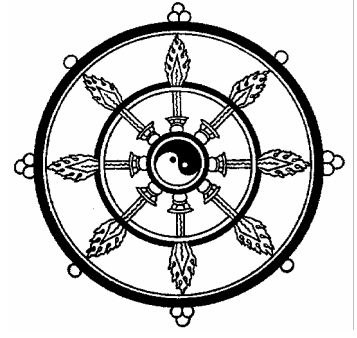


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

འཇིགས་མེད་མཚོ་ཆེན་པོ་འཕྲིན་ལོ་།



20 September 2000

As usual, first we will do a few minutes breathing meditation. Please adopt the most comfortable meditation posture, making sure that every part of your body is completely at rest.

When we begin this meditation, we should consider why we practise it or, for that matter, why we do any sort of spiritual practice. Whether we call it meditation practice or spiritual practice, the most important thing we have to do is to focus on the mind.

Meditation practice is a means of training and disciplining the mind. In meditation practice, we come to understand our sudden disturbing, emotional states of mind. These negative, destructive states of mind are initiated by various external objects that occupy the mind. When we engage in meditation practice, we are aiming to rid our mind of negative thoughts or objects – which only bring us unnecessary problems – and instead cultivate positive ones.

After getting rid of negative states of mind, we bring the mind inward and let it settle there. Then, we try to cultivate a state of mind that will enhance our inner peace and happiness. Meditation practice is about training the mind to get used to abiding in such a positive state.

We refer to spiritual practice as dharma practice. We have to understand that the aim of dharma practice is to transform or change the mind. Spiritual or dharma practice has nothing to do with the external world. The whole focus of the practice is our own mind.

When we follow any spiritual practice, we are seeking some sort of inner guidance, protection or refuge, some sort of clear direction in our life. We are trying to find this within ourselves. One of the reasons why it is so important for us to try and calm the mind and quell our uncontrolled thought processes is that this is the only way by which we can achieve not only mental peace, but also physical relaxation.

On the contrary, if our minds are always busy and overflowing with conceptual thinking, this not only makes us feel anxious, stressed and tense, it can also cause pain within our bodies. When we talk about the mind, we need to understand that its functioning is based on what we call 'wind' energy. When the mind is overly busy, this impairs the balance of wind energy in our bodies. As a result, we can experience physical pain. Not only does meditation and spiritual practice bring about positive changes in our mind, it also brings about physical benefits.

We will now begin the breathing meditation. After physically relaxing yourself, trying to rest your mind inward by removing all outgoing thoughts. Then, without letting the mind wander off towards any other object, try to place your focus just on the in-breath and out-breath. We will do this for short time. (*Pause for meditation.*)

One of the obvious benefits of practising this meditation is

that it enables us to strengthen and sustain our mental capacity. It ensures that we maintain a positive, creative and constructive frame of mind. With such an attitude, whatever we decide to do in life, we will approach it with a strong motivation to achieve it. So meditation practice sustains the sort of mental capacity we require to succeed in anything.

When we say that meditation practice helps us to transform our mind, we need to understand how this change can have an immediate effect on us. It can change our whole perspective on life. Every day, we experience different emotions. These are all directly related to the frame of mind we habitually adopt. Generally, the causes of all the problems we encounter are in our own mind – in the form of continuous worry, feelings of depression and despair, loss of interest in our goals, and so on.

So the real cause of our unhappiness is not external – we are usually not experiencing physical harm (like being beaten up by someone with a stick!), or even being harshly abused verbally. The main cause of our suffering is our way of thinking. In meditation practice, we have to focus is these ways of thinking, and try to observe them so that we can understand how they come about.

By engaging in meditation practice, we can recognise the negative thinking patterns that we have within us. We can see they how make us feel bad, how intense they are, how they have caused the problems we are now facing.

As a result of our meditation practice, the solution to our problems becomes obvious to us – we have to get rid of the negative frame of mind and replace it with a more helpful one. If we know a little about meditation practice, we will know which practice we need to apply to overcome a particular problematical state of mind.

The moment we get rid of that state of mind, our way of thinking and our experience will change completely, from unhappiness to happiness. Whereas before you were discouraged and depressed about your situation, now your attitude is positive and optimistic and you find yourself filled with energy and enthusiasm.

Now we going to continue our discussion on the thought-transformation text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. We are up to verse 98, which reads:

As crows may be cured after swallowing poison
By a powerful antidote given in time,
Let's direct to all others our virtuous merit ...

These lines provide a further explanation about the meditation of giving and taking. In this practice, you mentally take on the suffering and sources of suffering of all other beings, while giving away all your virtues and sources of peace and happiness to them. In this verse, you are effectively praying: 'May the meditation I perform be effective in relieving the sufferings of all other beings, and

bringing them everlasting peace and happiness’.

The text uses the example of crows as an analogy for all ordinary beings whose minds are dominated by the delusions, and whose main experience is one of suffering. A crow is an example of an ordinary bird. Here the example shows that just as crows could die from eating poison, so too could any ordinary being. However, even crows can find an antidote to poison after they have swallowed it, and can cure themselves.

So your prayer here is: ‘May all other beings, though my practice of giving and taking also find an antidote to their suffering and the causes of their suffering. Instead of being filled with delusions, may their minds be filled with the altruistic mind of enlightenment, the conventional and ultimate bodhicitta mind’.

The instruction here is that we should always try to dedicate or think of giving away to other beings whatever positive qualities we may possess. If we have some special skills or some higher education, we should think about how we can use this to benefit other beings. We should pray that whatever good qualities we possess, we may use them to benefit all other beings. We can only undertake actions to benefit other beings after generating the *thought* of benefiting them. Therefore, we need to think about how we can use our knowledge and skills to benefit others, and how we can pass these skills onto others.

If we don’t think about benefiting others, we can become very miserly with our knowledge and skills, and even become arrogant about them. So, let alone not benefiting others, one’s knowledge and skills become a source of problems for oneself.

Thus we can see the benefit of engaging in the meditation practice of training the mind in the practice of giving our knowledge and skills and so on to others. As part of this training, we should also pray: ‘May whatever advantages I possess be used to benefit all other beings, eliminating suffering and promoting peace and happiness in the world’.

We will leave the teaching here. There is time for one question.

Question: The texts talk about transforming attachment into the path. This text (*The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*) is about thought transformation, so how are we to understand the meaning of transforming attachment into the path?

Answer: Is your question about whether the practice of taking the attachment as a path is a practice of thought transformation? (*Some clarification here from student.*)

Technically speaking, we differentiate between taking the delusions as the path (to enlightenment), and transforming delusions as a favourable condition to following the path.

When we talk about taking delusions as the path, we are referring to the practice of tantra, particular highest yoga tantra. In tantric teachings, they use examples of the way you can actually take a certain a negative emotion as the path. They use the example of a grub that eats wood. The grub and lives inside a tree or log, but at the same time eats the wood around it for sustenance. So the analogy here is to the practice wherein you transform your experience of a delusion into the path that in turn counteracts it.

However, thought transformation practice is where you take a particular object or situation that normally causes us to generate anger, for example, and use that object or situation to develop tolerance and patience.

So the distinction between the practice of tantra and the sutra is that tantric practice *includes* desire or attachment, whereas the practice of sutra *excludes* desire or attachment.

Whenever anyone engaging in the practice of thought transformation confronts some unfavourable situation – such as someone trying to annoy them – that practitioner would see it as a great opportunity to develop their practice. Even though the situation would be undesirable for anyone else, the person who is familiar with thought transformation practice will see that situation as being favourable.

There are many ways of transforming adverse situations into favourable ones. For example, as a result of making a bad decision or doing something wrong, a person can sometimes learn a lot about themselves and about how to achieve success in the future. Without having faced difficulty in the past, they would not have gained that knowledge. This is an example of transforming an adverse situation into a favourable one.

You have a saying in English – ‘blessing in disguise’ – which we also have in Tibetan. This is exactly what we are learning about in these thought transformation teachings. What one perceives as a blessing is up to the individual. For some individuals, an adverse situation can cause them to completely lose all hope; whereas for others, it can be a great lesson.

If you are student and you have failed an exam or course in the past that made you feel bad, this can be a cause for you to generate stronger motivation so that you make more effort in your study or practice, in order to achieve a good result. Similarly, if a spiritual practitioner who is very thorough about his or her practice commits a negative action, even though negative action is already committed, the practitioner has to use it as a motivation to work harder and do more purification practice. The more negative actions you create, the more you have to engage in the practice of purification – more than ever before!

So when you transform adverse conditions into favourable ones, it is not a case of that entity of the negative state of mind itself being transformed into something positive. Rather, the experience motivates you to put more effort into your practice, thereby accumulating more merit, and so on.

In the Seven-Point Thought Transformation teaching, one of the main sections deals with how to transform adverse situations into favourable ones.

There are some examples of a good monks and nuns who initially decided to take up a celibate life, as a result of a personal problem they had experienced, such as the passing away of a partner or a close friend, or separation from a partner. So even though such a situation may initially cause you to undergo a lot of suffering, it may lead you to live a better life later on.

We will now chant the Buddha’s mantra. As we did earlier, sit in the meditation posture and as much as possible settle the mind inward by removing all distracting thoughts. Then, when we begin the chanting, focus the mind just on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYA SOHA

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