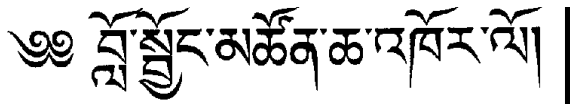

Dharmarakshita's "The Wheel of Sharp Weapons"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



12 February 1997

We shall do some breathing meditation first. Relax your body and choose the most suitable sitting posture.

Whenever we do something, it is important to first check the motivation behind our action. This is because the result of any action is determined by mind, i.e. the mind leads the action. So, as we begin to practise meditation, the first thing we do is check our mind. This will help to ensure that we have the right motivation.

If, at the very beginning of the day, we check our mind and find that it is peaceful, joyful and stable, then the force of this happy mind makes all our actions during that day so much more enjoyable. So, even if we meditate for only a short time, it is still an important time, and has the purpose of bringing some change to our lives. By transforming our actions into something meaningful meditation transforms us into better people. Our actions become more positive and beneficial to ourselves and to others.

Meditation practice is like an inner training program. So as discussed, before beginning cultivate the best motivation, the motivation to benefit others. A positive attitude is a valid motivation for meditation. Generate the motivation, "Through engaging in meditation practice I shall attain the perfect state of full enlightenment in order to bring benefit to all sentient beings".

Next, turn the mind inward by not following thoughts of external objects. As the mind abides within, without following any other object, focus the mind on the inhalation and the exhalation of the breath at the nostrils. Be fully aware of the in and outflow of the breath.

The only reason to practise meditation is to bring inner peace, happiness, stability and clarity to our mind. It is the wish of most beings to enjoy a sound and happy mind and body. People try to fulfil this wish in many different ways. Some choose a spiritual practice and others don't. However the aim behind everybody's actions is the same - wanting happiness and avoiding suffering.

Happiness can be physical, where we enjoy good health, or it can be mental, where we enjoy inner happiness. The causes for happiness are found in two main categories of 'outer' and 'inner' factors. We can further understand this by looking at a situation where one is confronted by a beautiful object. We can see that the object alone does not automatically make us happy and peaceful. Even

when we talk about gross physical happiness, it doesn't just depend on a good physical body. Physical happiness has to be supported by the inner factor of happiness. So what we need is to further develop our knowledge of the causes and conditions that bring about happiness or unhappiness. As we examine both these outer and inner conditions, we can see that even though the outer conditions are necessary and important, the inner factor is more important. In fact, the inner conditions can dominate the outer conditions. So we can see how important meditation practice is in finding more happiness. Through meditation we can cultivate and develop the inner conditions needed for the happiness we constantly seek.

If we turn our mind inward and focus on it, we can observe the effect our mind has on our day to day life experiences. We can see that when our mind is unstable and fluctuates quickly, it has a destabilising effect, on our daily experiences. We cannot enjoy ourselves if our mind is agitated or disturbed. No physical conditions can help us to be happy when we are in that state. We need to know what it is within our minds that is responsible for making us uneasy, and what is responsible for providing us with us inner stability, clarity and peace.

We find that mental distractions are the main cause of our inner disturbance. Mental distractions arise to bring us discomfort and unease, because of the habit of our mind wandering after the various types of objects that appear to it. The actual cause of distraction is not so much the objects that appear to our mind - it is the way we apprehend those objects and our grasping after them.

We follow any meditation or spiritual practice to benefit ourselves in this life and beyond. It is important to see our spiritual practice as a means of improving the quality of the life we lead now, and in the future. Quality of life is where we enjoy a lasting physical and mental happiness.

We are all responsible for our wellbeing, including our physical health. Without good health we cannot fully enjoy happiness. If we are physically weak we cannot achieve much in our life. It is important, especially at a young age, to take care of our bodies by knowing what food and drink is beneficial, and what is harmful. So put the utmost effort in trying to avoid harmful food and drink, and give your body the best nourishment you can.

We also have to think of the body, not only in the short

term, but also in the long term. If we consume harmful substances, there may be no apparent immediate harm to us. We may actually think it is alright to consume those substances because we perceive no harm to ourselves. So we continue and become addicted. As time goes on, we can see the effects, but by that time it is too late to do anything to cure the harmful effects of the past. Then you have a very sick and weak body preventing you from doing all the things that you want to do. This affects your mind, and can have a detrimental effect on your whole life. So if we are more responsible, then we know that we should take care of our physical health to the best of our ability at least for our own benefit. We aren't simply influenced by society or our friends. Instead, we know what is good for our bodies and, accordingly we look after our physical health.

We are also responsible for our own minds. This means knowing what type of thinking brings us unhappiness, and what type of thinking brings happiness and peace. Based on this knowledge, use meditation to try and get rid of all the states of mind that bring unhappiness. For example, notice your state of mind when you focus on an ugly or beautiful object. Notice what effect it has on your experience, and what sort of emotion it brings within your mind. If that state of mind is disturbing your inner peace and stability, you know it is not a good or beneficial state of mind. In practising meditation we train our mind to get away from those negative states of mind.

We need to be responsible not only for our physical and mental health, but it is also important to look after our material conditions. We have to plan our financial security for the future. So you can't, especially at a young age, afford to waste time by doing nothing. You need to work, and you should use the money you earn wisely. As said before, we should provide our body with nourishment, good clothing and shelter. Also you need to try to save some money for the future.

If you practise meditation and you work, both your inner and external savings accounts will progress. So when you get to an old age, then you have everything that you want in life - peace of mind and financial security. You can become financially secure and at the same time familiarise yourself with the practice of ensuring peace of mind.

In this way you can be independent and happy, whether you are living with someone else or not. Whether you are living alone or with another, inwardly you are still happy. If you feel like going on a long holiday, you have the money to do that too. It is important to develop full responsibility for ourselves. We have to do everything we can to develop inner knowledge and inner strength. If you find reading books useful, then do that. Or if you enjoy meditation and discussion with others then do that. We should do everything we can to sustain the positive qualities of our life.

Meditation has the potential to benefit us even after this life, in future lifetimes. It is said that if you become familiar with meditation practice, then even the experience of facing death is not frightening. Even though you will be leaving all your friends and

possessions behind, your familiarity with meditation practice means that you can maintain a peaceful and virtuous state of mind. It is said that if you can die with such a wholesome state of mind, then your future life will be favourable.

We will stop the teaching here and recite the Buddha's mantra. Without being distracted by any outer objects as we recite the mantra, try to focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

© *Tara Institute*