

Dhamma Desana

WHAT MAKES YOU THINKING YOU ARE A MEDITATION PRACTITIONER?

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Today, we hope to embark on a collective quest to identify a way of thinking, which may help us to live more peacefully and with less suffering. In this exercise, we are converging (unifying) energy and wisdom of all of us into one collective body for a successful exploration.

Leaving aside our responsibilities as householders for a while, we are here to focus on the *Dhamma* as a result of our dedication to the practice. Let us concentrate on “the profile of a meditation practitioner”. What kind of a portrayal or an image comes to your mind? For example, can you distinguish between the practitioner and the non-practitioner of meditation from the colours of their attire or from the type of hairdos worn or from the type of wristwatch worn? In other words, how would you describe a meditation practitioner? How would you describe a non-practitioner? What kinds of images come to your mind of the two types?

Let us try to identify the practitioner and the non-practitioner from within us! We love to call ourselves practitioners of meditation, and presume to live a spiritual life. What really makes you think you are a practitioner? Surely, exteriors or the outward appearance of a person may not be a proper yardstick. Then, on what basis do we recognise the meditating or non-meditating mind?

Meditation connects directly with our thinking process and stream of thoughts. Our mind is constantly being recreated based on the flux of thoughts, and is not a finished product like a radio or a television set. A finished product does not require any improvement and can be put to use right away. Mind is essentially a collection of passing thoughts and impressions. Nobody can predict one’s next thought. Thoughts are originated according to our individual attitudes and patterns of thinking. This is why we often say, “I am different from the rest” or “this is how I think!”

Each of us possesses a unique pattern of thinking and a stream of thoughts, which explains the reason behind a diverse society in terms of preferences, may be for colours, foods, relationships etc. These psychological differences between two persons are much greater than that of the physical. Not even identical twins think the same way. Perhaps, only two Buddhas are completely identical, hence the title “*Asamasama*” or unequalled, (or unique, or incomparable), meaning that a Buddha is unique or unequalled to anyone but to another Buddha. There is a perfect and wonderful match in terms of wisdom, among Buddhas.

Let us look at the level of differing opinions and tastes that exists in our society driven by individual attitudes and point of views. When one prefers to be clad in dark colour attire the other prefers a lighter shade. One favours hot & spicy dishes while another wants less spicy food. On the surface level, these differences make us believe that peoples' tastes differ to a great extent, and as a result, a wide array of variants of products (ice-creams, beauty soaps, toothpastes etc) are manufactured to cater to various segments.

Nevertheless, even within this vast diversity of preferences, a big similarity in terms of thinking exists among the average unenlightened humans. On the basis of how emotions originate, we are all the same- highly emotional beings. That is, since our emotions and experiences trigger our thoughts our thinking pattern gives rise to suffering and depression. For instance, even our simple decision either to watch or not to watch TV leads to suffering or unsatisfactoriness.

Here, by suffering we do not mean sadness alone. There may be a highly emotional mind behind the most heartening laughter. Our perspective of life (our thinking) constantly triggers emotions, both negative (fear, sadness, anger, jealousy) and positive (happiness). It is craving that drives one to prefer a particular colour to another, irrespective of its shade (white or red). It is wrong to say the person who wears white has a lesser craving than the person who wears some other colour. The differing tastes does not make the degree of craving lesser or greater. For instance, the ardent fan of classical music has a similar craving as the ardent lover of pop music.

We instantly split every single worldly experience into two- what we like and what we dislike. We forget the fact that movie characters are mere players who get paid for their work and we develop a liking towards some and disliking towards others. On what basis do we make this classification? It is based on whether the person or the character or the situation makes us happy or not. To put it simply, we like everything that makes us happy while we dislike anything and everything that makes us unhappy.

We are all out to retain the part that makes us happy and remove the other. We do this with every sound, every taste, every memory every thought and every smell we experience by integrating ourselves with the liked (pleasant) and waging war with the disliked (unpleasant). As soon as we take side with one half we automatically oppose the other. For example, the moment we declare one half pleasant the other half becomes unpleasant, and duality comes into existence.

This conflict of (good and bad/like and dislike) what should be retained and what should be removed or duality exists only in our mind and not in any other place on the planet earth or in the space out there. It's also our mind that gives the verdict of us ending up in heaven or hell. Both types of clinging, clinging to desire and clinging to opposition/aversion, lead to suffering alike.

Nonetheless, instead of seeking a way to cease, we repeatedly experience suffering because of our inability to let go of clinging.

We presume that the world consists of two primary components - the things that make us happy and the things that make us unhappy. Say for example, some foods make us happy while some foods make us unhappy. We perceive some sounds to be nice and others to be irritants. It is due to our limited perception that we label things 'good' or 'bad'. We embark on an unachievable journey of clinging onto the 'good' and 'likeable' things; an impossible battle to win. We loathe the things that make us unhappy or uncomfortable- physical pain, hunger, thirst, drowsiness etc- and try to get rid of them.

Similarly, we develop resistance to anger and grief when these mind states arise within us. The very battle against such negative mind states itself can be highly stressful and may lead to more suffering.

This attitude of clinging to the likeable and getting rid of the unpleasant is a mundane human behaviour and the *Dhamma* teaches us that an alternative attitude is to be adopted if one intends to lead a more joyous and peaceful life. What is this alternative attitude? Simply letting go of the clinging to the pleasant and the aversion to the unpleasant.

A true meditator is someone who has undergone such an attitudinal change. The adaptation of such an attitude is not distinguishable from one's outward appearance, though. Meditation is a tool to bring about that transition from a mundane attitude to life to an enlightened one.

Meditation is a virtue because it eliminates suffering. The attempt to gain ownership of people and things is similar to the futile exercise of holding water by embracing- trying to retain something that cannot be retained will only result in stress and weariness. Some things are impossible to change despite our utter aversion to them. In such cases the wise thing to do is to let go of the aversion itself. Meditation means this attempt to change this mundane attitude. Through experience we know the extent of pressure, stress & suffering caused by things we feel averse to.

In order to live a peaceful and joyous life, we must give up the futile fight against what we dislike. It is not worth it and nobody has ever succeeded, and paradoxically, the winner is the person who gives up the fight. The *Dhamma* states that the moment you let go, peace and joy are restored.

Let me illustrate this point using a story in the *Dhamma*. There lived a monster named *Krodha Bhaksha* that was fed on anger (another *sutta* mentions about a group of beings that lived on happiness too). When someone is angry in the human realm this monster's hunger gets satisfied. Since human beings get angry all the time, this monster had enough and ample food. Nonetheless, after sometime the food was boring and there was no variation in flavour as all humans get angry in the same way. Naturally, the monster was looking for something delicious and got to know that heaven is a source of tasty food.

One day, the manner-less monster barged in at heaven and sat on the chair set aside for the Chief of gods, god Shakra, and this made the staff and other gods furious. They screamed at the beast and wanted him out of heaven instantly. What might have happened? Their anger provided a stream of delicious food for the beast and he started growing at a rate, and the visible enlargement only made the gods angrier. Unfortunately, gods at heaven failed to identify the relationship between their anger and rapid growth of the monster.

At that moment, the wise chief of gods, god Shakra, arrived at the scene and knew exactly what to do. He knelt before the monster and humbly said, "My Lord, I am god Shakra". His modesty and loving-kindness cut the food supply to the monster and the monster started shrinking. As god Shakra continued his loving-kindness, unable to bear it any further, the monster made a quick departure.

Dukkannassa sutta in the *Sanuktha Nikaya* states that our anger only strengthens the aversion we have for a particular object/person or a situation. Only by opening ourselves to it and being friendly with it can we lessen the aversion and in turn the suffering will be less too. It can be a physical ailment or a psychological pressure or weariness that we cannot come to terms with. Develop loving-kindness and look at it mindfully.

Accept it for what it is and just ‘let it be!’ This is an extremely beneficial meditation. Practising loving-kindness is another way of saying, “it is all right to experience unpleasant mind or weariness or physical pain”, and having a gracious attitude towards the unpleasant. The lesser resistance you have toward the unpleasant the more relief it brings to you; **accepting the unacceptable is a great virtue.**

If we intend to live a worry and stress free life, then our mental resistance to people and objects that do not live up to our expectations has to be minimised. When you notice something that you do not approve of taking place in your mind or body or in the external environs, remind yourself that you have no dislike to it. Such a reflection and attitude will bring immense joy into your life. This is where the meditator comes into existence.

On the one hand you are judgemental and fragment your experiences, then surely you are not in meditation. On the other hand when you are not judgemental and leave things alone, or as they are, then you can call yourself a meditator. Let us try if we can attempt to establish a non-judgemental attitude towards our experiences for a while.

MEDITATION

- ❁ Can you accept those sounds you hear even if they are unpleasant?
- ❁ Say to you ‘It is all right to hear these sounds’
- ❁ See, if you can be friendly with the memories and thoughts that arise in your mind.
- ❁ Some memories may be unpleasant and make you uncomfortable. Let anything any memory come up.
- ❁ You can call yourself a meditator only if you can be friendly and harmonious with your mind.
- ❁ Experience the deep stillness and peace that exist in your mind when there is no strong resistance to your thoughts and memories.
- ❁ Let us end this session with stillness and deep peace in our minds.

May the Triple Gem protect you all!

Where there is beauty, there is ugliness.

When something is right,

Something else is wrong.

Knowledge and ignorance

Depend on each other.

It has been like this since the beginning.

How could it be otherwise now?

Wanting to chuck out one

And hold onto the other

Makes for a ridiculous comedy.

You must still deal with everything

Ever-changing,

Even when you say it's wonderful.

Ryokan (1758-1831)