

# **MEDITATION AND NIBBANA**

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In the place of prayers, Buddhists practise meditation for mental culture and for spiritual development. No one can attain Nibbana or salvation without developing the mind through the practice of meditation. Any amount of meritorious deeds alone would not lead a person to attain the final goal without taming the mind. Naturally, mind is very illusive and inclined to persuade people to commit evils. Mind encourages people to be the slaves of the senses. The imagination and emotions always mislead the man if his mind is not properly trained. One who knows how to practise meditation will be able to control his mind when it is misled by the senses. Most of the troubles and misunderstandings which we are confronting today are due to the untrained and uncultured mind. It is already established that meditation is the remedy for physical and mental sickness. Medical authorities and great thinkers all over the world say that mental frustration, worries, miseries, over-anxieties, tension and fear are the causes of many diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stomach ulcers, gastritis, nervous complaints and mental sicknesses.

When the conscious 'I' frets too much, worries too much, or grieves too long and too intensely, then troubles develop in the body: gastric ulcers, tuberculosis, coronary diseases and a host of functional disorders are the products of mental and emotional disorders. In the case of children, the decay of the teeth and defective eye-sight is frequently correlated with emotional disorders.

Many of these sicknesses and disorders can be avoided if people could spend a few minutes a day to calm down their senses through the practice of meditation. Many people do not believe this or are too lazy to practise meditation are due to lack of understanding. Some people say that meditation is only a waste of time. We must remember that every great spiritual master in this world had attained the highest point of their life through the practice of meditation. They are honoured today by millions of people because they have done tremendous service to mankind with their supreme knowledge which they obtained through the practice of meditation.

We have already mentioned that the Buddha obtained his enlightenment through the development of his mind. He had no divine power to help him. He gained his wisdom by himself by practising meditation. To have a healthy body and healthy mind and to have happiness in life, one must learn how to practise meditation. Today we are living in a world where people have to work very hard physically or mentally. Without hard work, there is no place for people in the modern society, very keen competition is going on everywhere. One is

trying to beat the other in every sphere of life and man had no real peace and rest in the mind, the whole life will collapse after some time. People naturally try to overcome their miseries by pleasing the senses: they drink, gamble, sing and dance all the time having the illusion that they are enjoying the real happiness of life. Sense stimulation is not the real way of having relaxation. The more we try to please the senses through the sensual pleasures, the more we will become slaves to the senses. There will be no end to our craving for satisfaction. The real way of relaxation is to calm down the senses by the control of mind. If we could control the mind, then we will be able to control everything. When the mind is fully controlled, and purified, it will be free from mental disturbances. When the mind is free from mental disturbances it can see many things which others could not see through their naked eyes. Ultimately we will be able to attain our salvation and find peace and happiness.

To practise meditation, one must have strong determination, effort and patience. Immediate results cannot be expected. We must remember that it takes many years for a person to be qualified as a doctor, lawyer, mathematician, philosopher, historian or a scientist. Similarly to be a good meditator, it will take some time for the person to control the illusive mind and to calm down the senses. Practising meditation is like swimming in a river against the current. Therefore one must not lose patience for not being able to obtain rapid results of his meditation. At the same time the meditator also must cultivate his morality. A congenial place for meditation is another important aspect. The meditator must have an object for his meditation, for without an object the jumping mind is not so easy to trap. That object also must be free from lust, anger, delusion and emotion.

Some people take the Buddha image as an object and concentrate on it. Some concentrate on inhaling and exhaling. Whatever may be the method, if anyone tries to practise meditation, he is sure to find relaxation. Meditation will help him a great deal to have physical and mental happiness and to control the mind whenever it is necessary.

Man can do the highest service to mankind by simply abstaining from evils. The cultured mind that is developed through meditation is most useful in the service of others. Meditation is not simply a waste of man's valuable time. The advanced mind of a meditator can solve so many human problems and is very useful to enlighten others.

Meditation is very useful to help a person to live peacefully despite the noises and other disturbances that are so frequent in this modern world. In this densely populated world of ours, there are bound to be various kinds of external disturbances. We cannot be expected to retire to a jungle or forest or mountain valley and live in splendid isolation. We cannot hope to live in ivory towers –

‘far from the maddening crowd’. Right meditation is not escapism; it is not meant to provide hiding places for temporary oblivion. If meditation is to be realistic, it has the purpose of training man’s mind to face, to understand and to conquer this very world in which we live. We must learn to adjust ourselves to bear up with the numerous obstacles to the life of meditation in the modern world.

Because they want to satisfy their material desires; they want to further their material gains. They want to use meditation to get a better job. They want to earn more money or to operate their business more efficiently. Perhaps they fail to understand that the direction of meditation is not to increase desires. Materialistic motives are hardly suitable to proper meditation whose goal lies outside of worldly affairs. One should meditate to try to attain something that money cannot buy or supply. If you practise meditation, you can learn to behave like a gentleman even though you are disturbed by others. If you practise meditation you can learn to calm the body and feelings and mind: you can learn to be tranquil and happy within. If you practise meditation, you can learn to control the mind when it is disturbed by negative thoughts and feelings such as jealousy, anger, pride, envy. If you practise meditation, you can learn to make the proper decisions when you are at a cross-road and are at a loss as to which way to turn. These qualities you can develop if you practise meditation. These qualities cannot be purchased in any shop. No amount of money or property can buy these qualities. Yet you can attain them – if you practise meditation. And finally the ultimate object of Buddhist meditation is to eradicate all defilements from the mind and to attain the final goal: Nibbana is the final goal of Buddhism. But what is Nibbana? It is not easy to know what Nibbana really is; it is easy to know what Nibbana is not.

Nibbana is not nothingness or extinction. Would the Buddha leave his family and kingdom and preach 45 years – all for nothingness?

Nibbana is not Paradise. Several centuries after the Buddha, some of the Buddhist sects began to introduce Nibbana as a Paradise. Their purpose of equalling Nibbana with a heavenly world was to convince the less – intellectuals and to attract them to the teachings of the sect. Striving for Nibbana came to mean looking for a nice place where everything is beautiful and where everyone is eternally happy. This might be a very comfortable folktale, but it is not the Nibbana that the Buddha experienced. During his time, the Buddha did not deny Brahmin religion. But the Buddha knew that this paradise was within samsara and that final liberation was beyond samsara. The Buddha could see that the Path to Nibbana leads beyond the heavens.

If Nibbana is not a place, then where is Nibbana? Nibbana exists just as fire exists. However, there is no storage place for fire or for Nibbana. But when

you rub pieces of wood together, then the friction and heat are the proper conditions for fire to arise. Likewise, when the conditions in man's mind are such that he is free from all defilements, then Nibbanic bliss will appear.

You must experience Nibbana. You must taste a mango to know the taste of mango. Until you experience the supreme state, you can only speculate as to what it really is. For those who insist on the theory, the scriptures offer some help. The scriptures suggest that Nibbana is a Supra-mundane state of unalloyed happiness. But remember that the happiness of Nibbana is not experienced through the senses.

“Friend, happiness is Nibbana.” The Ven. Sariputta once made this statement to another monk. The monk replied with a question, “But Ven. Sariputta, what is this happiness if there is no feeling?” “Just this is happiness” replied Sariputta, “that therein there is no feeling.”

The Ven. Sariputta's reply is confirmed in these words of the Buddha, “Whatever is experienced, sensed, felt, all that is suffering.”

By itself, Nibbana is quite unexplainable and quite undefinable. As darkness can be explained only by its opposite, light and as rest can only be explained by its opposite, motion, so also Nibbana can only be explained by its opposite: the complete absence of all suffering. As darkness prevails wherever there is no light, as rest prevails wherever there is no motion, so also Nibbana is everywhere where suffering and change and impurity do not prevail.

A sufferer who scratches his sores can experience a temporary relief which is a kind of happiness. But soon the nails will infect the wounds and cause the disease to be prolonged. The joy of the final cure can hardly be compared to the fleeting happiness obtained from the scratching. Likewise, craving for sense desires brings only temporary gratification or happiness which prolongs the stay in samsara. The cure for the samsaric disease is Nibbana. Nibbana is an end of the cravings which cause all the sufferings of birth, old age, disease, death, grief, lamentation and despair. The joy of Nibbanic cure can hardly be compared with the samsaric suffering with its temporary happiness.

It is dangerous to speculate on what Nibbana is; it is better to know how to prepare the conditions necessary for Nibbana, how to attain the inner peace and clarity of vision that leads to Nibbana: simply follow the Buddha's advice; put his teachings into practice. Get rid of all your defilements rooted in greed, hatred and delusion. You must completely purify yourself of all desires and you must completely realise absolute selflessness. You must lead a life of right, moral conduct and you must constantly practise meditation. By active exertion, you must free yourself from all unselfishness and illusion. You must learn to detach from all worldly things. If there is any attachment to anyone or to

anything or if there is any aversion to anyone or anything, you will never attain Nibbana; for Nibbana is beyond all opposites of attachment and aversion, like and dislike.

When that ultimate state is attained, you will fully understand this worldly life for which you now crave. This world will cease to be an object of your desire. You will realise the sorrow and impermanence and impersonality of all that lives and that does not live. No monk and no book will ever teach you profound realisation. Your dreams will vanish. No castles will be built in the air. The tempest will be ended. Life's struggles will be over. Nature's processes will have ceased. All your worries, miseries, responsibilities, disturbances, burdens, physical and mental ailments and emotions will vanish after attaining this most blissful state of Nibbana.

