



### Meditation

Good Question, Good Answer with Ven. S. Dhammika

#### Question:

What is Meditation?

#### Answer:

Meditation is a conscious effort to change how the mind works. The Pali word for meditation is 'bhavana' which means 'to make grow' or 'to develop'.

#### Question:

Is meditation important?

#### Answer:

Yes, it is. No matter how much we may wish to be good, if we cannot change the desires that make us act the way we do, change will be difficult. For example, a person may realize that he is impatient with his wife and he may promise himself: "From now on I am not going to be so impatient." But an hour later he may be shouting at his wife simply because, not being aware of himself, impatience has arisen without him knowing. Meditation helps to develop the awareness and the energy needed to transform ingrained mental habit patterns.

#### Question:

I have heard that meditation can be dangerous. Is this true?

#### Answer:

To live, we need salt. But if you were to eat a kilogram of salt it would kill you. To live in the modern world you need a car but if you don't follow the traffic rules or if you drive while you are drunk, a car becomes a dangerous machine. Meditation is like this, it is essential for our mental health and well-being but if you practice in a stupid way, it could cause problems. Some people have problems like depression, irrational fears or schizophrenia, they think meditation is an instant cure for their problem, they start meditating and sometimes their problem gets worse. If you have such a problem, you should seek professional help and after you are better then take up meditation. Other people over reach themselves, they take up meditation and instead of going gradually, step by step, they meditate with too much energy for too long and soon they are exhausted. But perhaps most problems in meditation are caused by 'kangaroo meditation'. Some people go to one teacher and do his meditation technique for a while, then they read something in a book and decide to try that technique, then a week later a famous meditation teacher visits town and so they decide to incorporate some of his ideas into their practice and before long they are hopelessly confused. Jumping like a kangaroo from one teacher to another or from one meditation technique to another is a mistake. But if you don't have any severe mental problem and you take up meditation and practice sensibly it is one of the best things you can do for yourself.

#### Question:

How many types of meditation are there?

#### Answer:

The Buddha taught many different types of meditation, each designed to overcome a particular problem or to develop a particular psychological state. But the two most common and useful types of meditation are Mindfulness of Breathing (anapana sati) and Loving Kindness Meditation (metta bhavana).

#### Question:

If I wanted to practice Mindfulness of Breathing, how would I do it?

#### Answer:

You would follow these easy steps: the four Ps place, posture, practice and problems. First, find a suitable place,

perhaps a room that is not too noisy and where you are not likely to be disturbed. Second, sit in a comfortable posture. A good posture is to sit with your legs folded, a pillow under your buttocks, your back straight, the hands nestled in the lap and the eyes closed. Alternatively, you can sit in a chair as long as you keep your back straight. Next comes the actual practice itself. As you sit quietly with your eyes closed you focus your attention on the in and out movement of the breath. This can be done by counting the breaths or watching the rise and fall of the abdomen. When this is done, certain problems and difficulties will arise. You might experience irritating itches on the body or discomfort in the knees. If this happens, try to keep the body relaxed without moving and keep focusing on the breath. You will probably have many intruding thoughts coming into your mind and distracting your attention from the breath. The only way you can deal with this problem is to patiently keep returning your attention to the breath. If you keep doing this, eventually thoughts will weaken, your concentration will become stronger and you will have moments of deep mental calm and inner peace.

### **Question:**

How long should I meditate for?

### **Answer:**

It is good to do meditation for 15 minutes every day for a week and then extend the time by 5 minutes each week until you are meditating for 45 minutes. After a few weeks of regular daily meditation you will start to notice that your concentration gets better, there are less thoughts, and you have moments of real peace and stillness.

### **Question:**

What about Loving Kindness Meditation? How is that practiced?

### **Answer:**

Once you are familiar with Mindfulness of Breathing and are practicing it regularly you can start practicing Loving Kindness Meditation. It should be done two or three times each week after you have done Mindfulness of Breathing. First, you turn your attention to yourself and say to yourself words like "May I be well and happy. May I be peaceful and calm. May I be protected from dangers. May my mind be free from hatred. May my heart be filled with love. May I be well and happy." Then one by one you think of a loved person, a neutral person, that is, someone you neither like nor dislike, and finally a disliked person, wishing each of them well as you do so.

### **Question:**

What is the benefit of doing this type of meditation?

### **Answer:**

If you do Loving Kindness Meditation regularly and with the right attitude, you will find very positive changes taking place within yourself. You will find that you are able to be more accepting and forgiving towards yourself. You will find that the feelings you have towards your loved ones will increase. You will find yourself making friends with people you used to be indifferent and uncaring towards, and you will find the ill-will or resentment you have towards some people will lessen and eventually be dissolved. Sometimes if you know of someone who is sick, unhappy or encountering difficulties you can include them in your meditation and very often you will find their situation improving.

### **Question:**

How is that possible?

### **Answer:**

The mind, when properly developed, is a very powerful instrument. If we can learn to focus our mental energy and project it towards others, it can have an effect upon them. You may have had an experience like this. Perhaps you are in a crowded room and you get this feeling that someone is watching you. You turn around and, sure enough, someone is staring at you. What has happened is that you have picked up that other person's mental energy. Loving Kindness Meditation is like this. We project positive mental energy towards others and it gradually transforms them.

### **Question:**

Do I need a teacher to teach me meditation?

### **Answer:**

A teacher is not absolutely necessary but personal guidance from someone who is familiar with meditation is

certainly helpful. Unfortunately, some monks and laymen set themselves up as meditation teachers when they simply don't know what they are doing. Try to pick a teacher who has a good reputation, a balanced personality and who adheres closely to the Buddha's teachings.

**Question:**

I have heard that meditation is widely used today by psychiatrists and psychologists. Is this true?

**Answer:**

Yes, it is. Meditation is now accepted as having a highly therapeutic effect upon the mind and is used by many professional mental health workers to help induce relaxation, overcome phobias and bring about self-awareness. The Buddha's insights into the human mind are helping people as much today as they did in ancient times.