Dharmarakshita's "*The* Wheel *of* Sharp Weapons" A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Sandup Tsering

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First, we will do some breathing meditation together as usual. Please adopt the meditation posture that is most suitable for you, making sure that your body is fully relaxed.

Next, we should try to overcome all distracting or discursive thoughts, so that our minds are fully settled within. Then we will actually feel at rest. We will also notice that our minds are not only more peaceful, but also very clear. Through this meditation practice, we are trying to achieve a sense of peace and happiness just by achieving calmness within the mind. Even in our everyday life, we can bring peace to the mind simply by overcoming discursive thinking.

Discursive thoughts are any states of mind that make you feel restless and disturbed. When we do not have discursive thoughts, we can find more peace, happiness and satisfaction. If the mind is calm and settled, we can find more enjoyment in whatever we do. Through this practice we try to achieve inner peace so that we can truly feel ourselves to be happy. To others we will also look happy, positive and peaceful.

Keep this in mind whenever you engage in meditation practice, and try to focus the mind and pacify it by getting rid of all outwardly directed thoughts.

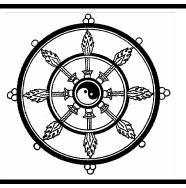
As we engage in the meditation, we should make every effort to ensure that the mind is resting within, by preventing it from wandering outwards. Then, we should begin the actual breathing meditation, in which we direct our attention to the incoming and outgoing breath, ensuring that our attention is not distracted by any other object. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Whenever we find time, we should regularly try to do some meditation practice, because through it, we can bring more energy to the mind. Through meditation practice, we can minimise unnecessary thoughts, particularly discursive thoughts.

One of the most renowned Indian masters, Shantideva, used the analogy of a person who is sick or infected with disease – because that person is physically weak, whatever action he or she undertakes is not forceful or strong. Likewise, if the mind is always overwhelmed with discursive thoughts, it becomes weak. So we should try to recognise the benefits of meditation in our every day life (for example, in strengthening the mind), and practice it regularly.

Day to day, we should always maintain a positive state of mind, even when we face difficulties. How we maintain this positive state of mind depends on our thinking habits and our mental capacity. If our mental capacity is great enough, we will always have some determination, some capacity in the mind to sustain positive thoughts.

Everyone experiences ups and downs in life. If we train the mind to view every situation we meet in a positive way, then we will always feel happy. If we look at our material



conditions, for example, we have the good fortune to have enough food, drink and clothes, and many other good things. So, even when your circumstances seem bad, try to keep some room in the mind to recall that, in reality, your life situation is quite good. Try to generate hope for a better future, and not lose your spirit. Always try to think, "I'm happy, I can take care of myself".

We have to train our mind to think positively. If we don't do this, when we meet unfavourable outer conditions, they can cause us to think negatively. We may feel hopeless and unable to take care of ourselves. If you are not careful, even if some outer friend simply makes a comment that you are really in a bad situation, you will feel really discouraged. So you must maintain a positive way of thinking and always maintain your spirit or motivation to do what you want to do, and to achieve what you want to achieve. It all depends on your own mind.

These are some of the things we can achieve through meditation practice. By diminishing discursive thoughts, we can consolidate our mental energy. As a result, the mind will become more stable and our thinking will be clearer.

We'll continue our discussion on the text, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. Last time, we left the text at verse 98. We will now focus on the first two lines of the next verse (99), which read:

Till the time when all motherly beings and I Gain the perfect conditions for us to be Buddhas,...

In fact, the last three lines of the previous verse (98) read:

Let's direct to all others our virtuous merit, That this may replenish their chances for freedom – May all sentient beings reach Buddhahood soon!

This verse tells us the best way to dedicate our merit or any virtuous actions we create. After you have performed a spiritual practice, such as the meditation on giving and taking, it's important to dedicate your merit. The supreme way of dedicating the merit is on behalf of all other sentient beings, who are deprived of the chance to achieve liberation. We dedicate our merit so that they may achieve complete enlightenment, or the state of Buddhahood.

It is said that where you direct your dedication of merit will determine whether the merit actually helps achieve that goal. It's like a person riding a horse – by just pulling the reins to the left or right, the rider can determine decide which direction the horse will go. Likewise, your dedication of merit predetermines the cause that your merit will support. As we have said, the supreme dedication is on behalf of all other sentient beings, that they may achieve the state of Buddhahood.

Dedicating our merit to benefit all sentient beings is part of our practice of cultivating impartial loving kindness for all beings. When we follow the special teachings or instructions that emphasise the practice of benefiting others, we should always try to do just that, dedicating our merit or making a prayer to achieve the welfare of other beings.

On the other hand, what we are combating here (in this practice) is the self-centred or self-cherishing mind. To follow this teaching of benefiting all other beings, we have to overcome this self-cherishing mind and ensure that all the actions we do, all the thoughts we have, and even the prayers we make are not tainted by our self-cherishing mind. Rather all of these actions should be motivated by the mind that cherishes other beings.

We will stop the teaching here. If any of you has a question, please feel welcome to ask it.

Question from student here about the vase breathing meditation explained briefly last week.

Answer: That particular technique of breathing meditation that you mentioned is called 'vase' breathing. It involves holding all of the breath or wind energy in your body at the level of the navel, and then focusing your mind on that point.

As we began explaining last week, you imagine as you breathe in that you are making almost no noise. Then, when you gently swallow any remaining saliva, you imagine you are swallowing all the wind that normally moves through your upper body. Think that you are bringing down all this wind in the upper body to the level of the navel, and that you are also bringing up all the wind in the lower body to the level of the navel. At that point, imagine that these two wind energies from the upper and lower body are joined together. The mind just focuses on that.

The actual practice requires us to hold the breath and stop the movement of breath coming in and going out of the body. Of course, if you were a beginner you would be lucky to hold your breath for just a minute! It's important for a beginner who is not used to this kind of practice to not force themselves to hold their breath to the point where they physically begin to experience pain in the body. Rather, just hold your breath as long as you can.

Then, when you begin to find it a bit difficult, let the breath out, making sure you let it out very gently, if possible through the nostrils rather than the mouth. This is just a rough explanation. As you say, you really need someone to show you the physical movements. So if you can't understand the verbal explanation, you may need to get someone to physically demonstrate it.

In the last teaching, in reference to bringing the wind from the lower part of the body up towards the navel level, Geshe-la said that to do this, we need to close all the apertures in the lower part of the body. At the same time, we have to press the stomach and the abdomen towards the spine. This is one of the physical techniques that are supposed to help bring the wind in the lower part of the body upward.

Has anyone got another question? (Another question from a *student.*)

Answer: In other words, she doesn't like the idea that what she is going through is the result of her negative actions in her past life, or karma.

Geshe-la wants to know how she relates this physical affliction of asthma (or whatever it may be) to the Buddhist idea of the karma. As you said, she disagreed that her asthma or her problem is the result of her previous negative actions. (*Student tries to clarify comments.*)

Geshe-la's next question is whether she accepts the idea of karma. Because it all depends on the reason why she can't accept that the asthma is a result of negative karma. If it is because of a belief that she already has established in her mind – for instance, if she strongly believes in Christianity or a Creator-God...(student responds further).

This is a very difficult question. Because when you talk about karmic cause and effect, it can become very complicated, very subtle. What this woman is saying is not unusual, because even Buddhists who are supposed to believe in karma can doubt it when they face unexpected problems or difficulties. Under such circumstances, they cannot justify what has happened in terms of their own actions.

Even though a problem is the result of karma, it's hard to identify the specific karmic cause of that problem. When we talk about karma, we are not just talking about the actions we have done just in the preceding moment, or day. In fact, the cause may not necessarily have been created in this lifetime. It may go back to our previous life, or the life before that, and so on. There are many instants where you cannot identify the actual cause.

So the bottom line is that, philosophically speaking, the only reason this woman can't accept that her asthma is a result of karma is that she cannot remember any actions that she feels could have created such a negative result in her life.

It can be very difficult to introduce the Buddhist topic of karma to someone who knows little about Buddhism. It is hard for them to make sense of this topic, because as you just said, people have trouble directly relating the idea of karma to their own lives. Generally, it may be more sensible for you to discuss an aspect of Buddhism Buddhist meditation that is relevant to their lives, something they can relate to their own experience.

You could show someone how to practise meditation, and explain how through meditation you can calm your mind and transform your problems, and so on. Because the person has been told something practical, when they actually apply that practice, if they achieve some good result from it – such as a calm mind, or an understanding of how the mind can determine whether actions bring good or bad results – then this is very useful to them.

In this context, if you started to discuss karma, it would make more sense to them. If you talked about the connection between cause and effect – between their thoughts and actions and the results of those actions – they could relate to it. But that is only one situation. As said before, normally we would find it very difficult to interpret how karma manifests in the lives of others, let alone in our own lives. Other than knowing about the principles and theory of karma, it is hard to actually understand what specific karma creates a specific result.

We will finish with the chanting of Buddha's mantra. As in the beginning, could we again sit in the meditation posture and remove all distracting thoughts from the mind. Then we should just focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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