



Advantages of Meditation I

transcript of a teaching given September 19, 1997

Geshe la: Meditation helps us to gain a calm and peaceful state of mind. It changes many of our behaviors and actions of body and speech. The person becomes gentle, kind, more calm and quiet.

Secondly, meditation helps us to reduce many of our mental afflictions and negative thoughts. Naturally, the action of body speech mind becomes wholesome, constructive and healthier. This is very helpful to oneself as well as to others.

Thirdly, meditation provides, or brings us, special alertness, freshness, and sharpness in one's mind. This allows us to see the things beyond the understanding of ordinary human mind or consciousness. It allows us to see the things as they are, not as they appear to our ordinary mind. This is the final, or ultimate advantage, or benefit of meditation.

Many people are interested in meditation, especially in the west, because it helps to relieve mental stress, anxiety, and depression. Sitting in meditation helps us to gain some degrees of inner relaxation which also helps to recharge body. Sitting in deep meditation for twenty to thirty minutes equals taking rest in ones bed in the form of sleeping or lying down, but taking rest in the form of lying down in ones bed offers less chance to get full rest if our mind is disturbed.

Meditating for twenty minutes, freeing mind completely from thoughts, and all manner of thinking processes, letting the mind to remain at rest, calm and peaceful, offers good opportunity to get full rest, to restore energy to both mind and body. Those who meditate for many, many hours and have proper experience of meditation do not need too much long sleep because meditation has the potential to sustain body, as well as mind. According to Buddhist metaphysics, or cosmology, there are three things that sustain our ordinary human body: (1) food, we eat food to sustain our body; (2) sleep, our body needs sleep; (3) meditation. The very reason we need sleep is to rest our mind, so meditation helps our mind to get rest, therefore, meditation has a potential to sustain our body like sleep.

Now I would like to describe meditation briefly.

According to Buddhism there are two types of meditation, single pointedness and insight, or analytic, meditation. The single pointedness meditation is the technique of refining the mind and its quality through bringing mind under perfect discipline, gaining two qualities, stability and clarity.

When we sit and meditate, focusing mind on a single object without distraction, we will face two obstacles. Firstly, it is very difficult to withdraw our mind from the objects of the five senses because mind voluntarily chases after objects of the five senses. Secondly, when the mind becomes calm and gains some power, or capacity, to remain at rest, single pointedly on the

object of meditation, such as the image of Buddha, lights, sound, mantra, etc., then our problem is that the mind starts sinking in a sort of dullness. We feel a sense of heaviness in mind and body which leads us toward sleep. We lose the clarity of mind, our mind becomes numb and blank, there is no freshness, or alertness and sharpness, and our proper meditation is lost.

Agitation and excitement are the obstacles to gaining mental stability. Dullness and sluggishness are the obstacles to gaining mental clarity. Concerning mental agitation, when we are meditating, and we hear sound or music outside, at that moment, we pay attention to that sound, and immediately start thinking, 'what kind of sound is that?', 'what are they doing?', 'it's too loud'. If it is music, we start following the rhythm and melody. This is called external distraction.

When our mind is not running or chasing after any particular object of the senses, and mind is still on the object of meditation, but fills with a sort of fuzz that distracts us from getting the clear picture or image of the object upon which we are focusing, this is the inner distraction. Inner distractions frequently cause us to fade away the object of meditation.

When mental sinking obscures the mind, our mind becomes cloudy or misty, we totally lose the mental clarity. There is no more freshness, alertness or sharpness. When we lose the mental clarity in our mind, then we are no longer in meditation. I would say that it is something like a mother chicken sitting on her eggs, no matter how long we are meditating, it is very important to maintain full alertness and sharpness in our mind and not to remain in a state of numbness and dullness of mind.

I have discussed how one meditates and what meditation brings us at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. Many of our human mental problems arise due to our not knowing how things exist in reality and how things appear to our mind. There is a huge contradiction between the things themselves and their appearances. Not being aware of these contradictions causes many mental and psychological problems such as anger, hatred, jealousy, attachment, frustration, confusion, fear, and all other kinds of harmful emotional thoughts.

Finally, the main advantages of meditation, are purification of the stains of our mind. Enhancing and improving the quality of mind and our understanding of material world. Gaining direct experience of naked mind which exists at the beginning pure, undeluded.

Student: Geshe la do you also teach insight/analytical meditation? Can you briefly say something concerning this, or perhaps it is a subject for another talk?

Geshe la: Yes, it is a subject for another talk.

Student: Geshe la, do you know of any situations where meditation, done correctly or otherwise, can cause depression rather than end it?

Geshe la: Yes, if one is remaining in a state of numbness and dullness, in which there is no freshness, alertness, and clarity, no sense of joy and delight, then it may cause depression. Depression means sinking mind accompanied lack of self confidence, and hope.

Student: Geshe la, Vipassana is sometimes referred to as insight meditation, but it seems to me to be single pointedness - do I misunderstand Vipassana?

Geshe la: Vipassana refers to analytic, or insight meditation. It is strongly supported and complimented by single-pointedness meditation. But, with single-pointedness meditation, there is no slight thinking process in the mind. With Vipassana meditation, there is slight thinking process in one's mind, such as using some logical reasonings to search the true nature of impermanence and emptiness of things.

Student: What about meditations that have a specific path to follow in the meditation - such as the Supreme Yoga meditation (don't know if you are familiar with it) - meditations that have specific visualizations - they don't seem to fit in either of your definitions?

Geshe la: Tell us what it is.

Student: It would take awhile to describe it - but that one is basically visualizing first a sound then a light which enters through your third eye & travels through the body in a specific path.

Geshe la: I think in the tantric practice visualizing tantric deities in ones mind and holding this mental image for the rest of the time.

Student: Yes, yes.

Geshe la: The same as taking the letter 'S' in one's mind. In this case, letter 'S' is the object of your meditation, because at that time, you are single-pointedly holding the letter 'S' in your mind without mixing, or confusing, it with objects other than the letter 'S'.

Student: Would it be the same if you were communicating, or receiving messages from, the object of your meditation?

Geshe la: In terms of tantric deities, yes, communicating and receiving messages. But in terms of the letter 'S', communication, or receiving messages is questionable.

