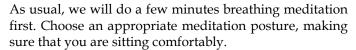
Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons" A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Sandup Tsering







In meditation practice, we should ensure that we achieve both mental and physical isolation. Physical isolation means physically distancing ourselves from all noise and busy activity. Mental isolation means mentally distancing ourselves from wandering or distracted thoughts. If we can achieve both, our mind and body will immediately be at peace.

Through meditation practice, we should try to better understand our own mind, in terms of what disturbs it, and what brings peace and happiness. The way to bring peace to the mind is to control our disturbing thoughts. Because the mind is continually wandering, even if we physically stop doing any work and try to relax alone in a quiet room, unless we check the mind, there is no guarantee that we will find the relaxation and rest we had hoped to find by retreating to a quiet room.

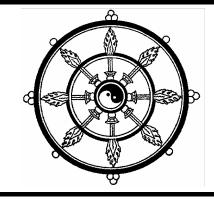
So, even when you are alone in your own room, your mind, unchecked, is burdened and kept busy by wandering thoughts. If our thoughts just continually run amok, thinking of various objects, fantasies, and ideas, this constant activity will slowly build up internal stress or neurosis in the mind.

To quote the advice on thought transformation by the renowned Geshe Chekawa, no matter what we try to do, if we do not know our mind in terms of which objects are right and wrong for it, then there is no hope of achieving mental peace and happiness. However, someone who has mastery over the mind - in terms of knowing which objects are good or bad for it - is even able to transform unfavourable circumstances into favourable ones.

What Geshe Chekawa is talking about is having control over the mind. Normally, whenever we hear abusive words from others, we become enraged and lose our temper. However, if you have a good understanding of the mind and are able to control it, instead of this situation making you angry and causing you to lose your sense of peace and self-control, you use it to enhance your practice of tolerance or patience. For someone who knows how to control his or her mind, such a situation becomes favourable, in the sense that it becomes a cause for that person to further develop patience and tolerance.

Similarly, whenever we see a very appealing or pleasant object there, we normally feel desire for that object, and so generate attachment to it, creating another cause of disturbance to our mental peace and happiness.

We do meditation practice so that we can develop an understanding of the mind and come to know which objects are suitable for the mind - which states of mind are good for



us, and which ones harmful.

Meditation is basically the practice of observing and examining your mental, verbal and physical actions so that you become more aware of the consequences of your actions of body, speech and mind and become better acquainted with them. It is said that all the unwanted things we experience in life are due to the bad relationship we have with our body, speech and mind. At least as far as this life is concerned, we cannot exist without our body, speech and mind - they always accompany us. So we should be able to see the benefit of understanding our actions of body, speech and mind, and discriminating between those actions that are positive and beneficial to us, and those that are harmful and destructive.

As we have just said, our constant companions through life are our own mind and body. If we have good companions if our mind and body are both in sound health and functioning positively - then we too will enjoy a positive state of being.

We should not be always directing our thoughts and energies to the external world, thinking only of what is beneficial and harmful for us in a material sense. Rather, through meditation practice, we should be directing our attention to our inner world, so that we become aware of the health of our mind and body. If, through meditation practice, we could cultivate a positive state of mind, this would secure for us the peace and happiness we normally seek externally. If we can find that peace, that inner friend, within us, then external friends almost become redundant and not that important.

However, if we are completely deprived of an inner friend, then having external friends becomes critical to us - without finding them, we experience the great suffering of loneliness, and feel no joy, peace, or happiness. If we think about the value of external things and external friends as being a cause of happiness and peace for us, we can see that sometimes they have the opposite effect. They can disturb our peace and happiness. In fact, if somebody is around you, you can't even engage in meditation practice. So, the meaning of finding peace and happiness in our life is really finding peace and happiness within our own mind.

If somebody offered you some delicious food, that did not agree with you - it might cause you a stomach pain or something - then even if you knew that it tasted delicious and smelt good, you wouldn't eat it because you knew it was not good for your health.

Likewise, we have to educate ourselves about our mental health - what is good for our mind in terms of mental peace and happiness, and what is bad for it. If you apply meditation in this way, it can be very practical. For us to follow the meditation practice or spiritual practice, we don't necessarily have to have long-term spiritual goals such as achieving a good future life or liberation from cyclic existence or enlightenment. Even right in this moment, you can see the benefits of meditation practice.

We will leave the discussion here, and do a short breathing meditation. Just assume a correct and comfortable sitting posture, then try to remove all distracting thoughts from the mind, and let it completely rest or stabilise within. When we begin the actual meditation, we should make sure that our mental focus is one hundred percent on the object, which here is the incoming and outgoing breath.

The quality of our meditation is not determined by how long we do it. Rather, it is determined by the degree of mental focus on the object. If your mental focus is fully on the object, then even if your meditation is only a minute or two's duration, your sustained concentration is a sign that you are slowly making progress. On the contrary, if we think we are meditating, but our mind is not fully on the meditation object and instead is running after some other object and we are continually trying to bring it back, then even if our meditation session is long, we won't make much progress, because the mind has been developing the bad habit of continually wandering.

Also, the way we focus the mind on the breath – it's not like the mind is watching the breath in the same way that we perceive an external form, with the perceiver in here, and in the object out there. Rather, we have to try to completely close the gap between mind and object, so that the mind is completely absorbed in, or merged with, the object, and becomes one with it. (*Pause for meditation*.)

Now, we'll discuss another two lines from the text, in the verse we left off from last week. The middle of verse 106 says:

All the things of this world are but fog-like appearance; When closely examined, they fade out of sight.

This lines contain another analogy for us – a "fog-like appearance". Fog is the early morning hazy cloud we may see in low-lying areas in the distance on a cold day. This image illustrates the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, which is their true nature.

When we get closer to fog, we can see that there is nothing there, the fog or cloud-bank vanishes. Likewise, if we do not closely examine and analyse the way things exist, then everything will appear to us as being very solid, and as having a concrete existence. However, close analysis by a reasoning mind will show that things do not exist concretely.

The next two lines introduce another analogy:

Like mirages these things at a distance seem lovely, But when we come closer, they are not to be found.

Here we have the example of a mirage, which can appear in a hot climate especially in desert areas, again from a long distance. Because of the combination of sunlight, sand particles, the reflection of light, and our visual consciousness, from a distance the mirage looks like a flowing river or stream. Of course, when we get closer to it, there is not a drop of water to be found.

This verse is saying that when the causes and conditions of things are not closely analysed, from their own side they will appear to have an inherent quality of existence.

For example, some things from their own side look as if they have a quality of beauty. We all have some fixed idea about certain objects being a model of beauty. We see that object as beautiful without actually closely examining the quality of the beauty – what is in that object that makes it appear beautiful? These lines suggest that if we examine and analyse the object to find that quality of beauty, it cannot be found.

This is the way all things exist. They are all merely designated, merely labelled [on the base]. From its own side, a thing doesn't exist – like the quality of beauty doesn't exist from the side of an object. Things don't exist from their own side, and don't have self-existent qualities. Rather, the text is saying that all things are dependent-arisings.

If we gain a realisation of the ultimate nature of things, we won't generate delusions with respect to the objects we perceive. At the moment, we continuously generate delusions – for example, when we perceive a beautiful, appealing object, we suddenly generate a strong desire to possess that object. Likewise, when we perceive an unpleasant object, we generate anger or hatred towards it.

The text is saying that the main reason why strong attachment or desire arise is because we perceive a quality that appeals to our mind; it objectively appears as if that the object possesses that quality. So, our mind views that object as beautiful. Therefore, when we perceive an object as having a quality of beauty, we can say to ourselves that this quality is partly a projection of the mind –it is not there with the object, but is something to do with being superimposed by your mind. With such a view, we can have less desire. Likewise, we will have less hatred if we see that the unpleasantness of an object is not inherent in the object, but rather is superimposed by your mind.

If we trace the root cause of these delusions further, we will see that deep down it is our strong misconception with respect to the true nature of our own self – the way one exists as a person, or 'I'. If we penetrate the true nature of the way the 'I' or this person exists, we can see that it is empty of any inherent existence. If we can gain this knowledge, it will counteract all the delusions we generate with respect to all the other objects we perceive with our mind.

Likewise, when we generate strong desire or anger, deep down we have a strong sense of 'I' which says "I want to have that object close to me" or "I want to get rid of that object". Whenever we experience this 'I' that says "I like this " or "I hate that", if we examine how the 'I' exists, then we can see that the way it appears to the mind is as if it exists inherently, as if it is self-existent.

You not only examine the 'I' at such times. At the same time, you can examine the object that is desired or hated by the 'I', due to the influence of misconception of its true nature. We can see that we also misconceive the object of desire or the hatred as if it exists in its own right.

We will finish the teaching here. As usual, we chant the Buddha's mantra. While we chant, we should try to focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tapes by Gabrielle Thomson
Edited by Mary-Lou Considine
Checked by Dianne McDonald
Edited Version

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