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Mind

# Disciplined

*A vast number of people go through life with their minds in a state of stress and therefore easily confused. Some seek an antidote for such stress through meditation. Attention to and enthusiasm for meditation is on the increase in today's society for that reason.*

*Understandably, there are those who exploit the commercial potential of this new commodity, and thus one sees a proliferation of 'meditation parlours' and 'meditation clinics', so to speak. One also finds people who practice meditation alone without the guidance of the Buddhist Doctrine. Both these methods are discouraged in the Dispensation of the Buddha.*

**Question:**

**Is it true that meditation has gained prominence in contemporary society?**

Life is full of pressures – pressure for time to do things, opportunities to be gained and protected, in short life itself. However much people acquire money or property, the pressures they impose on life do not become less.

Society today is engulfed in a huge effort to improve the world we live in. However, it has overlooked the importance of improving its state of mental health. Meditation is a medium that soothes and tones the mind to a state of well-being. Mental well-being is a necessity in today's society. The enthusiasm for meditation as evident today is very encouraging.

**Question:**

**Would the benefits of meditation accrue in this life itself, or, is it a spiritual asset for the series of rebirths?**

Good results of meditation will be evidenced in life. That is the nature of the meditative process. Supposing a person is in meditation for one hour. An onlooker will only see that person seated for one hour. No one will see that person's concentration or absorption. Supposing that person arises from the meditative absorption and speaks to an onlooker about the mental peace

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that was experienced while in meditation. Then the onlooker sits down and starts to meditate. Supposing the on-looker is unable to reach a state of concentration. Then, the onlooker may conclude that the person who spoke about mental peace did not, after all, reach such a state of concentration.

Actually, whether one gets results from meditation depends on one's reaching a high level of concentration. The Supreme Buddha has shown several ways in which a person can prepare the mind for meditation. Contemplation of loving-kindness, mindfulness of in-out breathing, contemplation of loathsomeness of body, reflection upon the physical and mental elements of the foundation of the process of perception (***dhatu manasikara***), contemplation of the impermanent quality of all things: these are important phases of these exercises.

If one does not succeed in completing an exercise one may try another, and persist in the effort until one sees success. The Supreme Buddha discoursed that preparing the mind by meditation leads to enlightenment. After becoming enlightened the Supreme Buddha led a life free from defilements. His guidance to meditation will always remain a perfect model for us.

### **Question:**

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**There are those who say that no meditator of modern times has been able to achieve levitation through meditation, not even one inch. Is there a truth in that?**

Actually, levitation is not the objective and goal of meditation. ***Iddhi*** is the term for magical power. Magical powers constitute one of the six kinds of higher spiritual powers. Meditation seeks inner peace through a calm mind. The Supreme Buddha has discoursed that we should not think of magical powers as the objective, but seek freedom from suffering. The Fortunate One has exhorted disciples to practice the four foundations of mindfulness and proceed beyond suffering and sorrow.

Meditation is for understanding the reality of life and attaining **Nibbana**<sup>1</sup>. It is not for walking above the surface of the earth without touching it. On certain occasions the Supreme Buddha used His supernormal powers to appear instantly before a person or persons when the need arose. However, He showed disciples the way to make the mind resolute and clear to understand the truth.

Perhaps questions about levitation as a quality-measure of meditation arises out of not understanding the psychological

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<sup>1</sup> Nibbana – enlightenment or Aranhantship.

dynamics of meditation, or in some instances due to scurrilous disrespect for non-material things.

**Question:**

**What meditations are best targeted towards realizing Nibbana?**

There are two meditations that should be practiced by those seeking Nibbana. They are: tranquillity and insight (***samatha, vipassana***). Both these are cultivated through the four foundations of mindfulness. Concentration becomes strong by practicing mindfulness and tranquillity. One gains knowledge according to reality (***yathabhuta ñana***) by cultivating insight. One becomes free from defilements by gaining knowledge according to reality through the practice of meditative insight. When one becomes free from defilements one progresses towards Nibbana.

**Question:**

**Can a person become an Arahant by practicing meditative insight (*vidharshana*) without practicing concentration (*samadhi*)?**

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of eight links. Three of these, namely right effort (***samma vayama***), right mindfulness (***samma sati***) and right concentration (***samma samadhi***) belong to the category of concentration. Without these three wisdom cannot thrive. So, insight (***vidharshana***) only without concentra-

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tion would make one walk along five of the eight Noble Paths. Thus, the Doctrine does not show a way of becoming an Arahāt by following the route of meditative insight only.

The meaning of taking refuge in the Dhamma is to faithfully accept the Noble Eightfold Path and walk along it. The path consists of three parts: virtue, concentration and wisdom (*sila, samadhi, pañña*). If one expects to realize the Dhamma but rejects concentration before even walking the Noble Eightfold Path one misses the benefits of the Eightfold Path. Therefore one may lose the opportunity to gain anything of value. We must understand here that a Noble Disciple becomes an Arahāt by fully accomplishing virtue, concentration and wisdom.

### **Question:**

### **Can person gain wisdom by aspiring to gain wisdom?**

Buddhists in Myanmar practice aspiration to gain wisdom. This practice has influenced Sri Lanka to some extent. It is not known when the practice began in Myanmar or Sri Lanka. However, there is no reference in the Doctrine to support this practice.

The Supreme Buddha has discoursed on gaining knowledge in conformity with truth and reality (*yathabhuta ñana*). Gaining knowledge in conformity with truth and reality is possible only by directing one's wisdom – not by aspiration.

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Learning and understanding the Doctrine, practicing it diligently, are processes that take much effort. Aspiration cannot be a substitute for that immense effort. The only aspiration that has a place in gaining wisdom is the resolve to understand the Dhamma. That resolve has another name. It is called energy (*viriya*).

**Question:**

**How does a person get initiated into meditation?**

A person who desires to meditate must necessarily hear the Doctrine with faith and attention. He or she must gain a correct understanding of the Dhamma.

One who does not know the subject of meditation will constantly lean on an instructor. One will be curious about what the next instruction would be. Thus one would be totally dependent on the instructor. Such a person may therefore not have the opportunity to learn the Dhamma well.

It is therefore important to learn the Doctrine first. Learning the Dhamma and meditation are not two different isolated things – they are interactive.

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There is a supposition doing the rounds in Sri Lanka that one does not need to know the Doctrine to meditate – that the knowledge of the Doctrine will arise as meditation progresses. This is far from the truth. There are practices verging on the occult and the bizarre that pass off as meditations. Many of them are commercial ventures and frauds. Dishonest persons may prefer to teach practices without the need to explain. However, no meditator can benefit by doing things that he or she does not understand with wisdom. The truth is, the more the disciple understands the Doctrine the more he or she will benefit from meditation.



Translated by

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