

"MEDITATION"

"Meditation" (from Chapter 8 of "The Dalai Lama: A Policy of Kindness")

Would you like to participate in an experiment in meditation? First, look to your posture: arrange the legs in the most comfortable position; set the backbone straight as an arrow. Place your hands in the position of meditative equipoise, four finger widths below your navel, with the left hand on the bottom, right hand on top, and your thumbs touching to form a triangle. This placement of the hands has connection with the place inside the body where inner heat is generated. Bending the neck down slightly, allow the mouth and teeth to be as usual, with the top of the tongue touching the roof of the mouth near the top teeth. Let the eyes gaze downwards loosely -- it is not necessary that they be directed to the end of the nose; they can be pointed toward the floor in front of you if that seems more natural. Do not open the eyes too wide nor forcefully close them; leave them open a little. Sometimes they will close of their own accord; that is all right. Even if your eyes are open, when your mental consciousness becomes steady upon its object, these appearances to the eye consciousness will not disturb you.

For those of you who wear eye glasses, have you noticed that when you take off your glasses, because of the unclarity there is less danger from the generation of excitement and more danger of laxity? Do you find that there is a difference between facing and not facing the wall? When you face the wall, you may find that there is less danger of excitement of scattering. These kinds of things can be determined through your own experience.

Within meditations that have an object of observation, there can be two types of objects: external or internal. Now, instead of meditating on the mind itself, let us meditate on an external object of observation -- for instance, the body of a Buddha for those who like to look at a Buddha or a cross for those who like that, or whatever symbol is suitable for you. Mentally visualize that the object is about four feet in front of you, at the same height as the eyebrows. The object should be approximately two inches high and emanating light. Try to conceive of it as being heavy, for this will prevent excitement. Its brilliance will prevent laxity. As you concentrate, you must strive for two factors: first, to make the object of observation clear, and second, to make it steady.

Has something appeared to your mind? Are the sense objects in front of your eyes bothering you? If that is the case, it is all right to close them, but with the eyes closed, do you see a reddish appearance? If you see red with the eyes closed or if you are bothered by what you see when your eyes are open, you are too involved with the eye consciousness and thus should try to withdraw attention from the eye consciousness and put it with the mental consciousness.

That which interferes with the steadiness of the object of observation and causes it to fluctuate is excitement or, in a more general way, scattering. To stop that, withdraw your mind more strongly inside so

that the intensity of the mode of apprehension begins to lower. To withdraw the mind, it helps to think about something that makes you more sober, a little sad. These thoughts can cause your heightened mode of apprehension of the object, the mind's being too tight, to lower or loosen somewhat whereby you are better able to stay on the object of observation.

It is not sufficient just to have stability. It is necessary also to have clarity. That which prevents clarity is laxity, and what causes laxity is an over-withdrawal, excessive declination, of the mind. First of all, the mind becomes lax; this can lead to lethargy in which, losing the object of observation, you have as if fallen into darkness. This can lead even to sleep. When this occurs, it is necessary to raise or heighten the mode of apprehension. As a technique for that, think of something that you like, something that makes you joyous, or go to a high place or where there is a vast view. This technique causes the deflated mind to heighten in its mode of apprehension.

It is necessary within your own experience to recognize when the mode of apprehension has become too excited or too lax and determine the best practice for lowering or heightening it.

The object of observation that you are visualizing has to be held with mindfulness. Then, along with this, you inspect, as if from a corner, to see whether the object is clear and stable; the faculty that engages in this inspection is called introspection. When powerful steady mindfulness is achieved, introspection is generated, but the uncommon function of introspection is to inspect from time to time to see whether the mind has come under the influence of excitement or laxity. When you develop mindfulness and introspection well, you are able to catch laxity and excitement just before they arise and prevent their arising.

Briefly, that is how to sustain meditation with an external object of observation.

Another type of meditation involves looking at the mind itself. Try to leave your mind vividly in a natural state, without thinking of what happened in the past or of what you are planning for the future, without generating any conceptuality. Where does it seem that your consciousness is? Is it with the eyes or where is it? Most likely you have a sense that it is associated with the eyes since we derive most of our awareness of the world through vision. This is due to having relied too much on our sense consciousness. However the existence of a separate mental consciousness can be ascertained; for example, when attention is diverted by sound, that which appears to the eye consciousness is not noticed. This indicates that a separate mental consciousness is paying more attention to sound heard by the ear consciousness than to the perceptions of the eye consciousness.

With persistent practice, consciousness may eventually be perceived or felt as an entity of mere luminosity and knowing, to which anything is capable of appearing and which, when appropriate conditions arise, can be generated in the image of whatsoever object. As long as the mind does not encounter the external circumstance of conceptuality, it will abide empty without anything appearing in it, like clear water. Its very entity is that of mere experience. Let the mind flow of its own accord without conceptual overlay. Let the mind rest in its natural state, and observe

it. In the beginning, when you are not used to this practice, it is quite difficult, but in time the mind appears like clear water. Then, stay with the unfabricated mind without allowing conceptions to be generated. In realizing this nature of the mind, we have for the first time located the object of observation of this internal type of meditation.

The best time for practicing this form of meditation is in the morning, in a quiet place, when the mind is very clear and alert. It helps not to have eaten too much the night before nor to sleep too much; this makes the mind lighter and sharper the next morning. Gradually the mind will become more and more stable; mindfulness and memory will become clearer.

See if this practice makes your mind more alert throughout the day. As a temporary benefit your thoughts will be tranquil. As your memory improves, gradually you can develop a kind of special perception and understanding, which is due to an increase of mindfulness. As a long term benefit, because your mind has become more alert and sharp, you can utilize it in whatever field you want.

If you are able to do a little meditation daily, withdrawing this scattered mind on one object inside, it is very helpful. The conceptuality that runs on thinking of good things, bad things, and so forth and so on will get a rest. It provides a little vacation just to set a bit in non-conceptuality and have a rest.

There is yet another method of meditation which enables one to discern the ultimate nature of phenomena. This type of meditation involves analytical introspection. Generally, phenomena are divided into two types: the mental and physical aggregates -- or phenomena that are used by the I -- and the I that uses them. To determine the nature of this I, let us use an example. When we say John is coming, there is some person who is the one designated by the name John. Is this name designated to his body? It is not. Is it designated to his mind? If it were designated to his mind, we could not speak of John's mind. Mind and body are things used by the person. It almost seems that there is an I separate from mind and body. For instance, when we think, "Oh, my lousy body!" or "My lousy mind!", to our own innate mode of appearance the mind itself is not the I, right? Now, what John is there who is not his mind or body? You also should apply this to yourself, to your own sense of I -- where is this I in terms of mind and body?

When my body is sick, though my body is not I, due to the body's being sick it can be posited that I am sick. In fact, for the sake of the well-being and pleasure of the I, it sometimes even becomes necessary to cut off part of the body. Although the body is not the I, there is a relationship between the two: the pain of the body can serve as the pain of the I. Similarly, when the eye consciousness sees something it appears to the mind that the I perceives it.

What is the nature of the I? How does it appear to you? When you do not fabricate or create any artificial concept in your mind, does it seem that your I has an identity separate from your mind and body? But if you search for it, can you find it? For instances, someone accuses you, "You stole this." or "You ruined such and such," and you feel, "I didn't do that." At that time, how does the I appear? Does it appear as if solid?

Does some solid, steady, and strong thing appear to your mind when you think or say, "I didn't do that?"

This seemingly solid, concrete, independent, self-instituting I under its own power that appears at such a time actually does not exist at all, and this specific non-existence is what is meant by selflessness. In the absence of analysis and investigation, a mere I as in, "I want such and such," or "I am going to do such and such," is asserted as valid, but the non-existence of an independent or self-powered I constitutes the selflessness of the person. This selflessness is that is found when one searches analytically to try to find the I.

Such non-inherent existence of the I is an ultimate truth, a final truth. The I that appears to a non-analytical conventional awareness is the dependently arisen I that serves as the basis of the conventions of action, agent and so forth; it is a conventional truth. In analyzing the mode of subsistence or that status of the I, it is clear that although it appears to exist inherently, it does not, much like an illusion.

That is how the ultimate nature of the I -- emptiness -- is analyzed. Just as the I has this nature, so all other phenomena that are used by the I are empty of inherent existence. When analyzed, they cannot be found at all, but without analysis and investigation, they do exist. Their nature is the same as the I.

The conventional existence of the I as well as of pleasure and pain make it necessary to generate compassion and altruism, and because the ultimate nature of all phenomena is this emptiness of inherent existence, it is also necessary to cultivate wisdom. When these two aspects -- compassion and wisdom -- are practiced in union, wisdom grows more profound, and the sense of duality diminishes. Due to the mind's dwelling in the meaning of emptiness, dualistic appearance becomes lighter, and at the same time the mind itself becomes more subtle. As the mind grows even more subtle, reaching the subtlest level, it is eventually transformed into the most basic mind, the fundamental innate mind of clear light, which at once realizes and is of one taste with emptiness in meditative equipoise without any dualistic appearance at all, mixed with emptiness. Within all having this one taste, anything and everything can appear; this is known as "All in one taste, one taste in all."

These are a few of the types of meditation practiced in the Tibetan tradition. Of course there are many other techniques such as mantra and so forth. Perhaps now we could have some discussion.

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Question: Why is it better to meditate in the morning?

DL: There are two main reasons. Physically, in the early morning -- once you are used to it -- all the nerve centers are fresh, and this is beneficial. Also, there is a difference just in terms of the time. Further, if you have slept well, you are more fresh and alert in the morning; this we can see in our own experience. At night I reach a point where I cannot think properly; however, after sleeping and the waking in the early morning, that thing, which yesterday I could not properly think

through, automatically appears more clearly. This shows that mental power is much sharper in the morning.

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Question: What is the most expedient means for overcoming resistance to meditation?

DL: Five faults are explained as obstacles to meditation. The first is laziness; second is to forget the advice on the object, that is, to forget the object; next are laxity and excitement; then failure to apply an antidote when laxity or excitement are present, and the last is to continue applying the antidotes when laxity or excitement have already been overcome. These are called the five faults. Eight antidotes are explained for them. The antidotes to laziness are, first of all, the faith that intelligently sees the value of meditative stabilization, the prime value being that without it the higher paths cannot be generated. In dependence upon ascertaining the good qualities of meditative stabilization, the aspiration which seeks to attain those qualities is induced. By means of that, exertion comes whereby you eventually attain pliancy causing body and mind to be free from unfavorable states and to be serviceable in a virtuous direction such that whatever virtue is done is powerful. These four are the antidotes to the first fault, laziness.

It is helpful not to practice too long in the beginning; do not over-extend yourself; the maximum period is around fifteen minutes. The important thing is not the length of the session but the quality of it. If you meditate too long, you can become sleepy, and then your meditation will become a matter to becoming accustomed to this state. This is not only a waste of time but also a habit that is difficult to eliminate in the future. In the beginning, start with many short sessions -- even eight or sixteen sessions in a day -- and then as you get used to the process of meditation, the quality will improve, and the session will naturally become longer.

A sign that your meditative stabilization is progressing well is that even though your meditative session may be long, it will feel as though only a short time has passed. If it seems that you have spent a long time in meditation even though you have spent only a little, this is a sign that you should shorten the length of the session. This can be very important at the beginning.

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Question: Could you say something about effort? Isn't a great deal of effort necessary?

DL: Effort is crucial in the beginning for generating a strong will. We all have the Buddha nature and thus already have within us the substances through which, when we meet with the proper conditions, we can turn into a fully enlightened being having all beneficial attributes and devoid of all faults. The very root of failure in our lives is to think, "Oh, how useless and powerless I am!" It is important to have a strong force of

mind thinking, "I can do it," this not being mixed with pride or any other afflictive emotions.

Moderate effort over a long period of time is important, no matter what you are trying to do. One brings failure on oneself by working extremely hard at the beginning, attempting to do too much and then giving it all up after a short time. A constant stream of moderate effort is needed. Similarly, when meditating, you need to be skillful by having frequent, short sessions; it is more important that the session be good quality than it be long.

When you have such effort, you have the necessary "substances" for developing concentration. Concentration is a matter channelizing this mind which is presently distracted in a great many directions. A scattered mind does not have much power. When channelized, no matter what the object of observation is, the mind is very powerful.

There is no external way to channelize the mind, as by a surgical operation; it must be done by withdrawing it inside. Withdrawal of the mind also occurs in deep sleep in which the factor of alertness has become unclear; therefore, here the withdrawal of the mind is to be accompanied by very strong clarity of alertness. In brief, the mind must have stability staying firmly on its object, great clarity of the object, and alert, clear, sharp tautness.

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Question: What is the relationship of the mind and afflictive emotions?

DL: The very entity of the mind, its nature of mere luminosity and knowing, is not polluted by defilements; they do not abide in the entity of the mind. Even when we generate afflictive emotions, the very entity or nature of the mind is still mere luminosity and knowing, and because of this we are able to remove the afflictive emotions. If you agitate the water in a pond, it becomes cloudy with mud; yet the very nature of the water itself is not dirty. When you allow it to become still again, the mud will settle leaving the water pure.

How are the defilements removed? They are not removed by outside action nor by leaving them as they are; they are removed by the power of antidotes, meditative antidotes. To understand this, take the example of anger. All anger is impelled and polluted by improper conceptuality.

Both the object of our anger and subject, oneself, appear to exist concretely, as if established by way of their own character. Both seem forcefully to exist in their own right. But as I was saying earlier, things do not actually exist in this concrete way. As much as we are able to see an absence of independent self-existence, that much will our conception of over-reification and its assistance to anger be lessened.

The sign that our perceptions are superimposing a goodness or badness beyond what is actually present is that while desirous or angry we feel that the object is terrifically good or bad but afterwards when we think about the experience, it is laughable that we viewed the object that way; we understand that our perception was not true. These afflicted states do

not have any valid support. The mind which analytically searches for the independent self-existence of an object finds ascertainment of its lack of independent self-nature through valid reasoning, and thus this kind of understanding does have a valid foundation. Like a debate in court, one perception is based on reason and truth, while the other one is not. When the evidence is sufficient, in such a debate the true view eventually overpowers the other because it can withstand analysis.

It is impossible for the mind simultaneously to apprehend one object in contradictory ways. With respect to one object, therefore, as you get used to understanding its non-inherent nature, not only is it impossible at that time to generate a conception of inherent nature but also as strong as the correct realization becomes, so much, in general, does conception of its opposite weaken in force.

To generate such wisdom we engage in meditation because our minds, as they are now, are not very powerful. Our mind is presently scattered; its energies need to be channeled like the way water in a hydroelectric plant is channeled to create great force. We achieve this with the mind through meditation, channeling it such that it becomes very forceful, at which point it can be utilized in the direction of wisdom. Since all the substances for enlightenment exist within ourselves, we should not look for Buddhahood somewhere else.

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Question: Does emptiness also mean fullness?

DL: It seems so. Usually, I explain emptiness is like a zero. A zero itself is nothing, but without a zero you cannot count anything; therefore, a zero is something, yet zero.

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Question: Would you please say something about the nature of //mandalas//?

DL: //Mandala//, in general, means that which extracts the essence. There are many usages of the term //mandala// according to context. One type of mandala is the offering of the entire world system, with the major and minor continents mentally constructed, to high beings. Also, there are painted mandalas, mandalas of concentration, those made out of colored sand, mandalas of the conventional mind of enlightenment, mandalas of the ultimate mind of enlightenment, and so forth. Because one can extract a meaning from each of these through practicing them, they are called mandalas.

Although we might call these pictures and constructed depictions mandalas, the main meaning is for oneself to enter into the mandala and extract an essence in the sense of receiving blessing. It is a place of gaining magnificence. Because one is gaining a blessing and thereupon developing realizations it is called an extraction or assumption of something essential.

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Question: How does one choose a teacher of spiritual subjects or know a teacher to be reliable?

DL: This should be done in accordance with your interest and disposition, but you should analyze well. You must investigate before accepting a lama or teacher to see whether that person is really qualified or not. It is said in a scripture that just as fish that are hidden under the water can be seen through the movement of the ripples from above, so also a teacher's inner qualities can, over time, be seen a little through that person's behavior.

We need to look into the person's scholarship -- the ability to explain topics -- and whether the person implements those teachings in his or her conduct and experience.

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