

Meditation and Its Methods

Meditation means to completely concentrate on a chosen object without being distracted. How do we concentrate? For example, when you are looking at a flower, you are asked to totally concentrate on the flower without being distracted. But if you recognize that flower as a rose then this is a conceptual thought since you grasp at its appearance. When you think that this rose is yellow, with green leaves, it will lead to an increase in conceptual thoughts. This is then not meditation. In the scriptures, it says: "Conceptual thoughts is great ignorance, by which one falls into the ocean of samsara."

When we speak of meditation, Chinese meditators use the word "Chan" ["zen" in Japanese] 禪, which is a word made of two parts. The first part is "shi" 示, but the second part "dan" 單 means "single," which means a single—pointed mental concentration. A single—pointed mental concentration is to focus on a single object without being distracted. This then is called "meditation."

The great Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh says: "People can meditate while washing utensils." It means to completely concentrate only on washing utensils without thinking about anything else. Moreover, when you are sweeping, you are asked to completely concentrate only on sweeping without being driven by any other thoughts. While sweeping, if you have other thoughts, then it is "conceptual thoughts." It is mental distraction, not meditation, and is the cause of wandering throughout samsara.

There are three aspects of daily practice performed by Drikung Kyobpa Jigten Sumgon. Among them, one known as "All Conduct With the Left." This practice teaches that whether we engage in sitting, walking, and sleeping or eating, drinking, and wearing clothes, we should not to forget to do it from the left first: start with the left hand or leg. [Essentially), this is the practice that helps us to continuously maintain a stream of mindfulness. This is the practice of undistracted mind — you are to continuously check your state of mind when engaging in daily activities. You are to continuously watch over your state of mind with alertness.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, it says: "Without the practice of guarding the mind, what is the use of many other practices?" So, the most important practice is to guard one's own mind. This practice tells us to mindfully watch over our state of mind with mental alertness again and again. You are to check the state of your mind in every moment. As a result, it will help you tremendously to strengthen the power of your meditation and you will be able to completely concentrate on your chosen object in your daily life at all times.

Many of our fellow human brothers and sisters frequently ask me how to engage in meditation practice in this troubled and busy world. The response is as described above. Let me attempt to make it clearer. In the old days, there was a great meditator who taught how to make have total concentration while riding on a horse. They taught: "Look at that boulder [far over there]. Now make sure to reach there with total concentration on only that chosen object—the boulder. Upon reaching there, again he instructed: "Now look at the heap of thorns [over there] and make sure to reach there with total concentration only on that chosen object, the thorns." In this way they would teach "calm-abiding."

Nowadays, if you want to inwardly meditate while walking along the pathway of the city, I would ask you to practice in such a way that chooses a traffic light on the road as an object of your meditational practice. Make sure to reach there with single-pointed concentration on that chosen object without having a second thought in your mind. After reaching there, keep on walking with a single—pointed concentration on that chosen object, the traffic light, which is on the road. It is good if you can keep walking on with total concentration on a chosen object without being distracted. This kind of meditation is called “calm-abiding meditation.” This tremendously helps us to pacify conceptual thoughts. .

Nowadays in the world “vipassana” practice by focusing on “breathing in and out” very popular. Vipassana is not only popularly known in national level, but also in the international level at large. This is also popular even in prisons. There are a wealth of disturbances and conflicts in this modern world. Hence, vipassana practice is playing an important role to help those people who are suffering mental depression. For instance, in California, USA, where 20% of the population is suffering from mental depression, there is a special institute for emotional well—being established by the government. Every year, they spend a million dollar for promoting healthy minds.

I had an opportunity to talk on behalf of Buddhism about emotional well-being at the 15th World Health Conference (organized by this institute) in which many reputed psychologists, patients, and their families were physically present.

The Indian master Goenka received the technique of vipassana meditation in Burma and it has spread throughout the world. This form of vipassana meditation is recognized as meditation practice from Burma which is said to be of the so-called “Lesser Vehicle” [in traditional Tibetan texts]. However, Lesser Vehicle as a tenet-system [as understood in our texts] is discontinued, but there are meditation practices that continue.

In the meditation practice of “breathing in and out” taught by the Buddha, there is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. When you practice and meditate on the impure body, this body is seen as substantially impure and characterized by impermanence, suffering, and not-self, In this context, you are not practicing “calm-abiding” rather you are meditating on the meaning of a text based on a scriptural source. The Buddha himself did not teach only one vehicle. Therefore, vipassana meditation does not necessarily need to be explained only based on the system of the so-called “Lesser Vehicle.” At the same time, there is actually no need to differentiate [into tenets] when explaining the meaning of meditation.

The meditation practice focused on “breathing in and out” is already there in the “Collected Words of Buddha,” the Kangyur, but people do not study the the Kangyur and people do not put it into their daily practices. What people do is to beautifully display the Kangyur on their shrine. Therefore, people fail to know and understand this subject.

Our greatest mistake is to not fully study the words of the Buddha himself. Instead, we respectfully put the commentaries — the treatises written by the disciples of the Buddha — on our crowns in order to accomplish the interests of our own tenet—systems. We regard the commentaries as higher than even the words of the Buddha! In addition, we disregard the words of the Buddha by arrogantly establishing the special position of one's own school. This is in fact done only for the sake of one's own interest. So, in this modern age, no one should rely on such an approach.

The presentation of the practice of focusing on "breathing in and out" not only exists in the Theravada School, but many such presentations exist in the Kangyur. In Vinayavastu for example, it says: "The Bhagavan when he was c.29-years old did not enjoy the sensory objects as he was deeply moved by seeing an old man, sick man, and dying man, which led him to move to the forest at midnight. In the forest, he went through extreme hardship for six years, but it could not help him to quench his inner spiritual thirst. So, he chose instead to comfortably meditate on 'breathing in and out.' Thereafter, he gradually chose to take resume eating food, food such as cooked rice." Furthermore, elsewhere in the Vinaya, it says: "Thereafter, the Bhagavan abided in mindful meditation on 'breathing in and out' for three months. When his monks later arranged a seat for him to teach, the Buddha addressed them saying: 0 monks! If tirthikas and other wandering mendicants ask you about my conduct during these three months. tell them: 'Gautama abided in a mindful meditation on 'breathing in and out' during these three months.' The reason is that I mindfully abided in meditation on 'breathing in and out' with clear awareness. I mindfully engaged in focusing on inhalation with a clear mindful awareness through which I could clearly recognize the inhaling awareness as it is. I mindfully engaged in focusing on exhalation with a clear mindful awareness through which I could clearly recognize the exhaling awareness as it is." ‘

Having gained no results even after engaging in the practice of an extreme asceticism for six years, the Buddha discovered the practice of mindfully focusing on 'breathing in and out,' which tremendously helps to eradicate mental distraction. On this subject, there is both a brief presentation in the Kangyur as well as an expanded presentation in the *Sutra of Breathing In and Out (Anapanasmrti Sutra)* taught by the Buddha at Shravasti, which is available in another languages, but not in Tibetan. Therefore I have translated and edited the sutra, which explained to a few interested people.

The meditation practice of mindfully focusing on "breathing in and out" is an extraordinary and unsurpassable method for binding conceptual thoughts with the rope of wind (prana) — a method kindly offered and guided by the Buddha with great compassion to all concerned followers.

Those who practice three years, three months, and three days retreat, are asked to kindly pay attention. The key purpose of setting such a schedule is because an adult person with a healthy body and mind moves 21600 ordinary life-winds in a period of 24 hours. Within that period, 675 wisdom-winds move naturally. So, based on this, the schedule of three years, three months, and three days has been designed. If a person lived around 100 years, some of the ordinary life-winds transform into wisdom-winds. When roughly calculated and added together, each person experiences about three years, two-months-and-a-half of wisdom-winds. This is why this is called the retreat of three years, three months, and three days. Therefore, what the practitioner inwardly needs to practice during these three years is simply not to be distracted by conceptual thoughts even for an instant moment, which is an extremely difficult practice.

Even in the autobiography of the Lord Jigten Sumgon, it says: "I practiced for seven years in retreat. Of them, five years I did not understand the ways of meditation and only in the final two years I was able to dispel mental distractions. Therefore, if you could mindfully meditate for a few years, you will be able to purify your negative mental states. Due to the power of purifying your negative mental states, you will be able to reach the complete and pure land of

the Buddha and will be able to deliver all other beings to the pure realm." Thus, in *Abode of Manjushri Sutra*, it says:

Mind is moved by conceptual thoughts.
If there are no conceptual thoughts, it is nirvana.
Someone who knows this naturally,
Will be known as "possessing primordial wisdom."

In the course of our retreat of three years, three months, and three days, we are frequently told not to be distracted in one's mind, but we don't have that above mentioned method that helps us bind conceptual thoughts with the rope of wind or prana. Instead, we get concerned about not being able to complete the number of accumulations and purifications. It seems that the course of the retreat of three years, three months, and three days is finished through engaging only in counting accumulations and purifications done through only body and speech [but not mind]. Therefore, we need to look within to see whether we are able to transform our ordinary life—winds into the wisdom-winds or not.

For instance, when you are engaging a virtuous object [of mind], you must check by yourself whether you could concentrate on that chosen virtuous object for 5 minutes or 10 to 15 minutes or not. Otherwise, even though you diligently perform virtuous deeds with body and speech, if your mind is totally distracted then the main purpose of setting a schedule for the retreat of three years, three months, and three days is defeated. Therefore, you are asked to not let your mind be distracted, which is really the most important thing.

Drikung Kyobpa Jigten Suingon says:

Without knowing the ways of placing your mind on mindfulness at all times,
Engaging in activities merely through body and speech are useless.

[In this matter], we normally choose a pebble, stick, or an image of the Buddha etc., as the object of calm-abiding meditation. You need to concentrate on that chosen object, inanimate form, without being distracted. But due to extreme mental distractions and excitement in this degenerated era, it seems difficult to mindfully concentrate on a single object even after applying the antidote of mental distraction. But here, the method of mindfully focusing on "breathing in and out" taught by the Buddha is directly related to one's life-force, the life-winds and wherever you go, the breath follows you until last breath. Hence, doing meditation while living is crucial. And in the teachings of the great Burmese masters, it says, "while inhaling, expand your belly and while exhaling, sink your belly." This approach seems to be immensely useful in order to reduce conceptual thoughts. It is said [in our tradition]: "the object of meditation should be low." Thus, the importance of such a pith-instruction is also available in this meditation practice [of "breathing in and out"].

In the Ganges Mahamudra Pith-instructions, embodiment of Vajradhara, Tilopa says:

For a person with lesser intelligence who cannot abide (in reality), seize the vital points of the winds but forsake twisting intrinsic awareness. By the many ways of gazing and focusing the mind, Exert yourself until you abide in the state of intrinsic awareness.

Having practically engaged in the course of focusing on “breathing in and out,” conceptual thought is bound by the rope of wind,, Thus, when you settle your mind into the natural state without being distracted, you will be able to realize the ultimate truth and then undoubtedly you will be widely known as a “yogi.”

Many scientists have done a wealth of research on meditation. Not long ago, I have seen many explanations about the benefit of doing meditation such as healing disease, healthy mind and so forth. For instance, based on the information about meditation practice highlighted on BBC News, it says that while doing meditation, an extraordinary matter or substance is produced in the human brain and when the power of the human brain is deteriorated due to old-age, the declined power can be restored through this matter or substance. Furthermore, it is said that meditation practice also plays an important role in giving rise to the power of preventing human disease. Therefore, they advised everyone to practice meditation in order to have a healthy body and mind. There are many more things to explain, but I shall stop here with a brief concluding prayer:

Verse of Concluding Prayer by Kyobpa Jigten Sumgon, says:

The three mental afflictions arising,
Is like a sword striking water.
When the knot of mind is untied,
May I rest in the state of luminosity.

By His Holiness the Drikung Kyabgon Tinley Lhundup on 20th June, 2020. Taipei. Taiwan.

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