

Meditation

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There are many different understandings of the subject meditation. Some people think that to meditate is simply to close the eyes, think of nothing and totally empty the mind in order to have some mental relief from their problems. Of course, unless one is totally enlightened, everybody, even the most successful businessman or politician has some problems or negative thoughts in the mind. Buddhist meditation practice is a special technique to eliminate negative thoughts or confusion in the mind -- not just a temporary relief. Meditation practice needs not to be religious, nor to be confined to sitting meditation. In fact, you can meditate anywhere, any time, or all the time. The great yogi Milarepa said, "I meditate while I am walking, I meditate while I am eating, I meditate while I am sitting, I wish every sentient being can do this." Meditation means to be here and now with your mind. Most of the energies or thoughts are spent on what we have done in the past and what we shall do in the future. As a result, we cannot concentrate on whatever we are doing at that single moment, whether reading a book or saying prayers.

When we meditate, be here with our mind. Body should be where the seat is and mind should be where the body is. The mind should be relaxed. Relax means to be here at this moment. When the mind is in the present moment, it is very effective. No matter whether we are reading or planning, we will be able to understand or organize everything very precisely. In Buddhist philosophy, the ultimate goal of meditation is to totally free ourselves from the suffering of samsara and to attain enlightenment. Great mental capacity and confidence are needed in order to achieve that. Analytical meditation and mind-stabilizing meditation (samatha meditation) are two very fundamental and helpful meditation methods that can be practiced by anybody.

To do analytical meditation is to analyze and to investigate how things function universally. First, meditate on the precious human life. It is precious because it has every possibility and opportunity to transcend and purify all the negative thoughts, delusion and to attain the complete quality of enlightenment. There are individuals who feel so depressed and hopeless that they cannot do anything. Depression creates great obstacles for our well being and happiness. In order to overcome that we look at the supreme qualities and possibilities of the human brain and human life. The presence of the Buddha nature and the seed of enlightenment pervade every single sentient being, in particular human beings. Since this seed of great quality is within us, if we make enough effort, have great dedication and patience, we can definitely be able to totally free ourselves from the suffering of samsara and attain enlightenment. It is just a matter of time. So rejoice and appreciate such an opportunity. The precious human life is the vehicle, the primary cause for attaining Buddhahood. The contributory cause to achieve this excellent quality is having the spiritual master to help us to understand and guide us along the path.

Second, meditate on the impermanent nature of all phenomena. We need to make great effort ourselves. Revealing from within us, the impermanent, transitory and momentary nature of all phenomena. On the one hand, it may seem depressing since we are constantly aging. When we are especially attached to something, we do not want it to change, but things change anyway without our choice, so it seems depressing. On the other hand, it provides such a great positive opportunity. Just because everything can be changed, every negative thought can be purified, every bad habit can be removed. When we are depressed, we feel that things are so concrete and cannot be changed so there

is not much hope left. At this moment, just think of impermanence, things are subject to change. It is just a matter of time. We are all living within impermanence whether we are aware of it or not. Therefore, do not attach to the past, or anticipate the future. Past is past, everything is transitory and momentary in nature. Grasping and craving for the past would not bring benefit at this moment. Similarly, future has not come yet so there is no need to anticipate. Here, right at this moment, work as sincerely and diligently as we can. Whether we are experiencing happiness or suffering, it is just at this moment. At the next moment, it becomes just a recollection of the past or a memory. The clock is ticking every moment, and even our grasping and attachment to the past itself are also passing away. Not a single moment can stay in one single moment so just see that nature and meditate in this way.

Milarepa, a great Tibetan yogi, always meditated on impermanence. This great yogi had to often move from place to place and at that time his only food was nettles. Since he needed a clay pot to cook the nettle, he carried a clay pot with him wherever he went. One day, he walked from one place to another and on the way, he tripped over a rock and the pot broke. He was then totally awoken by the power of impermanence. The pot was the only thing he had and it broke there. It symbolizes that every composite phenomenon is transitory in nature and anything can happen at any moment. He related particularly to this precious human life which is so fragile. The life force of sentient beings is impermanent like a bubble. No one knows when one will die. So he said to himself, "If I work for meaningless worldly things or activities for this lifetime, I will be unable to pass beyond the causes for suffering. Now I must make greater effort to practice the Dharma." The breaking of the pot gave him such a powerful teaching and reinforced his practice on impermanence greatly.

There was once a great master who did his meditation in a cave. In front of the cave grew a big bush that caused him great difficulty to walk in and out of the cave. "It is so difficult to get out, maybe I should cut the bush," he thought. "But I am already out so why cut the brush? After all, I may not have time to get in, so what is the use of cutting the bush?" When he came into the cave, he said to himself, "This bush caused me great difficulty to get in, may be I should cut the bush. But now I am already in, I may not have time to go out so what is the use of cutting the bush?" So he meditated in this way. By the time when he achieved enlightenment, the bush was still there. Other people may think that he was so lazy, he could not take care of the bush which caused him great difficulty, but for him the bush provided him great opportunity to practice mindfulness and impermanence.

Third, meditate on the interdependent nature of every phenomenon. Everything is constituted as a result of causes and conditions. Because of that, every phenomenon arises in the relative state, conventional state. Let us look into our mind and see how we perceive a person. When you have a wonderful friend, even if he / she makes a substantial mistake, you do not mind. You would say, "That is okay. It happens to everybody." You still think that that person is wonderful. However, suppose you have changed the perception and he /she becomes your enemy, now no matter what that person does, you would not like it at all. Even if that person does wonderful things, you would still not accept it. The relative or conventional state of an outer phenomenon does not exist independently. Rather it is just the projection of our mind. Everything is momentary, insubstantial with no essence. Thus believing that the outside object is something real and concrete, and attaching to it lead us to suffering. In fact, it is just a label that we put on it in order to relate to it conveniently. There is nothing to attach to or hate. Since everything is in a relative and interdependent state, friend or enemy arises when certain causes and conditions are present. Therefore, there is no absolute friend or absolute enemy. The projections of our mind, the habitual attachment to such projections arise as the reactions (or the ripening of the fruits) of whatever actions we have done previously. Therefore, in order to free ourselves from suffering and break the streams of continuity of our habitual patterns,

it is very important to eliminate all non-virtuous actions and perform as much virtuous actions as we can. On the basis of that, in order to purify the delusion of our mind and to bring out the seed of enlightenment, meditating on loving kindness and compassion to every sentient being, including small insects, is helpful. The altruistic thought, thought of enlightenment, the desire to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of every sentient being is such a precious marvelous thought that it transcends every negative thought into the golden path of enlightenment. Gradually, we would see everyone as our friend or our close relative. Thus the causes of suffering due to anger and hatred would be reduced and are replaced by peace, joy and harmony.

Fourth, meditate on loving kindness and compassion. The meaning of practicing loving kindness and compassion to every other sentient being is the special thought, the mind that has the desire for everyone to have happiness and the causes of happiness. Just examine how we treat our best friend or our own child. We naturally would like them to have all the happiness. Therefore, we create the causes for bringing happiness to them. We would like to support them as much as we can. Just like parents send their children to school wanting them to have a good education and a good future. In the same way, look at all other sentient beings, they also desire to have happiness and the causes of happiness. There is no difference. Meditate on compassion means cultivating the genuine desire for every sentient being to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Examine how we treat our close friend. When that person suffers, we do everything to try to free that person from suffering. When that person is free from suffering, we feel so happy. In the same way, consider all other sentient beings, everyone would like to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. So cultivate loving kindness and compassion to all sentient beings in this way. Some people think that love and compassion mean that we have to give away something immediately or we have to sacrifice yourself to every individual. It is not necessary. We can cultivate that in our mind wherever we are, at home or in the office. The moment we develop such thought, peace and harmony arise. So for your own benefit, that mind is crucial. In contrast, when we have hatred or anger, there is no peace, no harmony. At that time, forcefully cultivate loving kindness and compassion to the person who makes us miserable or who irritates us so much, and genuinely wish that person to have all the happiness and be free from all suffering. This is an effective method of uprooting our ignorance due to hatred or anger. Just change our attitude: instead of thinking that the person should have all bad things, wish that person to have all the happiness and be free from all suffering. The moment when we meditate sincerely in this way, there is great peace and joy. We can achieve this in our mind, it has nothing to do with Buddhist or non-Buddhist. There are many life stories of great masters who used this meditation method to transform all negative thoughts into positive thoughts. It is very precious. It is a source of wisdom, peace, happiness and confidence that arise within us. We may say that we cannot cultivate loving kindness, compassion to that person because we hate that person, however, there is no benefit of hating at all. Hating will not give any happiness and peace, rather, it destroys our appetite, health and well being. Therefore, until we can achieve this effortlessly, we have to make effort.

Another type of meditation is the calm-abiding, stabilizing meditation or the Shamata meditation. There are many ways of doing the calm-abiding meditation. One easy and effective way to calm the mind is to watch the breath. Sit on a cushion or chair, relax and breathe normally. It is easy because we have to breathe anyway so we just need to be aware of it. Our breath and mind become inseparable. When the mind is somewhere else, just simply bring it back to the breath and meditate. There is no need to push, chase or feel upset. It is important to relax and do it without expectations and worries. When we have high expectations wanting to achieve all the good qualities in one session, at the end of that session, we may feel depressed. There is nothing to achieve. There is no

need to achieve anything. Just be yourself, relax and sit for half an hour or so. It is just a method to train to be with our mind. When thought arises, just look at it, let it go, and not attach to it. Thinking that you have no thought is itself a thought. Thought is something very subtle and can come at any time from any direction. So there is no need to cling to it or chase it. Just be aware of it. Place our mind, without consciously adopting or abandoning, in a fluid, natural state of being here and now. Be mindful in the ever-present moment and not to wander at all from this state. When we have a sinking mind during meditation, we need to uplift ourselves by, for example, moving the head more forward instead of downward, turn on some bright light or do some walking meditation. Shamata or the calm-abiding meditation is the cause as well as the result of analytical and insightful (vipasyana) meditation. It is so because without a calm mind, no matter how much we investigate, it may not do much. However, without careful investigation, doubt would arise and thus difficult to establish a peaceful mind. After practicing shamata and analytical meditation for some time, doubt or hesitation reduces. Certainty and confidence are important in order to stabilize the mind in the equipoise, meditative state during the vipasyana meditation. Without such clarity, peaceful and calm mind, there is no possibility of having a direct, intuitive realization of the nature of the mind and to enhance that realization.

On the basis of calm-abiding and analytical meditation, we expand our investigation. Gradually, our awareness increases. However, if one would like to purify all delusion, transform and purify all negative thoughts and to uproot our ignorance, it is necessary to train the mind more vigorously. In particular, we can engage in some Vajrayana Buddhist meditation practices, such as the preliminary practices (ngöndro) under the guidance of a well-qualified spiritual master and to receive empowerment (transformation) from the master. Such training helps us to purify our gross and subtle obstacles and accumulate some merit so that we will have less hindrances and more chance of success. Only through exerting the right effort can we achieve effortlessness, the natural nature, the uncontrived state. Right now, we do not know how to exert effort in the right way, therefore we will feel exhausted easily. Vipasyana meditation (insight meditation) is a special method to uplift the mind. Special insight is needed in order to penetrate into the nature of your mind, to penetrate into the nature of the body self and the phenomenon self. Such direct insight can purify and eliminate the delusion and ignorance in our mind. The actualization and realization of special insight bring us to the first bhumi. From that point, there are ten levels of bhumis. After reaching the ten levels of bhumis, one becomes a Buddha, with the maximum ability to benefit others. The all prevailing mind, the uncontrived state cannot be perceived without meditation. It is inexpressible like the taste of honey. If you have no experience of the taste of honey at all, when you hear others talk about how sweet and delicious honey is, you would think that honey is something wonderful. When a spoon of honey is finally placed on your tongue then you can directly realize what honey is. Similarly, we can only perceive the pure mind through shamata and vipasyana meditation. Therefore, until we are free from all delusion, we have to make effort to practice and apply the practice diligently to our everyday lives. Since the habit of our laziness and delusion is so powerful, we must make extra effort to eliminate all non-virtuous actions, to increase all virtuous actions and to cultivate the enlightened mind, Boddhicitta, based on wisdom and compassion. Thank you and good evening.