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THE BUDDHIST MEDITATION

by

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Meditation is observing the real nature of mind and matter. Meditation is an examination of mental and physical phenomena in ourselves. Meditation is a way or method which searches for reality and truth in the body and mind through wisdom based on concentration. By true and constant observation, we can accomplish a certain degree of concentration and knowledge. Through this concentration, we can penetrate the true nature of mind and matter in our body. By this penetration we can see the arising and disappearing of mental and physical phenomena in ourselves.

The word "meditation" is mental culture or development. Meditation aims at cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances (such as lustful desires, hatred, ill-will, indolence, worries, restlessness and sceptical doubts) and cultivating such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will energy, the analytical faculty, confidence, joy and tranquillity. This leads finally to the attainment of highest wisdom which sees the nature of things as they really are. Meditation attempts to realize the ultimate truth.

There are two forms of meditation. One is the development of mental concentration (samatha-samadhi). It means one-pointedness of mind. The other form is the insight meditation known as "vipassana." It can penetrate into the nature of mind and matter.

For the attainment of concentration, there are forty kinds of methods prescribed in the texts and the book of the Path of Purification.

Herein are the forty meditation subjects:

- A. Ten entirety (Totalities) (Kasina)
- B. Ten kinds of foulness (Asubha)
- C. Ten kinds of recollections (Anussati)
- D. Four kinds of divine abidings (Brahmavihara)
- E. Four kinds of immaterial states (Arupa)
- F. One perception (Sanna)
- G. One defining (avathana)

A. The ten kinds of entirety-methods are as follows:

- (1) Earth Kasina
- (2) Water Kasina
- (3) Fire Kasina
- (4) Air Kasina
- (5) Blue Kasina
- (6) Yellow Kasina
- (7) Red Kasina

- (8) White Kasina
- (9) Light Kasina
- (10) Limited-space Kasina

B. The ten kinds of foulness-methods are as follows:

- (1) The bloated body
- (2) The livid body
- (3) The festered body
- (4) The cut-up body
- (5) The gnawed body
- (6) The scattered body
- (7) The hacked and scattered body
- (8) The bleeding body
- (9) The worm-infested body; and
- (10) The skeleton

C. The ten kinds of recollection-methods are as follows:

- (1) Recollection of the Buddha
- (2) Recollection of Dhamma
- (3) Recollection of the Sangha
- (4) Recollection of virtue
- (5) Recollection of generosity
- (6) Recollection of deities
- (7) Mindfulness of death
- (8) Mindfulness occupied with the body
- (9) Mindfulness of breathing; and
- (10) Recollection of peace

D. The four kinds of divine abiding are these:

- (1) Loving kindness
- (2) Compassion
- (3) Gladness; and
- (4) Equanimity

E. The four kinds of immaterial states are these:

- (1) The base consisting of boundless space
- (2) The base consisting of boundless consciousness
- (3) The base consisting of nothingness
- (4) The base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception

F. The one perception is the perception of repulsiveness in nutriment. Finally, the one defining is the defining (analysis) of the four great primary elements.

Among them, the mindfulness of breathing is a very popular method for establishing concentration in the meditator's world. Concentration on breathing leads to one-pointedness of the mind and ultimately to insight which enables

one to attain enlightenment. The Buddha also practised concentration on breathing before he attained enlightenment. This harmless and fruitful concentration may be practised by any person, irrespective of religious beliefs.

The most important discourse ever given by the Buddha on mental development or mental culture (meditation) is called the setting-up of Mindfulness (Satipathana-sutta). The ways of insight-meditation are given in this discourse. The discourse is divided into four main sections. The first section deals with our body (Kaya); the second with our feelings or sensations (Vedana); the third with the mind (Citta); and the fourth with various moral and intellectual subjects (Dhamma). It should be clearly borne in mind that whatever the form of "meditation" may be, the essential thing is mindfulness, meaning awareness, attention or observation.

One of the most well-known, popular and practical examples of meditation connected with the body is called The Mindfulness or Awareness of in and out breathing. For this meditation only, a particular and definite posture is prescribed in the text. For other forms of meditation given in this course, you may sit, stand, walk or lie down, as you like. But for cultivating mindfulness of in and out breathing, one should sit according to the text, "cross-legged position, keeping the body erect and mind alert." Place the right hand over the left hand. Eyes may be closed or half-closed. Easterners generally sit cross-legged with body erect. They sit placing the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. This is the full lotus position. Sometimes they sit in the half position, that is, by simply placing the right foot on the left thigh or left foot on the right thigh. When the triangle position is assumed, the whole body is well-balanced. But, sitting cross-legged is not practical and easy for Westerners. Those who find the cross-legged posture too difficult may sit comfortably in a chair or any other support sufficiently high enough to rest the legs on the floor or ground. Assume any posture that is comfortable to you, keeping the back reasonably straight, without being stiff or strained. The head should be drooping. The neck should be straight so that the nose may be in a perpendicular line with the navel. Your hands should be placed comfortably on your lap, and the right hand must be on the left. The level of your eyes must be in front of you, not more than a distance of two and half or three feet. You should close or half-close your eyes, or you may gaze at the tip of your nose, as it may be convenient to you. Keep the body still and steady, relaxed and easy, without being stiff, strained, cramped, shackled or bent over.

Thus, seated in a convenient posture, at a quiet place, you should establish mindfulness. You should pay attention to the meditation object being mindful and alert, fixing on the tip of your nose.

Breathe in and out as usual, without any effort or strain. Do not control or force the breath in any way; merely stay attentively to the coming of breath-in and the going of breath-out; let your mind be aware and vigilant of your breathing in and

out. When you breathe you sometimes take deep breaths; sometimes not. This does not matter at all. Breathe normally and naturally. The only thing is that when you take deep breaths you should be aware whether they are long or short, in or out. In other words, your mind should be so fully concentrated on your breathing that you are aware of its natural movements and changes.

The important thing is not to move very often. Forget other things: your surroundings, your environment. Do not raise your eyes and look at anything. It is very important to be patient. Patience means staying in a state of balance, regardless of what is happening in the body. Staying easy, relaxed and alert. If we have a patient mind, all things will unfold in a natural and organic way. Being patient through all these experiences will help us to keep the mind in balance.

Another aid for deepening meditation is silence. Much of the energy that is conserved by not talking can be used for the development of awareness and mindfulness. As with the meditation practice itself, silence, too, should be easy and relaxed. By keeping silence, the whole range of mental and physical activity will become extremely clear. Verbal silence makes possible a deeper silence of mind. Try to cultivate a sense of aloneness. To do this, it is helpful to suspect preconceptions about yourselves; about relationships; about other people. At the time of meditation take time to experience yourself deeply. When we understand ourselves, then relationships become easy and meaningful. Concentrated efforts during the meditation on the development of moment-to-moment mindfulness will be directed towards one goal; the mind will become powerful and penetrating. During the meditation be very mindful of and notice carefully all your movements. The meditation deepens through the continuity of awareness.

Now we will begin the sitting practice with a very simple object of awareness: mindfulness of breathing. This exercise of mindfulness is breathing, which is the simplest and easiest of practices. It is meant to develop concentration leading up to the very height of mystic powers: the four-fold stages. The mystic powers can dispel the hinderances of mind and can cause joy, calm, peace, happiness, cleanness, purification, equilibrium and keenness of mind. The supernatural knowledge is very powerful, strong and sharp. There are five kinds. They are:

- (1) Mental creative power
- (2) the knowledge of former lives
- (3) the knowledge of the minds of others
- (4) the divine eye
- (5) the divine ear

By practicing meditation on breathing in-out, when your mind thus becomes tranquil, purified, cleansed, flawless, free from defilements, supple, ready to act, firm and imperturbable, you can apply your mind to these kinds of knowledge.

Here are the five stages in giving attention to breathing in-out:

- (1) Counting
- (2) Connection

- (3) Touching
- (4) Fixing
- (5) Observing

1. Herein, counting is just counting of slow and quick breaths. You should practice the slow counting method first, and the quick counting later. As a beginner, you should first give attention to the tip of your nose where the touch of breath is most evident, by counting with mindfulness. Take mental note and count a pair of out-breathing and in-breathing as number "one". Then the next pair of out-breathing and in-breathing is number "two"; then the next pair of out-breathing and in-breathing is number "three"; and so on. Count until you get to number "ten". When you get to number ten, begin again from number "one" - thus

in-out-one
in-out-two
in-out-three and so on. Count up to ten.

The counting should not be less than five or more than ten. You should not make any break in the series. You should do your counting of breaths without fail or break. At first, you should do this slowly, continuously. As you do your counting in this way, the in-breath and out-breath will become evident to you as they enter in and issue out. Then you can leave off slow-counting. In this way in-breath and out-breath, which had already become evident to you, while you counted them in the former way, now keep moving along quickly, continuously. Then knowing that they keep moving along quickly, not apprehending them either inside or outside of the body, but apprehending them just as they reach the nostrils, you can do your counting quickly: in-out-one; in-out-two; and so on up to ten. For as long as the meditation subject is connected with counting, the mind becomes unified with the help of counting, just as a boat in a swift current is steadied with the help of a rudder. When you can fix your mind on the place touched by the breath, at the tip of your nose, your development of mindfulness will be successful.

How long are you to go on counting? Until, without counting, mindfulness remains settled on the in-breath and out-breath as its object.

2. When you become perfect in the method of counting numbers and able to catch up without fail every out-breathing and every in-breathing with mindfulness and awareness, you will have to go over to the next stage called "connection or follow up method". This means that you must follow up with the beginning, catch up the middle and end of in-breath and out-breath without fail.

Let there be mindfulness and awareness since the very beginning of in-breath and out-breath. Let there be mindfulness and awareness until the middle of in-breath and out-breath. Let there be mindfulness and awareness also when the in-breath and out-breath come to an end. At this time your mind becomes rather

concentrated. You must be aware of the beginning, middle and the end at the very place where the breaths touch, that is, the tip of the nose. You must not make a move from the nostrils where in-breath and out-breath come into touch. You must note with awareness the very moment of beginning, middle and the end of breaths.

3. Touching. The place where in-breath and out-breath touches or makes contact is called "touching place" in Pali "Phuthokasa". This is the tip of the nose. Keep your mind fixedly on this place with mindfulness. If the mind tries to run away, tie it up with mindfulness so that it cannot move anywhere else. There is a method where the mind does not move from the place of touch (contact); it is called "method of keeping mind immovable" or "touching method".

Therefore:

- A. Beginning of touching
- B. Moving of touching-breaths; and
- C. Stopping of touching-breaths.

There are only three points. This is how the beginning, the middle and the end, the three points are to be caught up.

"Gate Keeper"

Here let me give an example of the Gate Keeper. There was a town or city where, for the sake of security, a posse of army or police was posted at the gate. The duty of the gate keeper was to check carefully everyone coming in and going out of the town and find out whether he was a good or bad man. The check conducted at the only gate where many people came in and out of the town enabled the gate keeper to know whether the man coming in was good or bad. The visitor need not be followed from behind into the town. The gate keeper need only wait and check at the gate.

In the same way, you must investigate or examine your breath in-out and at the nostril-gate with mindfulness and effort until your mind concentrates. You must be aware at this moment; mindfulness must be kept in waiting at the touching-place which is the gate of the town where breaths contact the nose. You must not move anywhere else.

4. Method of keeping the mind fixed. You have to remember an important point here. What is that? That is not to move your mind from the touching place, to fix your mind firmly at the touching place. Your mind must stand steadily at the gate and check breaths coming-in and going-out and investigate what is the nature of touching or contact, then you will find out real things distinctly. This is a method called "keeping-mind-fixed". (Fixing Method). The mind and mindfulness must be fixed at the place of contact of out-breathing and in-breathing with the nose.

To summarize:

(1) The first method is counting of number of in-breathing and out-breathing.

(2) The second method is connection (following) of the in-breathing and out-breathing.

(3) The fourth method is to fix the mind.

Thus the four methods are now complete. Now you can attain the many stages of concentration, mystic power and supernatural knowledge by these methods of development of mindfulness on breath-in-out.

5. Observing-method. The fifth method is observing. It means insight meditation. The mental concentration leads to insight, by observing, fixing-attention on the activities of materiality and mentality as they really are. If your mind becomes concentrated perfectly with the method of keeping-mind-fixed, if you are able to keep your mind firmly on the phenomenon of contact without allowing it to move elsewhere, insight knowledge is to be developed to find out analytically what it is, this is contact. Therefore, it will be seen that it is not only that concentration on breathing is required, but also the knowledge of investigation on reality of contact.

When you are seated in a suitable place and in suitable posture, you should establish mindfulness. You must pay attention to the meditation object, being mindful and alert, fixing the mind at the tip of the nose the place where the breath touches. The in-breath and out-breath are a body. In this case, a body means a group or a heap or a collection of physical phenomena. When you contemplate or observe or investigate the touching place in the body with mindfulness and knowledge, you can experience four material qualities. They are the elements of extension (earth); cohesion (water); heat (fire); and motion (air). When you stand your feet are touching the ground or floor. When you sit, the lower parts of your body are touching the carpet or floor. When you sleep, some parts of your body are touching the bed. There are many touchable parts of your body. Whenever you touch any part of your body with anything, you can experience the four material qualities or elements. Sometimes the touch will be soft or hard - this is the element of extension. Sometimes you will touch fluid with your body; this is the element of cohesion. Sometimes you will touch something hot or cold with your body; this is the element of heat. Sometimes you will touch air, wind or inflation of matter with your body; this is the element of motion (air). The material elements of our bodies are called great, because of their destructive power. Our bodies are constituted in these four great primary elements. Then the earth, the sun, the moon, the planets and stars are the same. It is these very elements, experienced in our body, which in following their natural laws are responsible for the creation and destruction of the whole solar system and the galaxies. The power of these elements is enormous. For a short period of time the elements are in some kind of balance. So we forget, not

realizing the tremendous destructive power inherent in them, until, following their own nature, they begin to get out of balance and cause decay, the dissolution of the body, great pain and death.

There is a pain of mind. Depression, despair, anxiety, worry, anger, hatred, fear, lust, greed, desire, grief, sorrow, dissatisfaction, jealousy, separation from beloved ones, association with a hated person, etc. which cause suffering in the body-mind or mental-body. How long will we remain ensnared in this cycle of rebirths and the suffering of this endlessness hurrying on, driven by ignorance and craving? Every morning you have to wake up and be subjected to colors, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts and sensations in endless repetition. You go through the day, you sleep and you wake up to be exposed to the same sense-objects, sensations and thoughts, over and over again.

Therefore, you have to give full attention, full-mindfulness to the mental-body. You must observe the flow of sensations, feelings, thinking, knowing, etc. Whatever appears and disappears from moment to moment in the mental-body or material-body; you must examine the real thing carefully; observe with mindfulness; investigate with knowledge. When you do so constantly, the three characteristics of material-body and mental-body will appear in your knowledge. That is, you will see or know the three signs of mind and matter. They are always changing, not everlasting, and they are impermanence, suffering and egolessness (soulessness). After distinguishing these as materiality and mentality, you should contemplate these three characteristics to develop successive knowledge of insight until the Enlightenment is attained and absolute Truth - Nibbana. So concentration meditation is the mental state of one-pointedness. It leads to mystic power and supernatural power. Insight-meditation is the knowledge or wisdom which penetrates the three characteristics of mind and matter. It leads to the highest Wisdom, Enlightenment, Noble Truth, absolute Truth - the Nibbana.

In conclusion, the great benefit of mindfulness on breathing in and out should be understood as the basic condition for the perfecting of clear Vision, final liberation and purification of mind. For this had been said by the Buddha, "Bhikkhus" (monks) mindfulness of breathing, when developed and much practiced, perfects the four foundations of mindfulness. The four foundations of mindfulness when developed and much practiced, perfect the seven enlightenment factors and the seven Enlightenment factors when developed and much practiced lead to clear Vision and Liberation.

So, I wish very deeply - may all you brothers and sisters, who are willing to enjoy cessation of suffering, pain, sorrow, lamentation - try to practice the foundation of mindfulness which gives you real happiness, peace and cessation of all forms of suffering.

Thank you very much my dear brothers and sisters.

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