

MEDITATION IS MIND CULTURE



“The Original Mind is luminous, Clear Light; it is tarnished by visiting defilement. The Original Mind is luminous, clear light, it is purified by the absence of visiting defilement.” - Buddha

Part I :Introduction to Meditation

Part II: Change Your Mind, Change The World;
a dhamma talk

Part I:

Introduction to Meditation

Meditation is making peace. When you walk down the street with peace in your heart, there is peace in the world.

The Buddha said the Original Mind is luminous, clear light. How can we experience this “Original Mind”?

Meditation is the craft of cultivating the mind, like a garden, with good seeds of peace, joy, and compassion. When we meditate until we see this selfless nature of the mind, we awaken to great compassion and joy.

Whatever we love grows. What we pay attention to grows stronger. If we water the seeds of understanding, kindness and compassion in our hearts, friendliness and generosity and patience, they will bear fruit of compassionate action, kind words, generous and friendly thoughts.

Likewise, if we water the poisonous seeds of greed, hatred, and ignorance in our hearts, the seeds will sprout, grow, and bear bitter fruits of suffering: greedy thoughts, greedy words, and greedy, selfish actions. The seeds of anger and hatred will become angry and violent actions, and hateful words.

The Buddha said: “All things arise out of the Ocean of Mind. All that we are arises out of mind. We are what we think. With the mind we create the world. If we give rise to unwholesome thoughts – like greed, hatred, and ignorance – we will create a world of suffering. If we give rise to wholesome thoughts – like generosity, patience, love and compassion – we will create a world of happiness.”

The heart produces the thoughts, the thoughts produce actions. Our actions become our habits. Our habits become our character. Our character becomes our destiny.

The purpose of the Buddha’s teaching is to turn suffering into happiness. When we feel greed, hatred, and ignorance we suffer. When we feel love and compassion, we are happy. Meditation as taught by the Buddha, is the practice of turning suffering into happiness; of turning greed into selfless generosity; anger and hatred into kindness and compassion; and turning ignorance into understanding, and evolved consciousness.

How to practice meditation.

It is not really possible to learn how to practice meditation from reading a book. This booklet is intended to give some pointers. But eventually you will need to find an authentic, qualified meditation teacher, if you want to advance in meditation practice.

The Buddha outlined his meditation teachings in two very important Suttas, (1) Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana Sutta*), and (2) Mindfulness With Breathing (*Anapanasati Sutta*). These Suttas teach the method of meditation, how to enter deeper and deeper into our own inner experience with profound awareness, concentration, and mindfulness. You can find the text of these suttas on the **Access to Insight** website.

Method:

1. Find a suitable place to practice meditation, quiet, peaceful, clean, with plenty of fresh air and light.
2. Sit in a comfortable position, with legs crossed, hands resting in your lap or on your knees. Hold your back straight like a stack of quarters. If you sit in a chair, sit upright without leaning against the back of the chair.
3. Try to sit still, without fidgeting or scratching.
4. Your eyes can be open or closed. If open, let the eyes rest on one spot about two-feet in front of you.
5. Fasten your attention onto the sensation of the breath. When you breathe in, know that you are breathing in, and when you breathe out, know that you are breathing out.
6. Every time the mind drifts away to the past-memories, or to the future, let go of that thought, and return to the breath.
7. Every time your attention drifts away to a thought, feeling, sensation, let go of that thought, feeling, or sensation and return to the awareness of breathing-in and breathing-out.
8. Just take-note of whatever arises in the mind, release it, relax, and return again to the breath. You cannot hold these things back. You don't have to follow them. Just acknowledge them and release them, over and over and over again. That is the practice of meditation, "mindfulness of breathing". Easy to say, but not easy to do!

If you keep practicing like this for a long time – fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, or forty-five minutes – you will begin to notice that your attention actually does begin to calm down and stay with the breath for a period of time. The restless and bored feelings will begin to evaporate. You will begin to notice that calm, peaceful, pleasant feeling is welling up within the body. Pay attention to this clean, clear and calm feeling, and let it grow strong.

At the same time, you will begin to notice that the mind-heart begins to feel bright, joyful and radiant, little by little. The body becomes relaxed, calm and pleasant.

This pleasure in the body, and joy in the mind, is the 'fuel' of meditation. It will fuel the power of mindfulness and concentration, until the mind can eventually become "absorbed" in one-pointed concentration (also known as *zen*, *jhana*, *dhyana*, *chan*, *son*, *thien*).

Creating a Favorable Environment

First we must choose a good place to meditate, one that is calm, clean and quiet. Outside in nature is very good – as the Buddha said “go to the forest, or caves” or sit under a tree.

If we meditate indoors, choose a quiet room or corner of a room, where it is clean, with fresh air, well lit, undisturbed. There should not be too many distractions.

Posture : The first thing to learning meditation is how to sit in a good posture. Look at a Buddha image seated in meditation, and sit like that.

The Buddhist approach is that the mind and body are connected. The energy flows better when the body is erect, and when it's bent, the flow is changed and that directly affects your thought process. Our posture actually affects the mind.



The back should be straight like a stack of quarters. Shoulders pulled back and down a little, in order to open the ribcage so you can breathe deeply and comfortably without being cramped.

If you need to use a chair for meditation, sit upright with the feet touching the ground; and without your back touching the back of the chair.

When you sit in meditation, you should have a feeling of stability and strength, suspended, alert, and flexible - not stiff and hard like a stone Buddha.

When we sit down the first thing we need to do is to really inhabit our body—really have a sense of our body. When you begin a meditation session, spend some initial time setting into your posture. You can feel that your spine is being pulled up from the top of your head so your posture is elongated, and then settle.

The basic principle is to keep an upright, erect posture. You are in a solid situation: your shoulders are level, your hips are level, your spine is stacked up. You can visualize putting your bones in the right order

and letting your flesh hang off that structure. We use this posture in order to remain relaxed and awake. The practice we're doing is very precise: you should be very much awake even though you are calm. If you find yourself getting dull or hazy or falling asleep, you should check your posture.

Pain: If you feel pain in your muscles or joints during meditation, it is okay to adjust your position – but be mindful of moving. Don't make yourself endure real pain. It will only frustrate you and make you dislike meditation practice. But try to resist the urge to fidget and scratch and wiggle and “get more comfortable.” It is important to stay as still as possible.

Gaze: For strict mindfulness practice, the gaze should be downward focusing a couple of inches in front of your nose, or fixed on the ground about two feet in front of you. The eyes are open but not staring; your gaze is soft. We are trying to reduce sensory input as much as we can.

If your mind is very restless, you may try closing your eyes in order to reduce sensory input.

Hands: Your hands can be palms up in your lap; or palms down on your knees. Your arms should be relaxed; with the elbows a few inches from the body.

Head: Your head should be balanced evenly, with your chin slightly tucked in. The back of your neck should be relaxed, long, and open. Your face should be relaxed, with your forehead smooth and relaxed, your jaws relaxed, the muscles around your eyes relaxed. Your tongue relaxed and just touching the back of your teeth.

Breath: Focus attention on the breath. Become aware of the sensation of the air moving in and out of your body as you breathe. Follow the sensation of the cool air as it passed through the nasal cavity, back of the throat, into the windpipes, inflates the lungs, expands the belly. Then follow the sensations of the warm air as it passes out through the same path. Pay attention to the way each breath changes and is different.

As you follow the in-breath, think “breathing in” and with the out-breath, think “breathing out.” The words act as an anchor to give the thinking-mind something to fasten on to, during the beginning stages of meditation. Or think “calm” while breathing in, and “clear” while breathing out. [In Thailand, they think “Bu” while breathing in, and “doh” while breathing out.]

Thoughts: Mindfulness is not a ‘trance’ state. In mindfulness, we are trying to achieve a mind that is stable and calm, alert, and aware. Calmness or harmony - unification of mind - is a natural aspect of the mind. Through mindfulness practice we are just developing and strengthening it, and eventually we

are able to remain peacefully in our mind without struggling. Our mind naturally feels content.

Watch every thought that comes and goes, whether it be worry, fear, anxiety, hopes. When the thoughts or feelings arise, don't follow them or try to suppress them, but simply "note" them – "thinking" – and then release them, relax, and return to the breath as an anchor.

When we do this mindfulness practice, we become more and more familiar with our mind, and in particular learn to recognize the movement of the mind, which we experience as thoughts. No matter what kind of thought comes up, you should say to yourself, "That may be a really important issue in my life, but right now is not the time to think about it. Now I'm practicing meditation."

Everyone gets lost in thought sometimes. You might think, "I can't believe I got so absorbed in something like that," but try not to make it too personal. If you find that you have been carried away on the flow of thoughts, just gently release them at that point, and return again to the breath, over and over again. Don't feel frustrated or judgmental to yourself. The Buddha said the mind is like a "wild elephant" that must be tamed.

Mindfulness practice is simple. Sitting in meditation is making peace.

Monkey Mind: You may be surprised at how active and uncontrolled your mind is. Don't worry, that's just the way it is. You are discovering the truth about your current state of mind.

It is common to mistake *thinking* for meditating. It takes practice to distinguish pleasant, dreamy thoughts from having your attention connected to the changing experience of this moment. Staying focused on the body and breath is a good way to stay grounded in the present

The thoughts and feelings that keep getting in the way of concentration are called "hindrances" because they hinder meditation from arising. There are five kinds of hindrances:

- Desires, craving: wanting more (or something different) from what is present right now
- Aversion: irritation, fear, anger, any form of pushing away
- Restlessness: jumpy energy, anxiety, agitation
- Sloth or torpor: sleepy, numbing-out, dullness
- Doubt or confusion: a mind trap that says, "It's no use, this will never work, maybe there's an easier way".

You will experience all these states. During sitting practice, if you notice one of the hindrances arising, it is useful to name it silently to yourself, e.g. "grasping, grasping" or "sleepy, sleepy." If it is too strong, try not to pull away from the difficult energy, but bring all your attention to it. Let yourself experience it fully through the sensations in your body, neither getting lost in it or pushing it away. Watch what happens without expectations, when it dissipates, return to the primary focus of your meditation. In essence, examine the hindrance to death - when you clearly see the suffering created by grasping and aversion, you will naturally start to let go.

Very time you notice the attention has focused on one of these things, just take-note of it, let it go, and return again to the breath.

At the end of the meditation, sit for a minute or two, becoming aware of your surroundings and reflecting on what has just happened. Get up gradually..

Establish a Daily Practice: It is important to establish a daily practice, to make mindfulness part of your everyday life. To begin, fifteen minutes in the morning after you wake up, and fifteen minutes again in the evening before you go to bed, is a good practice. Mindfulness practice in daily life will help you become gradually more present, attentive and compassionate and patient to the people and circumstances you meet.

Meditate frequently but for short periods of time—ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes. If you force it too much the practice can become another “duty”, and training the mind should be very, very simple and pleasant experience, adding benefit to your life. So you could meditate for ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes in the evening, and during that time you are really working with the mind. Then you just stop, get up, and go.

We have to create a personal sense of self-discipline. When we sit down, we can remind ourselves: “I’m here to work on my mind. I’m here to train my mind.” It’s okay to say that to yourself when you sit down, literally. We need that kind of inspiration as we begin to practice.

Time to meditate: Morning is a good time to sit. When you wake up, wash your face, brush your teeth, then sit in meditation for fifteen minutes (or thirty minutes, or even forty-five minutes if you like). The morning is a good time to sit, because the mind is refreshed, clear, alert. Meditation practice will help you live the day more mindfully, less stressfully, and will improve your powers of attention, and memory.

In the evening, after the days duties are done, meditate again for fifteen or twenty minutes. It will help relieve the stress and strain of the day, release built-up emotions, calm the mind and improve the quality of sleep.

Place to meditate: It is good to meditate in the same place and same time every day, in order to incorporate meditation as a part of daily life. Perhaps you can establish a small Buddha altar in a quiet, orderly corner of your bedroom, or your home, or even patio or back yard. The Buddha image will inspire you and remind you of meditation. Your mind will begin to associate “this place and this time is for meditation.”

How long to meditate: Sit ten or fifteen minutes in the beginning. This will seem like a long time to sit still. But as you gain experience in meditation and become more comfortable, increase the time

to twenty, thirty, forty, or even fifty minutes. After months of daily practice, you muscles and joints will begin to stretch and relax, and meditation practice will become easier and more pleasant. You may want to learn some yoga or Tai-chi stretching exercises to strengthen the back and loosen the limbs..

Sustaining Practice

Here are just a few hints for sustaining your meditation practice:

- Sit everyday, even if its for a short period - try to sit a couple of times during the day, establish contact between your body and breath.
- In you everyday life, remember, everyone wants to be happy, just like you. Try to perform a few deeds of kindness, generosity and friendliness. This will really strengthen your meditation practice!
- Practice regularly with a group or a friend.
- Visit a place outside - part of your garden - a place of beauty - sit quietly and absorb the moment-by-moment experience. This is life.
- Visit a Buddhist temple, shrine, or monastery from time to time. It will inspire you and reinforce your meditation practice.
- Sign-up for a retreat: one-day, a weekend, or longer - experience will deepen your practice.
- If you miss a day, a week, a month, simply start again.
- I recommend that you practice one hour every day; one day every week; one weekend every month; and one week (retreat) every year.
- You are travelling a path that has led to clarity and peace for many people over thousands of years. Reflect on the example of the Buddha and the enlightened beings over the ages; may their efforts support you and inspire you.

Some Inspirational Reflections:

Making Peace: “Non-action is the source of all action. There is little we can do for peace in the world without peace in our minds.

“And so, when we begin to make peace, we begin with silence – meditation and prayer. Peace making requires compassion it requires the skill of listening. To listen, we have to give up ourselves, even our own words. We listen until we can hear our peaceful nature. As we learn to listen to ourselves, we learn to listen to others as well, and new ideas grow. There is an openness, a harmony. As we come to trust one

another, we discover new possibilities for resolving conflicts. When we listen well, we will hear peace growing.” – Maha Ghosananda

Mindfulness and awareness:

The Buddha spoke of *santi-sampahana*, or mindfulness and awareness (clear comprehension). It will be important as you practice to recognize and balance the qualities of mindfulness and awareness. Mindfulness is the ability to gather your attention into one place. Awareness (clear comprehension) is pure moment-by-moment noticing. Without some mindfulness, awareness is difficult to sustain. Without awareness, mindfulness bears no fruit. In meditation practice, both are developed gradually.

“‘Gathering in’ is the characteristic quality of mindfulness. We gather in all that we observe. ‘Cutting out’ is the characteristic quality of clear comprehension. We discard all except the precise object of our concentration. Mindfulness gathers in the hindrances of the mind, and clear comprehension follows to cut the hindrances out.” Maha Ghosananda said.

Mindfulness and clear comprehension are at the heart of Buddhist meditation. The Buddha’s last words of advice to his disciples were “be mindful and alert.” Take care.



Balance: In the **Four Foundations of Mindfulness Sutta**, the Buddha teaches that the human person is a four-dimensional being. We are not “one thing” but four things simultaneously. We live in four dimensions at the same time – body, feeling, mind, and nature - bodily dimension; a world of feeling; a universe of mind; and a field of nature. We must keep these dimensions in balance.

If we fail to keep these four dimensions in balance, we become unbalanced; we become one-dimensional cartoon characters.

In modern, materialist western culture, we live a one dimensional materialist life in the bodily world, the material world, of the bodily senses of sights, sounds, smells, touches, and tastes. We spend all of our time, energy, money, resources, and attention on cultivating material existence in the material realm. This is the meaning of consumer culture. We consume things, brands, images in order to try to be somebody; in order to satisfy our selves.



Television meditation: Try to sit still, without fidgeting, wiggling, or scratching. Don’t look around and day-dream.

The first time I tried to practice meditation, the meditation teacher told me to go home and sit still and quiet for twenty minutes. “Twenty minutes!” I guffawed. “I can’t sit still for twenty minutes.”

“You can watch television for one hour, can’t you?” the teacher said.

“Yes, I can watch television for two hours, if it is a good movie.”

“Okay. You go home and watch television for one hour,” he said. “But don’t turn the television on. You can watch the television for two hours. Can’t you watch your own mind for one hour?”

I thought the meditation teacher was outrageous. A crazy Zen master! “Sit and watch a television without turning it on!”

I *did* go home and watch the blank television screen for one hour, as an experiment. It was one of the longest and most difficult hours of my life. But it was also one of the most revealing and educational hours of my life. I learned many things about my own mind, how out of control and crazy the constant gushing flood of thoughts, feelings, desires, emotions, judgments and opinions, mind-chattering. One thing after another, cartoons, advertisements, rehashed conversations, pictures of memories passing. The overwhelming urge to get up and run away, to go do something “more interesting” or “important”. The overwhelming feeling that I was “wasting time.”

But at the end of that agonizing hour, I realized that I could hardly stand to be alone with my own thoughts; that I was alienated from my own inner life; that my mind was preoccupied with useless junk and trivial, irrelevant thoughts and opinions, neurotic desires, resentments, irritations and frustration. I also realized that meditation was important, and if I dedicated myself to the practice of meditation, I would be able to liberate myself from this craziness – this monkey-mind.

The Original Mind is luminous, clear light; it is tarnished by visiting defilement.

Clear Water: The mind is like clear water. If the water is full of mud, leaves, dirt and sticks, we can’t see anything. But if the water is still and calm, the dirt and trash floating around in the water will settle to the bottom, and then we can see the clean, pure nature of the water. We can see everything.

Likewise, when the mind is full of thoughts, sensations, memories, feelings, judgments – we can’t see anything at all! Our mind is already “clogged up”. Our mind is pre-occupied, overloaded, intoxicated, polluted. But when we hold the mind still by focusing the attention on the breath, eventually all these things “floating around” in our minds will settle down, and we will be able to see deeper and deeper into our own inner nature, inner truth, we call the Buddha-nature.

Dark Room: The practice of meditation is like going into a dark room from the bright sunshine outdoors. When we first walk into a dark room, we can't see anything. Our eyes are blinded by the bright sunlight outside. But if we stay in the room and stand still until our eyes adjust, then we can begin to see what is in the room: the table, chairs, pictures on the walls, lamps, windows. If we stay there long enough, we will realize that the room is not dark at all. It was our eyes that were blinded and couldn't see.

Meditation is the same. At first, when we begin to practice mindfulness-with-breathing, we can't see anything. We think "nothing is happening." We feel restless, bored, anxious, distressed. We're having "withdrawals." Because the mind is accustomed to the bright light of the senses and the intellect. But if we wait until the eyes-of-the-heart to adjust, we will see many things in the heart.

"Meditation is the way to achieve letting go. In meditation one lets go of the complex world outside in order to reach the serene world inside. In all types of mysticism, in many traditions, this is known as the path to the pure and powerful mind. The experience of this pure mind, released from the world, is very wonderful and blissful."

- Ajahn Brahm

Part II:

Change Your Mind: Meditation and World Peace

A Dharma talk by Santidhammo Bhikkhu

Meditation has the power to solve all the problems of the world. Meditation has the power to bring personal happiness to the individual, and to achieve World Peace. The human race is facing tremendous challenges unprecedented in the history of the world. People live in terribly distressful, brutalizing and dehumanizing conditions. Despite “progress” in material wellbeing in modern times, suffering seems to increase.

This short essay does not give a step-by-step teaching on meditation practice, but describes the benefits that practice, both for the individual and the society.

What are we facing?

Now is a time of cataclysms: Environmental devastation and global warming; extinction of species; population explosion; clash of civilizations with wars and genocides; globalization of militant-materialism and nihilistic hedonism; out-of-control technology; atomic weapons; fundamentalisms; human trafficking and slavery. The list could go on.

Young people face the future with anxiety or dread. Many just go numb in denial, or self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, or other intoxications such as shopping.

We now live in the “Post-Modern” age, they say, the “New World Order.” It is the end of the world as we know it. Something new is coming. But what kind of world will the future bring? What will be the character of the “New World Order?” Will it be the expansion and intensification of the present world order of greed, anger and hatred, and ignorance? Or will it be a time of peace, security, wellbeing and sustainability? The choice is in our hands. If we keep going on the path we’re on, we’re going to end up where we’re headed. If we want to end up in a different place, then we have to go a different direction.

In meditation, we can have an inward transformation, an awakening, that will help us see new directions, an alternative future to the one we’re now facing. Meditators can help show the world a way to meet the challenges bearing down upon us with increasing urgency.

When the Buddha attained awakening under the Bodhi tree, he said he has a shattering realization that greed, hatred, and ignorance is the cause of all the suffering in the world, both personal and collective.

The Buddha said all the suffering of the world arises out of ignorance - not understanding the nature of reality - not seeing clearly. In our ignorance, we cultivate passions of greed and hatred. When greed and hatred are expressed in the organized social realm, greed is manifest as materialist-consumer culture. Hatred becomes manifest as militarism and war. The more desire we have, the faster we will destroy the earth.

Today the world is full of greed, hatred, and ignorance. A “consumer culture” is based on greed, the ever increasing consumption of products. The modern civilization defines us as “consumers.” I looked the word “to consume” up on the dictionary, and discovered that it means “to utterly destroy” and “to completely annihilate.” Are we destroyers? Is our greed - our consumption - destroying the earth? Is our greed and consumption leading us into angry and violent conflicts with other cultures and nations?

Globalization means the rapid and aggressive expansion and intensification of this militaristic consumer culture to every region of the globe. This process has been underway for a long time – the expansion of the “free market” of materialistic consumer culture.

Mahatma Gandhi, almost seventy years ago, pointed out the disaster that would ensue when heartless “modern civilization” was fully realized. “This civilization takes note of neither morality or religion...I have come to the conclusion that immorality is often taught in the name of morality. Civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts and it fails miserably even in doing this. This civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people of [the West] that those who are in it appear to be half mad. They keep up their energy by intoxication. They can hardly be happy in solitude...

“There is not end to the victims destroyed in the fire of civilization. Its deadly effect is that people come under its scorching flames believing it to be all good. They become utterly irreligious and, in reality, derive little advantage from [civilization]...When its full effect is realized, we shall see that religious superstition is harmless compared to that of modern civilization....”

We are living in the last days of modern materialism. But what will come next?

I heard a physicist on National Public Radio discussing Werner Heisenberg and quantum theory, and he said the real meaning of quantum theory is that “the age of materialism is over.” The old scientific understanding of the world as a machine, or dead matter of natural resources available for our exploitation and consumption is no longer workable. The earth, the universe, is alive and mysterious, and mind pervades the universe. There are many dimensions beyond what we can perceive with the senses.

The second lesson of quantum theory, he said, is that the human person is part of the universe; the human person is not a detached observer of the material universe. Consciousness and mind are interactive with the material phenomenal universe.

As the Buddha discovered a long time ago, “everything arises from an ocean of mind. All that we are arises from the mind. With the mind we create the world. If we think and act with unskillful mind – full of greed, hatred and ignorance – then suffering will arise in the world. If we think and act with skillful mind – generosity, compassion and understanding – then happiness will arise in the world.”

What kind of world will the future bring? It is up to us to create that world, and meditators can show the way.

What is meditation?

Meditation is mind-culture, the development of the mind. Meditation is the “technology of the mind” – the science of the mind; how to transform the mind from ignorance to wisdom, from suffering to happiness. The Buddhist teaching is about the understanding the nature of the mind and reality. Enlightenment is attainment of wisdom and compassion. Buddhism is the teaching about Awakening of Enlightenment. The aim of Buddhist practice liberation, happiness, and peace.

At the present time, many Americans, especially young people, have developed a keen interest in the meditation teachings and practices of Buddhism. I am often asked to speak about Buddhism to comparative religion classes at Seattle University or the University of Washington, and the students always have a lot of questions about meditation.

The consumer culture and materialism of the west is not enough to make people happy, as evidenced by the epidemics of drug abuse, mental illness, random violence, gang wars, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and suicide. Indeed, the countries with the highest standard of living also have the highest suicide rates.

People in the west have become disillusioned with our materialistic consumer lifestyles. Material wellbeing is not enough to bring us happiness. Indeed, our high-tech materialistic-consumer culture has brought us atomic bombs, genocides, terrorism, and environmental devastation. Many people are looking for a way of finding peace of mind.

For the past two millennium, Buddhist pandits and scholars have been of great eastern intellectuals were “looking inward” to understand the nature of the inner-world of the mind, and they have developed a great understanding of the mind-culture. We western people can learn a lot from their experience and teaching.

In deep meditation practice (jhana or zen) we concentrate the mind, and “stop” the mind in stillness, and see deeply into the nature of reality. We see that everything is “empty of self” – as quantum theory shows, that the person is interactive with the flow of conditions of the universe. We see that everything is “impermanent,” transient, changing faster than lightening. We see that all things are incomplete and that we must not crave, and “consume” them. This “seeing” is like “waking from a dream,” the Buddha said. We are no longer hypnotized and intoxicated by the universe as it appears to the senses. We are liberated from desire and craving, and great joy and compassion fills the heart.

Meditation practice

Meditation practice is the technology of how to purify the mind from *kilesa* (defilements) that cloud, intoxicate, and defile the mind – mind states such as greed and craving, anger and aversion, restlessness and anxiety, boredom and lethargy, doubts, conceit, opinions, shamelessness.

The natural state of the mind is radiant and joyful. The Buddha said, “The true nature of the mind is clear awareness, but it is defiled by visiting defilements.” When the defilements are removed and cleared from the mind, the radiant, clear, joyful nature of the mind shines forth.

In meditation practice, we learn to hold the mind still and allow the defilements to dissolve and settle, like dirt settling in disturbed water. When the defilements are removed from the water, the clear and radiant nature of the water becomes apparent. This process is called *jhana* (concentrated mind or zen) in Buddhism. The mind becomes progressively more and more unified, clear, and purified as the negative mind states are neutralized and removed from the mind. This process of awakening is very liberating to the mind and heart. The meditator feels great joy as he recognizes the mind being liberated from the harassing and painful mind-states of anger, craving, restlessness, and so on.

The new level of clarity and wisdom also carries over into daily life. The mind is more alert and clam and creative, and the person responds to life with more presence and attention and insightful creativity.

Meditation and Personal Happiness

Meditation has the power to bring us personal happiness. Happiness comes from internal conditions, from within, and not from external conditions outside ourselves. A person can be rich, famous and powerful, and still be very unhappy because happiness does not come from these sources.

Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian monk, once said, “If we cannot be happy even during difficulties, what good is spiritual practice?” In order to be happy in life, we must find a basis of deep internal happiness that will endure even during times of great difficulty and pain, because, indeed, life will bring us difficulties and pain.

What is happiness? What is the source of happiness? Happiness is a mind full of living-kindness, compassion, joy and peace. Happiness is in the mind.

The heart of spiritual practice is the “cherish living beings” – to love and care for and protect and cultivate living beings – human beings and other living things, such as animals, birds, forests and the entire web of life.

Happiness is a heart filled with love and compassion. There is no other happiness. When the heart and mind is filled with love and compassion, there is no place left for pain and unhappy, miserable mind states such as fear and anxiety, hatred and anger, frustration and resentment, envy and jealousy and so on.

Love and hate are like fire and water. Happiness and unhappiness are like fire and water. They cannot exist in the same place at the same time. The joyful cool waters of love and compassion will extinguish the painful fires of anger and other painful mind states.

Meditation practice gives us the tools for developing enlightened mind states of love and compassion and understanding.

We attain happiness and fulfillment because, when we respond to the world with love and compassion, because we are fulfilling the meaning of life. “You exist for the benefit of every living thing,” the Dalai Lama said.

When we benefit others, we experience happiness. This is a surprising discovery in a consumer culture, when we have been conditioned to believe that happiness comes from attaining the objects of desire. We have been conditioned to believe that the purpose of life is to “make lots of money,” to be successful, famous, and powerful. We have been conditioned to think that happiness comes from enjoying ourselves with sex, pop music, food, vacations and other luxuries and status symbols.

But this is a mistake. This is not the purpose of life, and therefore pursuing these ends will not bring happiness.

The purpose of life is to benefit living beings, to cherish living beings, to nurture and care for and protect life. The more we invest our time, energy, resources into caring for people and other living things, the more meaningful and fulfilling our lives become. We become progressively more and more satisfied, content, and happy.

The external, material conditions of our lives are largely irrelevant to the attainment of happiness.

When it comes time to die, your entire life will pass before you. In a single flash, you will see everything you have ever done or thought. At that time, you will feel remorse for all the time, energy, money and resources that you have spent on your “self” because you will see that the self is now passing away. Your precious life will seem to have been wasted. But all the everything you have done for others will be a source of great happiness and joy for you, because you will see that your life was not wasted. Your life was a source of great joy and benefit for living beings, and the benefit will go on forever.

Meditation can help us see what is really important in life, today, and how to respond to life with understanding, day by day.

Meditation and Consumer Culture

We live in a “consumer culture” as I described above. Consumer culture is the realization and actualization of out-of-control greed. All of our lives, we have been conditioned – through the media, entertainment industry, commercials and advertising, the educational system – that we can buy happiness; that if we attain the object of desire, we will be satisfied and happy and content.

But according to Buddhist psychology, the more we feed desire, the stronger it grows and the deeper desire and craving sinks its roots into the heart and mind. Therefore, the more we attain the objects of desire, the more we indulge and gratify the self, the more we actually increase our capacity for suffering. Even a mountain of gold cannot satisfy desire.

But the opposite is also true. The more we neutralize and uproot desire and craving through restraint, self-discipline, and simple living, the more we actually increase our capacity for enjoyment, pleasure, satisfaction, contentment, and happiness.

Consumer culture leads us astray in the wrong direction, because it leads us “out of our minds” into the world of senses and material objects. We become intoxicated, drunken, with hallucinatory dreams of pleasure. Consumer culture conditions us to believe that we can “be somebody” by buying and consuming certain products. Our identity and ego, our “self” can be purchased by consuming Prada sunglasses and shoes, Jaguar or BMW and Mercedes cars, Nike, Louis Viton, Chanel, Calvin Klein, on and on. If we don’t consume these products, we are “nobody.”

Consumer culture makes us more and more selfish, self-indulgent, self-centered, self-absorbed. And over time, the self becomes imprisoned in a masquerade, a hallucinatory hall of mirrors and images. The social fabric is destroyed, with all of these selfish egos walking around bumping into each others insatiable appetites. People become alienated from one another and lose the sense of connection and belonging to others in the family and community and the world.

The young people suffering most in this loveless consumer culture, and they often rebel against the heartlessness of the culture in self-destructive or violent ways.

Meditation practice can help the individual cut through the illusions and deceptive messages and heartless conditioning of the culture, and find a deeper realization and meaning.

In the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha taught young people not to believe in anything with blind faith; not to accept the messages and conditioning of the culture around us, even if it seems that everyone else in the world believes a certain doctrine – such as consumerism - to be true. Don’t believe what the mass media presents as truth. Don’t believe the scholars and pundits and talking-heads and television preachers. But learn how to quiet the mind and look into your own heart, the Buddha said, and your own heart will tell you what is true and good. Your own heart will tell you to “walk this way.” You will know “in your guts” what leads to happiness and benefit, and what does not.

Meditation practice can help us awaken from the ignorant nightmarish illusions of consumer culture, to a more authentic, awakened realization of the true nature of reality.

Meditation and World Peace

The Buddha said that all the suffering in the world arises out of greed, hatred, and ignorance. War is the manifestation of hatred. War is fear, anger and hatred, fully developed. To end war and achieve world peace, we must remove the cause of war – fear, resentment, anger, and hatred in the mind. Meditation practice can help with this.

War is the realization and manifestation of anger and hatred - the unwholesome mind states that the Buddha warned us about. Nuclear weapons, the arms race, and wars don’t just happen accidentally, or inevitably by some predestined forces of nature. Nuclear bombs and other weapons, arose out of the meditations of men’s hearts as they sat in rooms watering the seeds of fear and hatred, until the visions of weapons and war appeared in their minds, and then eventually became fully realized.

Likewise, world peace will arise out of the visions of men and women, sitting in quiet rooms, watering the seeds of understanding, compassion and courage, until fear, anger and hatred are dispelled and neutralized. We will see that we cannot kill, bomb and torture our way to peace.

The Buddha said, “In this world, hatred has never overcome hatred. Only love can overcome hatred. This is the law of the universe, ancient and inexhaustible.”

The Buddha taught many methods of relieving the hatred and fear within the mind. The most important of these meditations is *Metta* (loving-kindness) meditation. In *Metta* meditation, we learn how to loosen the knots of fear, anger, and resentments, until they eventually dissolve. Then we can see that our enemy or opponent is only a human being, exactly the same as us – individuals who only want to be happy and who don't want to suffer.

With the eyes of loving-kindness and compassion, we see the humanity of the so-called enemy. We see their darling little children, their beloved grandmothers and grandfathers, their handsome young sons and graceful daughters. We see them working in their fields and gardens and orchards. We hear them making music and arts and worshipping in their temples. And when we see that they are human beings just like us, we can no longer wish harm against them.

In meditation we find the inner composure and awareness to listen deeply to our enemies, and hear their fears, and grievances. With the understanding gained from insight, we can begin to understand the conditions that have produced the conflict, and see ways to calm the fear, neutralize the angers and resentments, and address the grievances, and thereby change the conditions that have produced the aggression and war. This is wisdom and compassion in action.

Meditation practice also produces deep insight into the Buddhist philosophy of Conditioned Origination, the conditions that produce phenomenon. We see that everything that happens in the world, is produced by conditions and causes. We learn to pay more attention to the conditions and causes than the simple effects, because if we want to change something, we must change the conditions that produce it. This is what Buddhists mean by the words “wisdom” and “understanding.”

If we apply Conditioned Origination to the problems of war, we see that we can look deeply and understand the conditions that produced conflict and war, we can change those conditions and war will not appear. We remove or transform the conditions that produced fear, anger, and hatred in the minds of our enemies. If there is no anger, fear and hatred in their minds, they will have no desire to go to war with us. In fact, they will no longer be our enemies; they will be our friends.

This is the meaning of non-violence that Ghandhi was talking about.

In meditation practice we also gain the insight of “interbeing” - that everything is connected. Everything is inter-related. Everything is dependent on everything else. Therefore, other people – even our supposed enemies – are not really separate from us, but are somehow deeply connected to us in a very deep and real way.

It is very important for people in the United States to learn about meditation – how to calm the mind and develop evolved consciousness – Enlightenment. America is the only remaining “Super power” and this country has a huge impact on the entire world. We have a lot of power – economic power,

technological power, military power. But as a materialist-consumer culture, we do not have much “wisdom.” We do not know how to use this super-power with wisdom, understanding and compassion – to generate happiness and peace in the world, and relieve the suffering of the world.

If we use this super-power motivated by consumer greed and militaristic aggression, we will only create suffering in the world, for our own citizens and for others. If we use this super-power with understanding altruism and compassion, we can create happiness and world peace. Meditation practice can help American policy makers reduce desire and calm the mind. And the world will be a happier and more peaceful place as a result.

Meditation and the Environment

Perhaps the greatest of all problems now facing the human race is the crisis of the environment, global warming, and climate change.

The Buddha was deeply concerned with nature. “Know the grasses and the trees,” the Buddha said. “Know the worms and moths and different sort of ants. Know also the four footed animals small and great. Know the fish which range in the water... the birds that are born along on wing and move through the air.”

A cataclysmic crisis is facing the human race, unprecedented in the history of the world, almost beyond anything that can be imagined, if the warning from the worlds leading scientists are true. The younger generation will require great courage and confidence, and profound understanding, compassion and joy to respond to the looming and growing challenge that they are inheriting.

The human race is definitely going to have to go in new directions. Civilized, conventional living has so brutalized the human person that we lost touch with out true nature. In the process of socialization, we do violence to our inner selves in order to adapt to the consumer lifestyle, and survive in the materialist, aggressive, competitive milieu of collective living.

Consumer culture has devastated the natural world, the wilderness, the web-of-life. The human person is debased by consumer culture, and forgets his true nature. In meditation we return to the wilderness to resist to reconnect with the natural world, and refuse the debasement of this artificially constructed reality of conventional living. In our breathing we discover and awakening of our liberating connection to nature. We break free.

In our own times, many people are trying to break free: anarchists, poets, artists, drag queens, homeless vagrants and bums, environmentalist tree-sitters. They are “outsiders” who are searching for a new way to live in the world. Because consumer culture has condemned the wilderness and nature, and has elevated artifice, money, and materialism to the level of a religion. Consumer culture is morally debased .We’re on the wrong path. Consumer culture is obsolete. We need to go in a different direction because this one doesn’t work, in fact, it appears to be lethal and terminal.

This materialist/consumer culture – and increasingly the new global economy – is based on the need of a growing economy, endlessly expanding markets, maximum profit. It is damn near lethal. It has uprooted everything in its path: traditional cultures, the environment, religion. Everything must surrender

before this insatiable enterprise of moneymaking. But “progress” is destruction. “Development” is destruction.

Meditation is an invitation to an alternative reality in which the inner truth of experience which arises from nature, is more important and satisfying than the outward artificially constructed reality of social convention.

In meditation we have gone out there into “the no-man’s land” into the “wilderness.” And we may cultivate some insights to offer to the folks in our civilization who are searching for new directions, and new ways to live in harmony and balance with the web of life.

The Buddha said, “In the discipline of living alone it is the silence of solitude that is wisdom. When the solitude becomes a source of pleasure, then it shines in every direction. This is the sound of meditation of wisdom, of those who let the sense pleasures of materialism go.”

“Listen to the sound of the water. Listen to the water running through the chasms and rocks. It is the minor streams that make the loud noise; the great waters flow silently. The hollow resounds and the full is still. We can explain many things with understanding and precision. We can describe the way things are.”

In meditation practice, the Buddha taught the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana Sutta*) in which he said the four fields of meditation are body, feeling, mind, and dhamma. He explained that all meditation begins with the body, which he defined as earth-element, water-element, wind-element, and fire-element – solid, liquid, vapor, and heat.

In meditation practice, we awaken to the reality that the inner-earth and the earth element are not different. The inner liquidity of the body is not different from the water-element. And also the wind and fire elements. When these elements of fire, water, earth, wind, and mind come together, that is life. Nature is inside of us. We are rooted in nature and are not separate or independent or “above” nature. We are part of the web of life, the community of living beings.

Our wrong view, our ignorance, has harmed nature and is presently resulting in environmental crisis. Meditation can give us a correct understand, an inward awakening that we are rooted in nature, and the wisdom and joy and compassion that comes with that awakening. Then we will know how to live lives in harmony and balance with the natural world, with forests and all the community of living beings of animals, fish, birds, insects.

Out of the evolved consciousness will arise new technologies of sustainable living. And perhaps we will discover that it is not yet too late to repair some of the damage unenlightened consumer culture has done to the earth.

Conclusion

People who practice meditation preserve and cultivate a holistic world view that values balance, harmony, interbeing, and integration with the natural world. They see through the illusory world of conventional living in the artificially constructed environment of commerce and consumption and productivity, and discover a more authentic and natural way of living, in harmony with nature.

Often they spend time “meditating in the forest – at the roots of trees” or cliffs and caves, in the wilderness, from the city to solitude in the forest, where they listen to the inner voice of the heart alone.

People who practice meditation developed a more evolved consciousness, and enlightened awareness in which we can see through the illusions of materialistic-capitalist-culture that is rooted in selfishness, greed, competition and violence, and see an alternative way of being in the world.

We see how narrow and circumscribed our so-called civilized life is, how much we pay for the security and luxury. They see that “this is not the way things should be.”

In meditation, perhaps, we may cultivate some insights, prophetic visions, regarding this materialist consumer culture, and these insights might have something to offer to the folks in our civilization who are searching for a more satisfying mode of human existence.

We invite our fellow travelers to an alternative reality in which the inner truth of experience which arises from nature, is more important than the outward artificially constructed reality of social convention. We remind people that this competitive, authoritarian, exploitative, dominance-submission world is obsolete. The human race needs to go in a different direction because this one doesn't work. We can help the world find new possibilities and new directions.

In meditation, we cultivate the mind and heart, and mine the rich depths of the psyche, to access the rich treasures of the heart, and hopefully bring forth some valuable treasures of understanding and compassion to benefit the world.

That the true happiness of life comes from the development of inwardness, much more than from wealth and fame and power. The life of tranquility and material simplicity is more rewarding and fulfilling than the life blindly obsessed with impoverished materialist values.

Resources:

Vipassana Fellowship: <http://www.vipassana.com/meditation/>

Access to Insight: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/>

Breath by Breath, by Larry Rosenberg

Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond, Ajahn Brahm, Wisdom Publications.

Mindfulness with Breathing, Ajahn Buddhadasa, Wisdom Publications

Living Buddhist Masters, Jack Kronfield

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