

We need to always be aware of our responsibility to maintain a calm, clear and stable mind. In contrast, think of the suffering we go through if our mind is unstable, unpredictable and completely beyond one's control. We all cherish our independence and freedom, but we do not want that very freedom to ruin our future. We do not want to end up with problems and regret the mistakes we have made in the past.

Physically, for example, if we do not take care of our

health and eat and drink whatever we feel like, thinking that we have the freedom to do whatever we feel like doing, we can end up with problems later. Young people often say they want to be free, so they do not want to listen to their parents' good advice. They may indulge in all kinds of things, like drugs. Of course, they will realise a few years later that what they did in the past was wrong, and has resulted in problems for them.

We always need to be careful about the state our mind is in, and not allow our thinking to become so loose that we just follow whatever thought comes into our mind. Rather, we should utilise our intelligence and wisdom, checking our thoughts and actions to determine whether they are constructive or destructive. It is important to learn about and practise meditation, because meditation practice can help us to stop the mind from going 'wild' with various thoughts.

If we do not control the mind, it will wander off of its own accord. The mind has an inbuilt habit of going all over the place, picking up everything, even useless, negative things. Eventually, you come to the point where you feel you have no control over it and you find it difficult to calm the mind and settle it down. However, if you train the mind over a period of time you will get to a position where, if you want to stop the mind wandering, you will be able to.

When it comes to training our mind, there is no reason to feel discouraged. The type of mind that you have depends the state of mind that you have been most familiar with. As far as the actual basic nature of the mind goes, every mind has the same nature. This basic nature is not rigid but flexible.

Because our mind's nature is so flexible, just as we can acquire faults that we haven't possessed before, we can also develop new qualities within the mind that we haven't possessed before. The mind's flexible nature gives us the hope that we can change our mind.

We need a strong sense of self-responsibility and self-discipline, as well as an ability to properly guide ourselves. If we try to understand any situation from the point of view of our intelligent wisdom, we need to realise that we have the same potential for success as anyone else.

Whenever we find ourselves saying "other people can but I can't, it is too hard for me," we are showing our lack of understanding of our own potential. As a human being, we have the same potential as all human beings.

We share the same advantages in terms of having a human intelligence and many freedoms. So, whenever you face a situation in which you feel discouraged and feel that you cannot achieve what you set out to, it's important to encourage yourself by generating such positive thoughts.

Discipline is beneficial – not the sort of discipline imposed by other people, but the discipline you choose to impose on yourself, from knowing what is beneficial and constructive for you. Even in our daily routine – going to sleep or getting up at certain times, or consuming certain food and drink – if someone else enforced discipline on you, you would find it difficult to follow. But if you choose to do a thing because you realise it has to be done, it is easier for you to do it.

Sometimes, we find that discipline makes the day go by more quickly, and that our mind is more stable. At the end of the day, you may even feel more positive and happier, because you are leading your life the way you want to. The way to change any habit in our life or to achieve anything that we want in our life is through discipline.

Again, we were meant to go over this text (*The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*), but Geshe-la said he has had this on his mind, and thought that maybe it would be useful to say it. There is a bit of time left, so if any of you have a question, please feel welcome to ask it.

Question: Regarding the different methods of breathing meditation – such as breathing in through one nostril and out the other, breathing in, holding the breath and letting it go or visualising light or smoke – is any one better than the others?

Answer: As you said, there are few different breathing meditation techniques. Each technique has a specific purpose. One technique related to tantric practice is the 9-round breathing meditation where in you are doing this breathing meditation in conjunction with the visualisation of psychic channels and wind.

First you visualise the left and right channels opening at the nostrils, and then the central channel, with the opening of the central channel between the eyes. The left and the right channels are joined together below the level of the navel like two pipes. At this point, the bottom of the central channel is also joined.

In the first 3 rounds, you breathe in through the left nostril and out through the right so that wind passes from left to right channel. The next 3 rounds you breathe in through the right nostril and out through the left so that the wind passes from right to left channel. In the last 3 rounds, you breathe in through both nostrils together, and via central channel, out through your both nostrils. As we said, this technique is related to tantric practice.

There are breathing techniques that are practised generally, they are not just Buddhist. In one of these, as you breathe out, you visualise dark smoke coming out of your nostrils, carrying all obstacles or particular negativities you want to purify. Then you breathe in white light through which you receive the blessings of all

the enlightened and holy beings. So, this type of breathing technique has the specific purpose of purifying negativities.

The breathing technique we do here is another general technique. All you do is try to focus the mind on the incoming breath and out-going breath, and keep that focus for a while. The main purpose of this is to bring about some peace and inner stability within the mind, and cultivate a neutral state of mind.

This neutral state of mind has been likened to a crystal-clear mirror. When the mirror is clear, whatever object you place in front of it, the mirror will naturally reflect the colour of that object, whether it's white or red or whatever. Through this general breathing meditation practice, we are trying to remove distracting thoughts and produce a neutral state of mind, suitable for engaging in meditation or whatever you want to do, because when you have that neutral state of mind, it becomes easier for one to direct the mind to your next action.

There is a breathing meditation technique in Buddhism that some people call *tum-mo* or 'vase breathing'. Vase breathing is also associated with tantric practice. In this technique, after you breathe in, you hold the breath or wind at the level of your navel. At this point, the level of the navel, you bring together all the wind energies of your body. All the wind energies carried in the upper and lower parts of your body are centralised here. You are supposed to hold the breath or wind energy at this point. However, if you find any discomfort or problem doing this, you should breathe out through the nostrils slowly.

This technique is called 'igniting the inner fire'. It is said that it has the benefit of generating heat in the body which, in terms of our health, improves digestion and brings more warmth to one's abdominal area. In fact, through 'igniting the inner fire', the meditator experiences some deep bliss throughout the body.

This technique involves a physical exercise which helps bring wind in the upper and lower part of the body together at the navel point, for example, to bring up the wind in the lower part of the body to the level of the navel we have to push our abdomen towards our spine, and so forth. When you know how to do all these things properly, the meditation becomes more easy and effective.

Now we will finish by chanting the Buddha's mantra. Again, sit in the meditation posture, get rid of all distracting thoughts, settle the mind inward, and then try to focus the mind just on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

© Tara Institute
