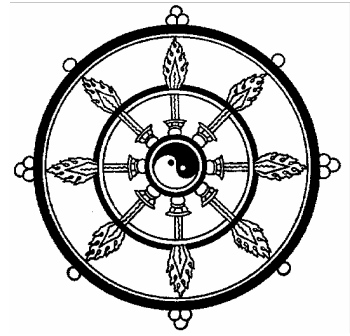


Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

འགྲུབ་ལོ་རྒྱུད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



23 May 2001

As usual, first we'll do some breathing meditation. Try to adopt an appropriate sitting posture, making sure you feel completely comfortable. The main reason we are here is to bring about some more clarity, stability and better functioning of our mind.

After choosing the right sitting posture and relaxing our body, we should then check our mind and try to recognise what in our mind is depriving it of inner stability and clear thinking. We can recognise that what prevents the mind from all these good and positive qualities is some form of distracting thought. Because our mind is always overpowered by distracting thoughts we can understand that inwardly we do not possess enough peace and stability.

Therefore, try to make sure that your motivation or reason for doing the meditation is to cleanse the mind of these disturbing thoughts or distractions that always make it wander after external objects. With this motivation, we should try to bring the mind fully inward, rather than having some part of it outwardly busy. Make sure that your mind is 100 percent inward. Then we should try to experience or feel some kind of relaxation or rest. After staying in that peaceful place for a little while, you should then begin the actual breathing meditation. Otherwise, if we don't engage in meditation practice, then of course our mind would just simply again run towards outside objects. Therefore we should engage in this breathing meditation, without getting distracted by any other object. The mind should focus single-pointedly on the incoming and outgoing breath.

It is said that the way we should engage in meditation, or focus our mind on the object, is so that the mind and object become almost as if merged together, or are inseparable. Our meditation should not be like when we see a visual form, and our mind or eye consciousness is here and the perceived object is there. Rather, in meditation, the mind that is meditating and the object that is being meditated on are an inseparable entity. Could we please now sit in this breathing meditation for a few minutes? (*Pause for meditation.*)

Meditation practice is very beneficial if we integrate it into our life, because basically, through true meditation practice, we can achieve peace and happiness within ourselves. The inner peace and happiness we can achieve through meditation practice is completely different from the peace and happiness we normally associate with our worldly or mundane activities.

In the worldly sense, from our ordinary mind's point of view, all peace and happiness is derived from external objects – we completely indulge ourselves in these objects either mentally or physically. Of course, we are not saying that the happiness or satisfaction we can gain from the external world is not beneficial or good. Rather, what we need to check is whether the happiness that comes from the external world is lasting or sustainable. If we ask this question, we will find that this happiness is not sustainable, because it depends upon meeting the external conditions and things that give enjoyment to our mind and body. When we do not have the right external conditions for happiness and peace, then we can't have that happiness.

We can also see how easily external happiness can disappear or change due to changes in the external world or conditions. If we consider the fast changes happening in the external world, and also that these changes are totally beyond our own control, we can see that the happiness we can gain through external objects is unreliable and disappears easily. Furthermore, as we grow older and age, a lot of external things that used to give us enjoyment no longer do so. Physically, we no longer have the ability to enjoy them.

Therefore, we should at least try to experiment for ourselves and, instead of always seeking happiness outwardly, we should consider seeking it inwardly. We need to try and find the way to this inner happiness. The only way is to first overcome all mental distractions, almost like cutting off the mind completely from external objects. Let the mind completely settle within. Even if it's not possible to settle the mind completely inward, try to see if even some part of the mind could gain some experience of this. If we can even reduce the amount of mental distractions then, as a result of resting the mind inward, we can experience some peace arising totally from within, which is not dependent on any external object. It's something you can gain even if you are alone in your own room. How strong our motivation is to practice meditation or not depends upon our knowledge of its benefits, especially from our own experience of whether it brings more peace and happiness to one's life. If we see some benefit, then we'll have a natural tendency to like the practice.

In Tibetan, the term for 'meditation' is 'gom' which means 'getting used to'. So literally, meditation practice is the practice of getting our mind used or habituated to a positive way of thinking and mental attitude. Through meditation practice it is possible for us to modify our mind to any shape, in any way we like. If we check the mind, we might find that it possesses many faults and may be more habituated to a negative rather than positive way of thinking. Basically, our mind has this quality of flexibility in the sense that it can be trained and changed, no matter how bad it is. Therefore, if we can train the mind through meditation practice, we can change it from a negative to a positive state. Seeing this, there's no reason to feel discouraged about making progress in transforming and changing our mind. Rather, if we see this potential within our mind, then even though it may take a bit of time, we can see that it's possible for us to change our mind, no matter how negative or how bad one is. To change the mind, we have to practise meditation over and over again. Through practice we can slowly bring change to the mind.

In a way it's similar to what we should and should not do in spiritual practice – what we should accept and what we should abandon or discard, like the way we value or judge external things such as choosing the right kind of friends. If we know two people and one is a good-natured person while the other bad, naturally we would try to go with the good-natured person. We would also try as much as possible to distance ourselves from and not be influenced by the person with the bad nature. The only difference in spiritual practice is that we have to focus our mind inward and try to see these things

within ourselves, in terms of our state of mind, or the different types of thoughts we generate. We have to develop some discriminating knowledge about which states of mind are worth keeping, and which we should get rid of. With greater discrimination, we would naturally try to follow the positive states of mind we generate. We would recognise them as being worth keeping, just like a good, reliable friend. In our everyday life, we should always try to recognise and use positive states of mind, and recognise and avoid negative states as being harmful to us and try to diminish and counteract them. In this way, we can make progress in our spiritual practice, because as said before, the main aim of meditation and spiritual practice is to increase and fully develop all the positive states of mind, and on the other hand to decrease, and in fact to completely eliminate, negative states of mind. If on a daily basis we work hard to increase our positive states of mind then naturally the opposite states will diminish.

In actually applying this spiritual teaching in daily life, we cannot say that we lack understanding of what spiritual practice is all about. As we have said, it simply means to safeguard the good nature of our personalities, in terms of our physical, verbal or mental actions or behaviour. As to actually putting this spiritual teaching into practice and making progress, we should see the practice of mindfulness and alertness as our excellent friends. If we have mindfulness, then at all times we will be able to recall our positive qualities. If we check within our personalities, we can see that there are certain parts that are very pleasant. There are certain habits, for example, when we speak to others, which are pleasant for them, in terms of even our outer facial expressions and our mental attitudes. It is said that the mental attitude is the most important, because all our outer physical deeds are outcomes of our mental attitude. At least always try to remember the value and importance of these good human qualities. On top of this, as we said, alertness is also important. Without alertness, even if do some faulty action, we won't take any corrective measures. But if we have alertness on top of mindfulness, we would be able to recognise any fault as soon as it arose in our actions of our body, speech and mind, and immediately apply the remedy to overcome it.

On the one hand we have to try as much as possible to safeguard all the good qualities we possess. We do not lose them simply because outwardly we face some unfavourable conditions. As said before, if we apply our spiritual practice to maintaining all the positive human qualities, then whatever practice we do, it will make good sense to the people around us. Even our friends will see that our practice is about a positive change in our lives. Not only that, they get to benefit from our practice. Your practice not only benefits you; it can also benefit others and encourage them to follow such practices.

Again, we have used up all our time on general discussion, so we are not able to go over the thought transformation text tonight. There's a bit of time left, however, and Geshe-la would welcome just one question, making sure it's a short and a simple question, an easy question! By saying that he means, don't give him, Geshe-la, a hard time!

Question: In some Zen texts it says to see through all thoughts as essentially empty. I am confused by tonight's teaching where we have been talking about seeing some thoughts as good and others as bad. How can we reconcile these two different views?

Answer: Geshe-la said that he has heard about that form of meditation learned in the Zen traditions – if you are talking about the meditation wherein you try to empty all thoughts from your mind, by seeing the thoughts, whether positive or negative, as an obstruction. In fact, way back in the past in

Tibet there was also some interest in this meditation. Geshe-la says he is not sure whether it is the same as the one taught in current Zen tradition. However, according to that meditation, all thoughts, like conceptual thoughts, even the positive ones, are equally obstructions preventing the mind from achieving concentration. They are all seen as bad. Geshe-la said he learned that they use an example of two vicious dogs, with the only difference between them being their colour—one being black, the other white. But they are both dangerous. If they bite you, they can cause the same harm. So like this, all types of thoughts, whether good or bad, all have the same influence as a hindrance and obstruction to mental development.

Similarly, in Buddhism we learn a meditation on emptiness wherein all you focus on is the mere emptiness of true existence, which is the mere negation of the object to be negated. In fact, there are many different types of meditation on emptiness with regard to the ultimate truth of emptiness. With regard to the manifest world of conventional truth, there are a lot of meditation topics concerning karma, and so forth.

Going back to your question, even though Zen offers similar meditations on their version of emptiness, at the same time, Zen, as a school of Mahayana Buddhism, would also accept this theory of the law of karma and have its own teachings on how to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. Therefore, if you accept the theory of karma, then you are talking about the practice where you have to accept certain actions as positive, and reject some others as negative and abandon them. Generally speaking, we can categorise meditation into two types—one type which belongs to the method side of the path, and the other type which belong to the wisdom side of the path. It is said that in order to achieve your spiritual goal, it is essential for both method and wisdom to be combined, not having one without the other. Therefore, when we talk of this meditation on emptiness, we are talking about the practice of the wisdom side of the path.

What meditation practice one should do is really up to the individual. In order to make progress in one's special practice and make it stable, it's important that whatever knowledge you have gained, you try to retain and make as stable as possible. The practice that is most beneficial for you is the one that matters most to you. Just because someone else recommends or has a different perspective on what practice is good, it is not necessary to change one's mind. Rather, it's wiser to try to add this knowledge to whatever knowledge and practice one already has been doing and in this way try to make some consistent progress in your practice.

We'll just stop here for tonight's teaching. We are going to chant the Buddha's mantra seven times, and as in the beginning of the session, we will again sit in the meditation posture and relax our body by calming our mind inward. Then, as we chant the mantra, we should focus the mind on it.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Gabrielle Thomson
Edited by Dianne McDonald
Edit checked by Mary-Lou Considine
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*