

Cetovimutti-Theravāda



Introduction to
Meditation and Mental Development
in Theravāda-Buddhism

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What is Theravāda-Buddhist Meditation?

Meditation is a crucial part of Buddhist practice.

The ordinary mind is distracted and uncontrolled. Buddhist meditation is a method of spiritual development to calm the mind, purify it, attain insight and finally overcome suffering, a path of liberation. Buddhist meditation is a systematic analysis of the whole existence.

Meditation leads through the accumulation of concentration to insight into the nature of matter and mind, and thus to liberation from suffering. The liberation of beings from suffering is the only goal of Buddhist practice. Suffering can manifest itself in a large variety of ways in our human lives, from gross physical pain to the subtlest mental dissatisfaction.

Meditation is a very active process of inner work on one's mind. Merely keeping the body in a seated posture without actively working on the mind is not meditation.

Meditation is useful for oneself and for society, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Meditation is useful for oneself and others because one dwells or should dwell in wholesome states of mind. By doing so, one cannot harm anyone and can also expect good results for oneself, because good deeds associated with wholesome states of mind bring good results, and bad deeds associated with unwholesome states of mind bring unpleasant results. For this, it is very essential to know what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, and to practice right concentration. Right concentration is associated with wholesome states of mind, wrong concentration is associated with unwholesome states of mind. In order to have progress in meditation, and on the path of mental liberation, it is also essential to practice right concentration as taught by the Buddha with various objects according to the noble eightfold path. Only through this, namely by dwelling in wholesome states of mind and practicing right concentration, can one complete *Parāṃī* (perfections), a prerequisite for liberation and reduction of suffering.

There are two types of meditation: tranquility meditation and insight meditation. Tranquility meditation is the prerequisite for insight meditation. If the mind is not still and calm, one cannot see the phenomena that make up our life according to reality. Calmness is not meant here in the sense of dull slackness. This calmness of meditation is a very awake, clear state of mind accompanied by wisdom.

Restlessness makes us unfocused, over-busy, and evokes more and more craving for the things of this world that pass so quickly. The more materialistic our thinking becomes, the more things we need, and the wholesome penetration of our existence becomes more and more difficult.

Calming the mind, which allows our mind to become concentrated, is the first step to be learned in meditation. This calming and concentration already

brings for many people a great improvement in their quality of life, both physically and mentally. When the mind is truly concentrated, very wholesome states of mind arise, accompanied by factors such as joy, happiness, lightness, softness, flexibility, stillness, skillfulness, sincerity, mindfulness, and others. Through these wholesome states of consciousness, it is also produced physical matter that feels very pleasant, namely light, soft, flexible and functional to keep the body healthy. One can achieve very deep states of absorption with this meditation. These states are called *jhāna* in the pali language. Although the mind is deeply absorbed in an object, it remains very alert, clear and flexible.

There are different objects for this tranquility meditation, depending on the person's character and present mental situation.

It is important to perform this meditation correctly in order to get good results. However, tranquility meditation alone does not lead to lasting liberation from suffering, which can manifest itself in dissatisfaction, frustration, sadness, despair, anger, depression, and various physical ailments. In order to achieve lasting liberation from suffering, one must analyse and fully understand our existence down to the smallest detail with its specific characteristics. For this, analytical and insight meditation are necessary. In analytical meditation, one analyses body and mind to the smallest indivisible detail. Physically, one sees microparticles of which our body is composed. In order to see them, the deep concentration achieved beforehand is necessary. With machines or instruments one cannot see these microparticles according to reality, since they develop and pass away very fast. These microparticles are then further analysed into their indivisible components. Thereby one gets a very exact knowledge about this body. When the concentration is deep, one can see each part of the body with the mind and then analyse it.

Also our mind does not consist of an unchanging entity. What we call mind are many, very short moments of consciousness that arise and pass away very quickly. They can occur in a very wide variety of ways because they are accompanied by various mental factors. These mental factors can be unwholesome states such as anger, greed, envy, pride, for example, or wholesome ones such as compassion, mindfulness, confidence, sincerity, and so on. Also these individual factors one can see with deep concentration. Thus one can observe the mind without gaps and in detail. One thus gets profound insight into the uninterrupted thinking and feeling.

When one has examined the two parts, body and mind, which make up our existence in this way, one examines their causes. According to the Buddha's insight, no phenomenon arises without a cause. Through deep concentration, one can trace the body and mind back in time, both in this life and over many previous lives, and see how causes for new existence have always developed. This doctrine of dependant origination was discovered by the Buddha, but not invented. It is a natural law. Good actions in body, speech

and mind produce pleasant results; malicious, unscrupulous or greedy actions produce unpleasant results. The results may appear soon after the action or in the distant future. The view of ineffectiveness of action is thus taken away, for the natural law is the law of cause and corresponding effects. Through this direct experience of the cause and effect of our actions, the sense of responsibility is greatly strengthened. Shame and hesitation towards unwholesome actions result from direct knowledge.

These two analytical steps, analyzing body and mind and recognizing their causes, are the prerequisites for practicing insight meditation (*vipassanā*).

If we do not know exactly what constitutes our life, we cannot gain insight into its nature. When one practices insight meditation, one can see and experience that these previously analyzed physical and mental components come into being and pass away very quickly. What we identify ourselves with, as 'I', person, being, is nothing but this permanent process of change in body and mind. With this, one gets deep insight into the nature of existence. Only through these direct experiences one can become free from all kinds of suffering and all mental defilements.

Many people seek happiness in external objects, for this one has to earn a lot of money and make a lot of effort to get them. It takes a lot of natural resources to produce these objects on the one hand, and on the other hand they leave a lot of garbage behind. The climate on our planet is becoming more and more threatened for future generations because of this consumption. The desire for these sense objects is becoming more and more demanding and ultimately never satisfied. There are also people who specialize in earning their money by arousing people's ever new needs for external objects. This kind of idea of happiness, that external objects can create satisfaction for us, is based on ignorance. We have cultivated this ignorance for a long time, so we often cannot recognize it as such. The pleasure that comes from these external objects is short-lived. When one does not get the desired object, anger or frustration often occurs. When one does get it, there is often fear and anxiety about losing it or not being able to obtain it in the future. Often one does not find the object one desires. All these results of seeking happiness in external objects often lead to serious illnesses, physical and mental or psychological. Through analytical meditation and insight meditation, one examines the sense organs, such as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and their objects, such as colour, sound, smell, taste, touch, in extensive detail. This gives rise to a deep understanding of sense perceptions. Only by experiencing sense perceptions and analyzing them systematically we can understand their true nature.


True happiness and contentment can be found only within ourselves, within our own mind. Only wholesome states of mind bring happiness. These are cultivated through meditation and can be maintained for a long time.

In order to be successful with meditation, one must also pay attention to

dwelling in wholesome states of mind in everyday behaviour. These are brought about by practicing the ten perfections, the four immeasurables and right mindfulness and clear comprehension. The ten perfections include generosity, ethics, renunciation, energy, wisdom, forgiveness, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness and equanimity. How to unfold these must be learned, practiced again and again, and reflected upon. The four immeasurables include loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

Meditation is an inner path that everybody can follow on different levels according to his or her abilities. One can share and discuss one's thoughts and experiences with other people, but in the end one has to walk this path alone, because no one else can develop one's own mind. However, someone who has walked this path and can show the way is very helpful. Today, when we want to reach an unknown place, we use a navigation system; for meditation, this guidance can only be given by a human being.

Buddha means fully enlightened one. 2500 years ago a person called Buddha found out these universal laws of any kind of existence. Today we can find his teachings in traditional writings.



With journey finished and sorrowless,
from everything completely free,
for one who has loosened all the ties
passion's fever is not found.

Dhammapada 90