

Buddhist Meditation

(Bhāvanā)

The main purpose that we do anything is to achieve happiness; people do everything from birth to death in the name of happiness. However, unfortunately, we are not able to attain happiness each day, as we mostly trust in the physical things that are impermanent. When those things change, we suffer. According to Buddhism, our happiness or suffering completely depends on how far we have purified our mind. The mind generates our physical body; the mind controls and maintains our daily activities. Mental condition dictates whether we are happy or not. That is why Buddhism says;

*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā;
Manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā;
Tato naṃ dukkhamanveti cakkamva vahato padaṃ.*

*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā;
Manasā ce pasannena bhāsati vā karoti vā;
Tato naṃ sukhamanveti chāyāva anapāyinī.*

(Dhammapada)

"Mind is the forerunner, mind is the chief of all states. If someone speaks or acts with a wicked mind, suffering follows him because of the polluted mind, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox. Simultaneously, if someone speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows him, even as one's shadow that never leaves."

In this situation, all Buddhas explain the same message like this;

*'Sabba pāpassa akaranam kusalassa upasampadā,
Sacitta pariyodapanam etam buddānasānam'.*

(Dhammapada)

Not to do any evil, do good and purify one's mind is the message of all Buddhas.

With this understanding what the Buddha taught, we are confident in the Karmic law. So, we always try to overcome evils and practice good deeds for our inner peace. Also, we have to purify our mind to the maximum level as much as possible for the peace of mind. Living with pure mind is the real path to happiness. If we purify our mind from negative thoughts such as desire, anger, jealousy, delusion etc., and also, if we can develop our mind with positive thoughts like compassion, generosity, virtue, wisdom, it is beneficial to live with happiness. Furthermore, if we can see the world wisely as it is, our mind is unshaken, when the world changes. Also whenever our mind is pure, calm, quiet with intelligence, unwholesome (evil) thoughts can't disturb our peace of mind.

Mainly there are three unwholesome thoughts which disturb our inner peace. They are lustful desire, anger (ill will) and delusion. Our success which brings us real happiness depends on how far we have reduced these three defilements. To overcome desire, anger and delusion, we have to practice generosity, loving kindness and wisdom. When our mind is generous, compassionate and wise, mind is free from suffering. Here right vision and practice play a main role on the path of liberation. For the peace of mind we mostly practice three meritorious deeds.

1. Generosity (*Dāna* - දාන)
2. Virtue (*Seela* - සීල)
3. Meditation (*Bhāvanā* - භාවනා)

These three meritorious activities focus on purifying the mind. By practicing generosity greed can be overcome. By practicing loving kindness anger can be reduced. By practicing insight meditation delusion can be overcome. Among them meditation is a very important and a powerful merit that we can practice to get rid of suffering.

Developing the mind in the correct way, practicing meritorious thoughts such as loving kindness, compassion and understanding the world as it is, is meditation. By practicing meditation in Buddhism, we hope to analyze our mind and body. First, Buddhist meditation aims to purify the mind from hindrances such as greed and anger, and then understand the world reality, which causes to overcome suffering. The final goal of meditation that the Buddha mentioned is the peace of mind and happiness that no one nor anything can disturb our peace of mind. When we experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, if we have no any attachments or conflict about visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, body impressions and thoughts, it is the result which we gain by practicing meditation. Finally, we live in the present moment with full awareness and wisdom seeing arising and ceasing about our all our experiences that we receive through our six senses.

The main purpose of Buddhist meditation is, increasing mindfulness (*Sati*) and wisdom (*Sampajanna or Panna*). According to Buddhist perspective, meditation can be divided into two ways, which are tranquility (*Samatha*) meditation and insight (*Vipassanā*) meditation. By practicing tranquility meditation, we develop mindfulness. It means we focus our mind on a particular object. Here we purify our mind from negative thoughts such as desire, anger, jealousy etc. then our mind is very quiet, calm and concentrated. Simultaneously, practicing insight meditation we develop intelligence or wisdom. The final goal of Buddhist meditation is to get rid of suffering. If we can live mindfully every moment seeing the world reality which is impermanence, that is the highest result of meditation. At that moment we live completely without suffering in the present moment. With this understanding, when we remember the past or the future, we have our attention or awareness fully that now I read my own mind not the real situation. Then we can overcome suffering. Also we see the arising and ceasing about present experience too.

When we are going to practice any kind of teaching in Buddhism, we have to fulfil three steps. They are;

- Knowledge (*Sutamaya Nāna* - සුතමය ඥාණ)
- Reflection (*Cintāmayā Nāna* - චින්තමය ඥාණ)
- Practice meditation (*Bhāvanāmayā Nāna* - භාවනාමය ඥාණ)

The **knowledge** is one of the most important things that we should have from the beginning to the end on the path of purification. We must have a clear knowledge where we go, what we practice, and what the results of our practice are. According to this knowledge, we have to know that the first step of liberation is discipline or virtue (*Seela*). The second step is tranquility or concentration (*Samadhi*) that means focusing on one's mind with positive thoughts. The third step is wisdom (*Panna*) that means seeing impermanence as arising and ceasing about all our experiences which we get through our senses. After we get this knowledge clearly, we have to think, investigate or **reflect** on it again and again in our day to day life focusing on our body and mind. It is named in Buddhism as wise investigation or wise reflection (*Yoniso Manasikāra*). We should be clever to increase gradually the time that we reflect on reality as it is. On the other hand, we have to purify our mind from negative thoughts, **practicing meditation** to develop above experience. Here we practice tranquility meditation (*Samata Bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*Vipassanā Bhāvanā*). When we fulfil all these three qualities above, we have practiced mindfulness which is very important. Without mindfulness or awareness, we can't reach real knowledge, reflection or meditation. If we practice all of them, right understanding (*Sammā Ditthi*) also should increase gradually. Right understanding, understanding of impermanence is the very important quality whether we go on the path of liberation.

The very first step of meditation is to focus our mind on a particular object. Here it is very important to understand the sign of mindfulness (*Sati nimitta*). When we do any kind of meditation, it is important to keep our attention on the tip of our nose or upper lip. Again and again we may try to develop this skill. As the result of practicing mindfulness for a long time, we are able to keep our mind in the same wholesome thought for a long time. It is named as concentration or tranquility. Furthermore, we can improve our meditation rapidly by meditating not only while sitting down, but if we practice being mindful in all our daily activities. When we are aware, negative thoughts such as anger, desire and jealousy are unable to come to our mind. Then there are no disturbances to our peace of mind. It means we are happy with positive thoughts which are wholesome.

Arising negative thoughts is the nature of the mind. In meditation, we try to decrease negative thoughts such as desire, hatred and delusion, and on the other hand cultivate positive thoughts such as generosity, good -will, compassion, sympathetic joy and wisdom. Specially, the meaning of meditation in Buddhism (pali- *Bhāvanā*) is cultivation or development of the mind in the correct way, practicing wholesome thoughts (*Bhāveti kusaladhamme āsevatī vaddheti etāyāti*

bhāvanā). If we can keep our mind with wholesome (positive) thoughts for a long time, then we are free from suffering, it means we are happy. We should be clever to increase the time we live mindfully, that is one of the ways to our success in our spiritual life.

The purpose of meditation is to focus or keep our mind in the correct way with wholesome (positive) thoughts. When we practice meditation, we have to focus on one wholesome object for a long time continuously that is called concentration. Why do we meditate? The purpose is for every person to be happy. Happiness or suffering depends on our point of view about the world. If our mind is wicked by desire, anger or ignorance, then we are not in peace of mind. If our mind is full with wholesome thoughts such as generosity, loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy or wisdom, then our mind is full with happiness. Meditation is the greatest merit in Buddhism. The Buddha says practicing merits means practicing happiness (*Sukho punnassa uccayo*). Also practicing merits decorates our mind with positive thoughts.

We mostly suffer with desire and anger. If we can keep our mind away from desire and anger, we are free from suffering. When we meditate, we purify our mind from defilements. And also we focus our mind on positive thoughts continuously. It means we try to keep our mind in happiness. If we can practice some sort of meditation such as loving kindness meditation, breathing meditation, it results in calming the mind, and making it quiet, concentrated and happy. When mind is concentrated, our body is also very relaxed, comfortable and pleasant. When we can purify our mind from unwholesome (negative) thoughts, it results happiness, not only in our mind, but also in our physical body.

When we start to meditate, our mind goes here and there. That is the nature of the mind. Don't worry. Try to take the mind to the meditation object. When we do it again and again, if we are clever and we have awareness and courage, we can control our mind, as we wish. At the beginning we can start meditation with 5 minutes per day, and later we are able to increase it little by little.

Among both tranquility (*Samatha*) meditation and insight (*Vipassanā*) meditation, tranquility meditation means keeping our mind for a long time in one particular wholesome thought such as loving-kindness. As a result of practicing tranquility meditation, we can keep our mind calm and quiet for a long time with happiness without defilements. If we can cultivate our mind in the maximum level in tranquility meditation, sometimes we can live for a long time without any other facilities such as food. In this situation, our mind is very rich in merits and happiness. However, this mental condition is not permanent. Anytime it can be changed. When we are out of meditation, defilements may come to our mind. Suffering could come and disturb us because that tranquility is impermanent. That is why Buddhism teaches us the second step of meditation – insight meditation (*Vipassanā Bhāvanā*).

Insight meditation aims to reflect on the world reality as *Anicca* - the impermanence, *Dukkha* – dissatisfaction, *Anatta* - selflessness. It leads to eradicate all our sufferings. If we can think gradually all kinds of experiences belong to above three, with a concentrated mind, then we are getting rid of suffering little by little. If we have some sort of experience through our senses, it means five aggregates arise together and they cease together at the same moment. It is instant. As a result of the gathering of the five aggregates, when reasons are together, we have experience through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When reasons are separated, the experience ceases. The highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence that "**Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence**" (*Ahutvā sambhutam hutva na bhavissati* - අහුන්වා සම්භුතං හුන්වා න භවිස්සති). If we can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering.

According to Buddhism, there are three integral factors – morality, concentration and wisdom for the success of meditation. Morality means the discipline in speech and behavior. When we speak something, it is very important to take care of our words. And when we behave, we should take care of our actions. Before meditation we should have enough discipline to practice meditation. If we don't have good discipline in speech and behavior, it is difficult to fulfill our hopes in spirituality. When we have good discipline, it is easy to succeed in concentration and practice meditation. In meditation, we cultivate two separate qualities of the mind – mindfulness or awareness and tranquility. If we have the real knowledge about the world as The Supreme Buddha mentioned, as the result of practicing concentration, we are able see the world reality which is impermanence, dissatisfaction and selflessness. That is the result of practicing insight meditation.

Final aim of meditation in Buddhism is to develop our mind according to *Anicca* - the impermanence, *Dukkha* – dissatisfaction and *Anatta* – selflessness. As the result of the comprehension of above three characteristics we are fully aware of six senses and six objects. In this understanding, we are mindful that six senses and six objects arise at the moment, and cease immediately.

The highest contemplation about all our experiences that the Buddha has pointed out to Bahiya;

“In that case, Bāhiya, you should train yourself hence: In what is seen there must be only what is seen, in what is heard there must be only what is heard, in what is sensed there must be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there must be only what cognized is. This is the way, Bāhiya, you should train yourself.

Tasmātiha te, bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: ‘diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissatī’ti. Evañhi te, bāhiya, sikkhitabbaṃ. (Bahiya Sutta, Udanapali)

This understanding causes our permanent equanimity, which is the real happiness without any suffering even though we are in very complex situations. This is the highest refuge that we can gain by ourselves as the Buddha mentioned.

Dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge. Dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge.

*Atta deepā bhikkhave viharatha atta saranā na anna saranā,
Dhamma deepā bhikkhave dhamma saranā na anna saranā.*

(Attadeepa Sutta)

The way how to be a refuge to ourselves is practicing mindfulness. When someone develops mindfulness as the Buddha explains, three disciplines gradually increase. They are;

1. Virtue (*Seela* - සීල)
2. Concentration (*Samādhi* - සමාධි)
3. Wisdom (*Panna* - භාවනා)

When these three disciplines develop, the five spiritual faculties increase. They are;

1. Confidence (*Saddha* - සද්ධා)
2. Energy (*Viriya* - විරිය)
3. Mindfulness (*Sati* - සති)
4. Concentration (*Samādhi* - සමාධි)
5. Wisdom (*Pannā* - පඤ්ඤා)

Improving these five faculties is the real success of our life since day by day we go forward on the path of liberation decreasing suffering.

With the understanding of impermanence or the dependent origination we have to practice these three qualities again and again with full dedication.

May the Triple Gem Bless You!

May You be Well, Happy and Peaceful!

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