

Meditation

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Meditation is the psychological approach to mental culture, training and purification of the mind.

IN place of prayer, Buddhists practise meditation for mental culture and for spiritual development. No one can attain everlasting happiness or salvation without cultivating the mind through meditation. Any amount of meritorious deeds alone will not lead a person to attain the final goal without the corresponding mental purification. Naturally, the untrained mind is very elusive and persuades people to commit evil and become slaves of the senses. Imagination and emotions always mislead humans if their minds are not properly trained. One who knows how to practise meditation will be able to control the mind when it is misled by the senses. Most of the troubles which we are confronting today are due to the untrained and undeveloped mind. It is already established that meditation is the remedy for many physical and mental sicknesses. Medical authorities and great psychologists all over the world say that mental frustration, worries, miseries, anxieties, tension and fear are the causes of many diseases, stomach ulcers, gastritis, nervous complaints and mental illness. And even latent sickness will be aggravated through such mental conditions. When the conscious 'I' frets too much, worries too much, or grieves too long and too intensely, then troubles develop in the body. Gastric ulcers, tuberculosis, coronary diseases and a host of functional disorders are the products of mental and emotional imbalance. In the case of children, the decay of the teeth and defective eyesight are frequently related to emotional disorders. Many of these sicknesses and disorders can be avoided if people could spend a few minutes a day to calm their minds through the practice of meditation. Many people do not believe this or are too lazy to practise meditation owing to a lack of understanding. Some people say that meditation is only a waste of time. We must remember that every spiritual master in this world attained the highest point of his life through the practice of meditation. They are honoured today by millions of people because they have done tremendous service to humanity with their supreme wisdom which they obtained through the practice of meditation. Meditation should not be a task to which we force ourselves 'with gritted teeth and clenched fists', it should rather be something that draws us, because it fills us with joy and inspiration. So long as we have to force ourselves, we are not yet ready for meditation. Instead of meditating we are violating our true nature. Instead of relaxing and letting go, we are holding on to our ego. In this way meditation becomes a game of ambition, of personal achievement and aggrandizement. Meditation is like love: a spontaneous experience—not something that can be forced or acquired by strenuous effort. Therefore Buddhist meditation has no other purpose than to bring the mind back into the present, into the state of fully awakened consciousness, by clearing it from all obstacles that come through the senses and mental objects. The Buddha obtained His Enlightenment through the development of His mind. He did not seek divine power to help Him. He gained His wisdom

through self-effort by practising meditation. To have a healthy body and mind and to have peace, one must learn how to practise meditation.

We are living in a world where people have to work very hard physically and mentally. Without hard work, there is no place for people in modern society. Very often keen competition is going on everywhere. One is trying to beat the others in every sphere of life and human beings have no rest at all. Mind is the nucleus of life. When there is no real peace and rest in the mind, the whole life will collapse. People naturally try to overcome their miseries through pleasing the senses: they drink, gamble, sing and dance—all the time having the illusion that they are enjoying the real happiness of life. Sense stimulation is not the real way to have relaxation. The more we try to please the senses through sensual pleasures, the more will we become slaves to the senses. There will be no end to our craving for satisfaction. The real way to relax is to calm the senses by the control of mind. If we can control the mind, then we will be able to control everything. When the mind is fully controlled and purified, it will be free from mental disturbances. When the mind is free from mental disturbances it can see many things which others cannot see with their naked eyes. Ultimately, we will be able to attain our salvation and find peace and happiness. To practise meditation, one must have strong determination, effort and patience. Immediate results cannot be expected. We must remember that it takes many years for a person to be qualified as a doctor, lawyer, mathematician, philosopher, historian or a scientist. Similarly to be a good meditator, it will take some time for the person to control the elusive mind and to calm the senses. Practising meditation is like swimming in a river against the current. Therefore one must not lose patience for not being able to obtain rapid results. At the same time the meditator must also cultivate morality. A congenial place for meditation is another important factor. The meditator must have a suitable object for meditation, for without an object the jumping mind is not easy to trap. The object must not create lust, anger, delusion, and emotion in the meditator's mind. When we start to meditate, we switch the mind from the old discursive way of thinking, or habitual thought into a new unimpeded or unusual way of thinking.

We spend most of our time on our body: to feed it, to clothe it, to cleanse it, to wash it, to beautify it, to relax it, but how much time do we spend on our mind for the same purposes? What is a suitable object to meditate upon? Some people take an Image as an object and concentrate on it. Some concentrate on inhaling and exhaling the breath. Whatever may be the method, if anyone tries to practise meditation, it is necessary to find relaxation. Meditation will help a person a great deal to have physical and mental health and to control the mind when it is necessary. We can do the highest service to society by simply abstaining from evil. The cultured mind that is developed through meditation performs a most useful service to others. Meditation is certainly not a waste of valuable time. The advanced mind of a meditator can solve so many human problems and is very useful to enlighten others. Meditation is very useful to help a person live peacefully despite various disturbances that are so prevalent in this modern world.

Meditation has the purpose of training a person to face and understand this very world in which we live. Meditation teaches us to adjust ourselves to bear with the numerous obstacles to life in the modern world. If you practise meditation, you can learn to behave like a

noble person even though you are disturbed by others. Through meditation you can learn how to relax the body and to calm the mind; you can learn to be tranquil and happy within. Just as an engine gets overheated and damaged when it is run for a prolonged period and requires cooling down to avoid this, so also the mind gets overtaxed when we subject it to a sustained degree of mental effort and it is only through meditation that relaxation or cooling can be achieved. Meditation strengthens the mind to control human emotion when it is disturbed by negative thoughts and feelings such as jealousy, anger, pride and envy. Meditation helps us to let go, to get a much needed reprieve from life's daily pressures. If you practise meditation, you can learn to make the proper decision when you are at a crossroads in life and are at a loss as to which way to turn. These qualities cannot be purchased from anywhere. No amount of money or property can buy these qualities, yet you can attain them through meditation. But we must never lose sight of the fact that the ultimate object of Buddhist meditation is to eradicate all defilements from the mind and to attain everlasting happiness. Nowadays, however, the practice of meditation has been abused by people. They want immediate and quick results, just as they expect quick returns for everything they do in daily life. In Buddhism, as is the case with other eastern cultures, patience is a most important quality. The mind must be brought under control in slow degrees and one should not try to reach for the higher states without proper training. We have heard of overenthusiastic young men and women literally going out of their minds because they adopted the wrong attitudes towards meditation. Meditation is a gentle way of conquering the defilements which pollute the mind. If people want 'success' or 'achievement' to boast to others that they have attained this or that level of meditation, they are abusing the method of mental culture. One must be trained in morality and one must clearly understand that to be successful in the discipline of meditation worldly achievements must not be equated with spiritual development. Ideally, it is good to work under an experienced teacher who will help a student to develop along the right path. But above all one must never be in a hurry to achieve too much too quickly.

As human beings we have great latent potential in our minds, but such potential is eclipsed by our anger, delusion, ignorance, craving, selfishness and many other mental defilements. We must realize that with the passing of every second we are wasting and misusing our mental energy on unnecessary pursuits. We just do not know how to harness our vast mental energy for a useful and good purpose. The Buddha showed us how to harness that vast storehouse of mental energy and use it for our liberation from misery.

Do you know the amount of mental energy we are using through our five senses and imagery? So much mental energy is needlessly wasted through our six channels in useless imagination, temptations and frustration. The Buddha has introduced one proven method for us to harness this vast mental energy and it is called 'Meditation'. Meditation means harnessing our mental energy through concentration and from there we go on training and taming the mind. It is not possible to cultivate the mind simply by faithfully praying and worshipping any god, or by performing various rituals and ceremonies. We can never hope to gain knowledge, wisdom, purity or enlightenment through performing ritualistic practices or prayers. The Buddha says in the 'Sati Patthana Sutta' that

meditation is the only path or only method that we can use to gain purity and enlightenment. Here we must not confuse Buddhism and Meditation. Buddhism is the total practice of the Teaching of the Buddha manifested through various popular cultures; whilst Meditation is the specific method developed to rid the mind of impurities. Once a person has practiced discipline through Sila and achieved control of the body, then the mind is ready to be developed - through Meditation. It is the only way for our FINAL release from all suffering. Here the Buddha is talking about concentration for mental training and purity for gaining final salvation. Since our minds are polluted, this method helps us to rid ourselves of our worries, miseries and mental disturbances. You may go here and there worshipping various gods and goddesses with the hope of getting rid of your worries and problems. But unless and until you train your own mind to develop a true understanding of the nature of existence, as well as realizing who you really are, you can never gain real relief from such miseries and worries. Meditation is the way whereby we differentiate between actions which fail to lead us to real happiness and those which we call 'skilful action', which positively help liberate us from misery and ignorance.

We cannot gain happiness by harboring anger or hatred, selfishness or delusion. Occasionally, we experience certain degrees of emotional satisfaction, but the nature of this happiness is just like lighting, it is fleeting. It appears for a moment and disappears the next. True happiness is not like this. If there is true happiness we experience a permanent sense of calmness, satisfaction and tranquility. So the real purpose of our lives should be to clarify our clouded, misled minds and free ourselves from worries and disturbances.

When we develop our minds through meditation we arrest the distractions provided by the five senses. When the mind is clear it reduces anxiety, craving, anger, jealousy and delusion. The mind that is clear becomes energetic and alert. This is when we can influence our mental activities and release enormous latent power. This is psychic power. We only have to release it through meditation.

Man's untrained mind is responsible for all the troubles, calamities, disturbances, unfavorable circumstances and even the changes of elements and matter. Conversely man's mind can change unfortunate situations in the world and also make it peaceful, prosperous and happy place for all to live. This can be done only through the purification of mental energy.

Meditation is thus a state of mental purity where disturbing passions and impulses are subdued and calmed down, so that the mind becomes unified and collected, and enters into a state of clear consciousness and mindfulness. It is only when the mind is controlled and is kept to the right road of orderly progress that it becomes useful for its possessor and for society. A disorderly mind is a liability both to its owner and to others. All the havoc wrought in the world is wrought by those who have not learned the way of mind control, balance and poise.