

Mindfulness Meditation Made Easy

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO VIPASSANA MEDITATION

THE AIM OF MEDITATION

WHAT WE ARE going to start now is a few days of meditation retreat. We are making a special effort to get together and help each other with meditation practice. This evening is an introduction. I would like to talk to you about why we need to meditate, what is concentration and how to begin to practise it.

To keep yourselves physically healthy, you go to a gym for an exercise, which is to make yourselves stable and physically strong. In the same way, to have a stable and strong mind we do meditation, which is mental exercise. Many people associate meditation with superstitious or extraordinary ideas. However, generally meditation in Buddhism is mental training.

It may help us to understand meditation better by thinking of mind **metaphorically** as a scene from nature. **Before we do that**, please bear in mind that the mind cannot

be compared with anything we can see with our eyes. The mind is so quick, wonderful, complicated, and mysterious.

MIND IS LIKE WATER IN A LAKE

Nevertheless, for the sake of our own understanding, we can liken mind to a lake filled with lotus flowers and aquatic creatures. If you have a large lake filled with unpolluted water, you will have a green environment, on which people around it can depend. The mind is something like the pure water and the lake is like our physical body. Imagine what would happen if there was a leakage of water. The lake would eventually go dry. The aquatic creatures and the lotus flowers would die. The green environment would no longer exist. People would no longer be able to depend on it. **Here**, note the word *leakage*. It suggests that the water is **draining away** without your knowledge. You are not aware of it **or** the need to block the leak.

Just like that, during the day, without any intention to think, thoughts just come into our minds and waste away our mental energy. We get exhausted after 20 or 30 minutes of being immersed in wandering thoughts. So what do you do? You push them away and sigh, which is a sign of being exhausted. Sometimes you cannot even sleep because mental

energy is leaking away. Frustration at work is a leak. Agitation at work is a leak. Mental energy is being wasted. You are not aware of it because it is just a leak.

WORRY IS A LEAKAGE

If worry or fear is present in a person, then that worry is like a leak draining all his energy. That person will become exhausted. That will also affect his physical health. It is important to block this leakage of mental power just as it is crucial to protect the aquatic creatures and the lotus flowers in order to keep the environment clean and enjoyable.

Suppose, at work you meet someone behaving very arrogantly. He may be a colleague or a client. Let us suppose that you become very agitated. Agitation takes away mental energy. The day you feel agitation, you will feel more tired than on other days. This is not necessarily due to the workload, but because of agitation you experience at work. The next day when you go to work, you may become agitated again. Suppose, this happens daily. One week later you come home and **may** feel disturbed very easily. Then you could start blaming others, sometimes your family, perhaps for a minor problem. You start quarrelling; you start losing the ability to appreciate what your family is doing for you. So now, the

aquatic creatures inside the lake begin to suffer. The lotus flowers are the members of your family. They cannot be happy around an agitated man. If someone is agitated in this room, not yet depressed but simply agitated, then people cannot smile at all. The leakage of mental energy has that kind of effect on society, starting from your own family and friends.

That is why it is important to know how our mind works, why we feel agitated, why we feel frustrated, why we feel unhappy, and, of course, **also** why we feel happy. So to know this we meditate. When we discover our own agitation, frustration, disappointment, resistance, resentment, we should try to accept it, see it more closely. **This will then surely lead us to understand it.**

ACCEPTING THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH

There are four noble truths; suffering (*dukkha sacca*), the cause of suffering (*samudaya sacca*), the end of suffering (*nirodha sacca*) and the path leading to the end of suffering (*magga sacca*). The first one, the noble truth of suffering means suffering exists in reality. Worry is suffering. Agitation, aversion, frustration and disappointment are suffering. We do not normally accept these as suffering. Instead, we try to justify our own emotional reactions such as agitation. We try

to blame others for our agitation instead of trying to understand and accept it. Suffering is an inseparable element of life.

Therefore, when we meditate we are going to see these things. We are going to accept suffering and try to understand it. Vipassana meditation is about trying to understand the First Noble Truth, **a universal experience**. It is not for the Buddha; it is not for me but for the one who meditates. We cannot share **our meditation achievement**; but **the lack of it is rather obvious: the states of our mind** in relation to our environment will be reflected, or indeed determined by whether or not we meditate. This is why it is important to meditate.

MEDITATION OR BHAVANA

Let me now say something about meditation. The English word *meditation* does not contain any special Buddhist ideas. Some people think that meditation is to sit quietly, closing your eyes, thinking only of what is good in your life, ignoring all that is bad, cultivating an optimistic view. Some people think meditation is extra work, has little to do with the majority of people in daily life, and is only for monks, nuns and old people who have retired and have time for it. Sadly,

even for many born Buddhists, meditation is seen only as a practice for those who wish to achieve nibbana here and now, maybe as a shortcut. If you are not concerned about nibbana or becoming an arahant, in their opinion, you do not need meditation. In some religions, meditation means reflection on something in the past, what you have done, both good and bad.

In our case, to understand meditation, we have to go back to the original word in Pali, which is *bhavana*, which means to develop mental ability. We believe that as human beings, we have the ability to make our minds stable and concentrated, and make full use of it to understand, to think and to create something wonderful. Nevertheless, this ability within us is only a seed. We have to nurture it to enable it to grow. Although we have the ability to be mindful, to be concentrated and to understand, like seed, which remains a seed and will not become a plant until you grow and nurture **it, the mind** remains undeveloped without **proper** mental exercise. The technique to do this is called *meditation*. When we meditate, we explore and we try to discover how the mind works. The technique was discovered and taught by the Buddha but *we have to see it for ourselves*. We need a technique to develop our minds, our mental energy, like the way we develop our muscles in our body.

MEDITATION OBJECT

We are going to practise *vipassana bhavana* or mindfulness meditation. From now on, I shall describe the technique. The object of meditation is very important. In 1995 when I went to Taunggyi, in Shan State, the Union of Burma, I met one of my devotees who had been meditating for quite some time. He did not understand the concept of the meditation object. He expected me to tell him the best meditation object. I told him that the object that arises at the present moment is a good meditation object. Anger is a meditation object if you are aware of it. Jealousy is a meditation object. Stress is a meditation object. Breathing is a meditation object. And the Buddha is a meditation object. I did not have the impression that he made anything of my answer.

I was, theoretically, in broad terms, saying the whole world is a meditation object. When you go to work as a doctor, all that you see and experience, your patients, your colleagues, your work, everything is a meditation object.

THE SIX SENSORY WORLDS

How do we perceive objects? We perceive them through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. From the

meditation point of view there are six worlds; the seeing world, the hearing world, the smelling world, the tasting world, the touching world and the thinking world. The first five are physical and the last is mental. Everything that you perceive through these six senses is a meditation object. Whatever comes into your mind is a meditation object; whatever you see is a meditation object. You are now sitting and your body is touching the floor. That touch is a meditation object. You are hearing my voice, which is another meditation object. There is nothing that cannot become a meditation object. We experience the world in only these six ways.

CONCENTRATION

What are we going to focus on? We have only one mind but we have to cope with six objects. Now you see me. This is a visual object. You hear my voice — an aural object. You are also thinking about what I am saying — this is a mental object. Your body is touching the floor, which is again another object — altogether four objects. Now which one are you going to focus on? This is where the technique comes in.

Imagine the mind is a watchman and he has to look after an object, say a house, which has six doors — the eye door, the ear door, the nose door, the tongue door, the body door

and the mind door. You are alone inside and do not feel secure. Someone may come in through the front door; another may come in through the back door. They are there and you have to catch them. The way to do it is to close the other five doors and watch the remaining one and catch the person(s) coming through that door. This is what we call concentrating. You focus on one point. The ability to do that keeping your mind on one door and not the rest is called concentration. This word is sometimes explained as one-pointedness, in its most developed state. You keep your mind on one point.

You want to go to the supermarket, you want to go to the library, you want to visit your friend, you also want to watch a video at home — four things. Which one are you going to do? Unless you have a strong mind, you will not be able to enjoy anything. Your mind will go to supermarket while talking to a friend. You fully enjoy none of the two. When you have a strong mind and decide "*I'm going to watch a video,*" then you will be able to sit and watch it. At the time, you are watching the video, your mind does not go to the supermarket, nor does it wander either to your friend or to the library. This is concentration.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY OBJECTS

Among these objects, we are going to select one as a *Primary Object* or an *Initial Object* and we are going to stick to that. As they come, we will watch the other objects as well. We will notice them, but they are *Secondary Objects*. If you have done meditation before and you have been given a certain meditation object as a primary object, you can keep to that. Otherwise, we are going to choose breathing in and out as initial object. As you breathe in you will say mentally "*breathing in*" and as you breathe out say "*breathing out*"; *breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out*. This is your primary object. However, this primary object is not the only meditation object. You do not shut yourself off from other objects altogether. It is not possible to do that. As they come in, whatever the object, you are going to note them, meaning to register them in your mind.

INSTRUCTIONS ON SITTING POSTURE

Now I will begin giving instructions. Please sit comfortably. First, I will say something about posture. When you sit, do not cross your legs unless you are used to doing that before and have indeed found you have no problems with that. It is better to keep your legs apart but touching each other. If you keep them crossed, they can produce heat and pain, and later unnecessary stress and distraction. If you keep them apart, you may move them unconsciously as the pressure of the time builds up. You are not supposed to move immediately or frequently, although you can do so at some point. This is to develop patience and determination. Keep your spine upright and look straight ahead of you.

Regarding your hands, do not keep the back of one hand in the palm of the other as this can produce heat and cause distraction. Keep your fingers together; you can keep them crossed or just place one on top of the other. If you keep your body straight, that will maintain your posture. If you feel your body slumping forward, try to straighten it, but do it slowly and mindfully.

Now you are going to keep your eyes closed, not tightly but merely closed. If you close your eyes tightly, it will make your mind wander. You just close them lightly.

BREATHING

Focus your mind on your nostrils. Start breathing in and out normally. As you breathe in, say in your mind "*breathing in*". This means you are naming the object. As you breathe out say in your mind "*breathing out*" — *breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out*. During the course of breathing in and out, if your mind goes somewhere, say it goes to the hospital and you see the hospital, now you release your mind from the breathing and take note of the hospital. When you see the hospital in your mind, you should willingly note "*seeing, seeing, seeing*" three or four times and after that come back to breathing. Start *breathing in, breathing out* again. If you hear somebody talking to you in your mind, you should keenly note "*hearing, hearing, and hearing*" three times or four times and then come back to your primary object, which is breathing in and out. If you hear the ticking of the clock, you focus on that direction and wholeheartedly note *hearing, hearing, hearing* three or four times and come back to the breathing. If you hear that again you can go back again and note *hearing, hearing, and hearing*.

PAIN

When you feel pain in some part of your body, say in your knee, you switch all your mental energy to your knee. Register in your mind as "*pain, pain, pain*" for three or four times. Leave it there and come back to breathing. The pain may decrease or increase. If the pain increases you go back there again and attentively note *pain, pain, pain* three or four times. Leave it there and come back to breathing.

If the pain keeps *increasing* you go back again, stay with the pain, and note it with some intensity for a longer time. If the pain makes you impatient, register "*impatience, impatience, impatience*" or "*agitation, agitation, agitation*", and come back to breathing.

If you feel cold, you note "*cold, cold, cold*". If you feel numbness, do not change your posture immediately. Try to stay with numbness as long as possible and note "*numbness, numbness, numbness*", then, leave it there and come back to breathing. If it becomes stronger, go back there and note "*numbness, numbness, numbness*" once again. If you are thinking of what you have done today or what you are going to do tomorrow, simply note "*thinking, thinking, and thinking*" and then release it and return to breathing.