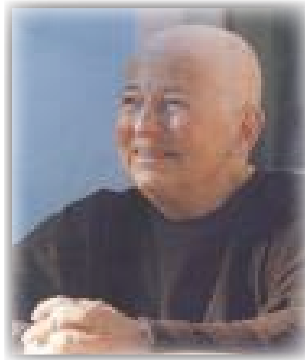


THE MEDITATIVE MIND

THROUGH MINDFULNESS, CLEAR COMPREHENSION AND CALMING THE SENSES, A MEDITATIVE MIND ARISES AND OUR PRACTICE FLOURISHES, AS **AYYA KHEMA** EXPLAINS HERE.



People are often surprised to find it is difficult to meditate. Outwardly it seems to be such a simple matter, to just sit down on a little pillow and watch one's breath. What could be hard about that? The difficulty lies in the fact that one's whole being is totally unprepared. Our mind, senses, and feelings are used to trade in the market place, namely the world we live in. But meditation cannot be done in a market place. That's impossible. There's nothing to buy or trade or arrange in meditation, but most people's attitude remains the same as usual and that just doesn't work.

We need patience with ourselves. It takes time to change to the point where meditation is actually a state of mind, available at any time because the market place is no longer important. The market place doesn't just mean going shopping. It means everything that is done in the world: all the connections, ideas, hopes and memories, all the rejections and resistances, all our reactions.

In meditation there are may be momentary glimpses of seeing that concentration is feasible, but it can't be sustained. It constantly slips again and the mind goes right back to where it came from. In order to counteract that, one has to have determination to make one's life a meditative one; it doesn't mean one has to meditate from morning to night. I don't know anyone who does. And it doesn't mean we cannot fulfill our duties and obligations, because they are necessary and primary as long as we have them. But it means that we watch our-

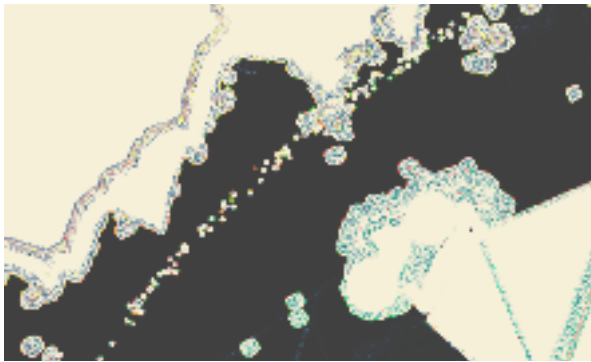
selves carefully in all our actions and reactions to make sure that everything happens in the light of the dharma—the truth. This applies to the smallest detail such as our food, what we listen to or talk about. Only then can the mind be ready with a meditative quality when we sit down on the pillow. It means that no matter where we find ourselves, we remain introspective. That doesn't mean we can't talk to others, but we watch the content of the discussion.

That is not easy to do and the mind often slips off. But we can become aware of the slip. If we aren't even aware that we have digressed from mindfulness and inner watchfulness, we aren't on the meditative path yet. If our mind has the dharma quality established within, then meditation has a good chance.

The more we know of the dharma, the more we can watch whether we comply with its guidelines. There is no blame attached to our inability to do so. But the least we can do is to know the guidelines and know where we're making mistakes. Then we practice to get nearer and nearer to absolute reality, until one day we will actually be the dharma.

There is this difference between one who knows and one who practices. The one who knows may understand the words and concepts but the one who practices knows only one thing, namely, to become that truth. Words are a utilitarian means not only for communication, but also to solidify ideas. That's why words can never reveal the truth, only personal experience can. We attain our experiences through realizing what's happen-

ing within and why it is as it is. This means that we combine watchfulness with inquiry as to why we're thinking, saying and reacting the way we do. Unless we use our mind in this way, meditation will be an on-again, off-again affair and will remain difficult. When meditation doesn't bring joy, most people are quite happy to forget about it.



Without the meditative mind and experience, the dharma cannot arise in the heart, because the dharma is not in words. The Buddha was able to verbalize his inner experience for our benefit, to give us a guideline. That means we can find a direction, but we have to do the traveling ourselves.

To have a meditative mind, we need to develop some important inner qualities. We already have their seed within, otherwise we couldn't cultivate them. If we want flowers in our garden and there are no seeds, we can water and fertilize, yet nothing will grow. The watering and fertilizing of the mind is done in meditation. Weeding has to be done in daily living. Weeds always seem to grow better in any garden than the flowers do. It takes a lot of strength to uproot those weeds, but it is not so difficult to cut them down. As they get cut down again and again, they eventually become feeble and their uprooting is made easy. Cutting down and uprooting the weeds needs sufficient introspection into ourselves to know what is a weed and what is a flower. We have to be very sure, because we don't want to pull out all the flowers and leave all the weeds. A garden with many weeds isn't much of an ornament.

People's hearts and minds usually contain equal amounts of flowers and weeds. We're born with the three roots of evil: greed, hate and delusion, and the three roots of good: generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. Doesn't it make sense to try and get rid of those three roots which are the generators of all problems, all our unpleasant experiences and reactions?

If we want to eliminate those three roots, we have to look at their outcrops. They're the roots underneath the surface, but obviously a root sprouts and shows itself above the surface. We can see that within ourselves.

Caused by delusion, we manifest greed and hate. There are different facets of greed and hate, and the simplest and most common one is "I like," "I want," "I don't like," and "I don't want." Most people think such reactions are perfectly justified, and yet that is greed and hate. Our roots have sprouted in so many different ways that we have all sorts of weeds growing. If we look at a garden we will find possibly thirty or forty different types of weeds. We might have that many or more unwholesome thoughts and emotions. They have different appearances and power but they're all coming from the same roots. As we can't get at the roots yet, we have to deal with what is above the surface. When we cultivate the good roots, they become so mighty and strong that the weeds do not find enough nourishment any more. As long as we allow room for the weeds in our garden, we take the nutriment away from the beautiful plants, instead of cultivating those more and more. This takes place as a development in daily living, which then makes it possible to meditate as a natural outcome of our state of mind.

At this point in time we are trying to change our mind from an ordinary one to a meditative one, which is difficult if one hasn't practiced very much yet. We only have one mind and carry that around with us to every activity and also to the meditation. If we have an inkling that meditation can bring us peace and happiness, then we need to make sure we have a meditative mind already when we sit down. To change it from busyness to quiet at that moment is too difficult.

The state of mind which we need to develop for meditation is well described by the Buddha. Two aspects of importance are mindfulness and the calming of the senses. Internal mindfulness may sometimes be exchanged for external mindfulness because under some circumstances that is an es-

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sential part of practice. The world impinges upon us, which we cannot deny.

External mindfulness also means to see a tree, for instance, in a completely new way. Not with the usual thoughts of “that’s pretty,” or “I like this one in my garden,” but rather noticing that there are live and dead leaves, that there are growing plants, mature ones and dying ones. We can witness the growth, birth and decay all around us. We can understand craving very clearly by watching ants, mosquitoes, dogs. We need not look at them as a nuisance, but as teachers. Ants, mosquitoes and barking dogs are the kind of teachers who don’t leave us alone until the lessons are fully learned. When we see all in the light of birth, decay, death, greed, hate and delusion, we are looking in a mirror of all life around us, then we have dharma on show. All of us are proclaiming the truth of dharma constantly, only we don’t pay enough attention.

We can use mindfulness to observe that everything in existence consists of the four elements, earth, fire, water, air; and then check out what is the difference between ourselves and all else. When we take practice seriously and look at all life in such a way, then we find the truth all around as well as within us. Nothing else exists.

This gives us the ability to leave the marketplace behind where the mind flits from one thing to the next, never has a moment’s peace, is either dull and indifferent or hateful and greedy. But when we look at that which really is, we’re drawing nearer to what the Buddha taught, out of his compassion for all the beings that are roaming around in samsara from one dukkha to the next. He taught, so that people like us may awaken to the truth.

We should neither believe nor disbelieve what we hear or read, but try it out ourselves. If we give our wholehearted attention to this practice, we will find that it changes our approach to living and dying. To be whole-hearted is a necessity in anything we do. If we get married and are half-hearted about it, that cannot be very successful. Half-hearted practice of dharma results in chaotic

misunderstanding. Whole-heartedness may have at its core devotion, and a mind which goes beyond everyday thoughts and activities.

Another facet which goes together with mindfulness, is clear comprehension. Mindfulness is knowing only, without any discriminating faculty. Mindfulness does not evaluate or judge but pays full attention. Clear comprehension has four aspects to it. *First: “What is my purpose in thinking, talking or doing?”* Thought, speech and action are our three doors. *Second: “Am I using the most skillful means for my purpose?”* That needs wisdom and discrimination. *Third: “Are these means within the dharma?”* This means knowing the distinction between wholesome and unwholesome. The thought process needs our primary attention, because speech and action will follow from it. Sometimes people think that the end justifies the means. It doesn’t. Both means and end have to be within the dharma. *And fourth: “Has my purpose been accomplished, and if not, why not?”*

If we live with these steps in mind, we will slow down, which is helpful for our reactions. No inactivity is not the answer. But rather we need to cultivate the meditative quality of the mind, which watches over what we are doing. When we use mindfulness and clear comprehension, we have to give time to investigate. Checking prevents mistakes.

Our wrong thinking creates the danger of making bad karma and takes us away from the truth into nebulous mind-states. The dharma is straightforward, simple and pure. It needs a pure mind to stay with it. Otherwise we find ourselves outside of it again and again.

External mindfulness can also extend to other people, but here we need to be very careful. Seeing and knowing others engenders negative judgment. If we practice external mindfulness towards other people, we have to realize that judging others is making bad karma. We can pay attention with compassion. People-watching is one of the most popular pastimes but usually done with the intention of finding fault. Everyone who’s not enlightened has faults; even the highly developed non-returner has yet five fetters to lose. What to say about ordinary worldlings? To use other people as our mirror is very helpful because they



reflect our own being. We can only see in others what we already know about ourselves. The rest is lost to us.

If we add clear comprehension to our mindfulness and check our purpose and skillful means we will eliminate much grief and worry. We will develop an awareness which will make every day, every moment an adventure. Most people feel bogged down and burdened. Either they have too much or too little to do; not enough money to do what they like or they frantically move about trying to occupy themselves. Everybody wants to escape from unsatisfactory conditions, but the escape mechanism that each one chooses does not provide real inner joy. However with mindfulness and clear comprehension, just watching a tree is fascinating. It brings a new dimension to our life, a buoyancy of mind, enabling us to grasp wholeness, instead of the limitations of our family, job, hopes and dreams. That way we can expand, because we're fascinated with what we see around and within us, and want to explore further. No "my" mind, "my" body, "my" tree, but just phenomena all around us, to provide us with the most fascinating, challenging schoolroom that anybody could ever find. Our interest in the schoolroom increases as mindfulness increases.

To develop a meditative mind, we also need to calm our senses. We don't have to deny our senses, that would be foolishness, but see them for what they are. Mara the tempter is not a fellow with a long tail and a flaming red tongue, but rather our senses. We hardly ever pay attention to what they do to us when they pull us from an interesting sight to a beautiful sound, and back to the sight, the touch, the idea. No Peace! Our constant endeavor is to catch a moment's pleasure.

A sense contact has to be very fleeting, because otherwise it becomes a great dukkha. Let's say we are offered a very nice meal which tastes extremely good. So we say to our host: "That's a very nice meal, I like it very much." The host replies: "I have lots of food here, please stay around and eat for another two or three hours." If we did, we would not only get sick in body but also disgusted in our mind. A meal can last twenty or at the most thirty minutes. Each taste contact can only last a second, then we have to chew and swallow. If we were to keep it in the mouth any longer, it would become very unpleasant.

Maybe we feel very hot and go to take a cold shower. We say to our friend waiting outside: "Now I feel good, that cold water is very pleasant." Our friend says: "We have plenty of cold water, you can have a shower for the next five to six hours." Nothing but absolute misery would result. We can enjoy a cold shower for ten or twenty minutes at the most.

Anything that is prolonged will create dukkha. All contacts pass quickly, because that is their nature. The same goes for sight. Our eyes are continually blinking. We can't even keep sight constant for the length of time we're looking at anything. We may be looking at a beautiful painting for a little while and really like it. Someone says: "You can stay here and look at the painting for the next five hours. We're not closing the museum yet." Nobody could do that. We can't look at the same thing a long time, without feeling bored, losing all awareness, or even falling asleep. Sense contacts are not only limited because of their inability to give satisfaction. They are actually waves that come and go. If we are listening to some lovely music, after a few hours the same music becomes unbearable. Our sense contacts are mirroring a reflection of satisfaction, which has no real basis in fact. That's Mara constantly leading us astray.

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There's a pertinent story of a monk in the Buddha's time which relates the ultimate in sense discipline. A married couple had a big row and the woman decided to run away. She put on several of her best saris, one over the other, wore all her gold jewelry and left. After a while the husband was sorry that he had let her go and followed her. He ran here and there, but couldn't find her. Finally he came across a monk who was walking along the street. He asked the monk if he'd seen a woman in a red sari with long black hair and lots of jewelry around her neck and arms. The monk said: "I saw a set of teeth going by."

The monk was not paying attention to the concepts of a woman with long black hair, a red sari, and lots of jewelry, but only to the fact that there was a human being with a set of teeth. He had calmed his senses to the point where the sight object was no longer tempting him into a reaction. An ordinary person at the sight of a beautiful woman with black hair, a red sari and lots of jewelry, running excitedly along the street, might have been tempted to follow her. A set of teeth going by, is highly unlikely to create desire. That is calming the senses.

If we come upon a snake, it's not an object of dislike, or destruction, but just a sentient being that happens to be around. That's all. There's nothing to be done, nothing to react to. If we think of it as a snake that could kill us, then of course, the mind can go berserk, just as the monk's mind could have done, if he had thought, "Oh, what a beautiful woman."

If we watch our senses again and again, this becomes a habit, and is no longer difficult. Life will be much more peaceful. The world as we know it consists of so much proliferation. Everywhere are different colors, shapes, beings and nature's growth. Each species of tree has hundreds of subspecies. Nature proliferates. All of us look different. If we don't guard our senses, this proliferation in the world will keep us attracted life after life. There's too much to see, do, know and react to. Since there is no end to all of that we might as well stop and delve inside of ourselves.

A meditative mind is achieved through mindfulness, clear comprehension and calming the senses. These three aspects of practice need to be done in everyday life. Peace and harmony will result, and our meditation will flourish.

Ayya Khema (Ayya means Venerable) was born in Germany in 1923. Between 1960 and 1964 she traveled with her husband and son throughout Asia, during which time she learned to meditate. In 1979 she became a Theravada nun. She was instrumental in the establishment of two Theravada monasteries, one outside Sydney, Australia, and the other in Germany, as well as a Buddhist women's center in Sri Lanka and Buddha-Haus in Germany. She authored 25 books on meditation and Buddhism, written in English and German, and translated into seven languages. She died in 1997.