

The Bodhisattva Promise

By H.H. the 17th Karmapa
Trinlay Thaye Dorje

On March 17, 2006, the day after inaugurating the Lhabab Stupa in Valle de Bravo, Mexico, H.H. the 17th Karmapa Trinlay Thaye Dorje returned to the stupa to give the Bodhisattva Promise. Before giving the promise, he gave an explanation of its significance. These are his words.



The Bodhisattva Promise is one of many Buddhist paths we can take in order to bring ourselves and others to the ultimate happiness. We all have the ability and the potential to be great bodhisattvas.

Yet, this is often not possible because we lack the right circumstances. This is due to negative circumstances, like yielding to our emotions. By doing this, we actually distance ourselves from this great path. What we don't realize is that it is very hard to get this precious opportunity.

This existence, or rebirth, is one of countless rebirths we have taken. Out of these countless lives, this human rebirth that you currently have taken is very, very precious. This is because we can understand the

dharma and practice the Bodhisattva Way. Therefore, this opportunity or rebirth that we have now is referred to in Buddhist terms as a "precious human vessel" or a "precious human rebirth." This rebirth is actually priceless simply because we can have the wisdom and compassion to enter into the Bodhisattva Path. Other realms of existence, such as the animal realm, have their own intelligence and wisdom, but they do not compare to the compassion and wisdom that can be obtained with a human rebirth.

You may be familiar with the other realms of existence, such as the hungry ghosts and hell states. These other circumstances or realms exist as a result of our positive or negative

actions. They are not without a cause; nobody just created them. Whether the outcomes are positive or negative, whatever we experience stems from our own actions and thoughts. So, once again, this precious human rebirth is a great tool and opportunity to improve our loving kindness, compassion, and wisdom.

It is our nature, as sentient beings, to seek happiness and avoid suffering. Because of our confusion, which is caused by negative emotions, more often than not we choose the wrong path. This is because of our habit of taking our existence as sentient beings to be permanent; we see ourselves as permanent. This is where we make our first mistake. We are impermanent because we and all of



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this existence came together based on cause and effect. The existence that we call samsara is actually the sum of all the negative causes.

In order to seek ultimate happiness and truly avoid suffering, we have to understand our nature. It is a question that we should ask ourselves and remind ourselves of all the time. In a very simple way of putting it, our nature is compassion and loving kindness. And, in order to apply the compassion, we must also have wisdom. This is the ground from which we can generate bodhicitta.

We all find ourselves in difficult



In many ways, we think we are far better than anything or anyone. From this attachment, we naturally develop our negative emotions. When one has the opportunity for a negative emotion to mature, all of its family will come along as well.

The second disturbing emotion is anger. Anger is definitely one of the more powerful negative emotions. All of them are very strong, but anger not only creates negative impressions, it is also very destructive. For example, even after we take the Bodhisattva Promise or enter the Bodhisattva Way, some negative

>>> Glossary

Bodhicitta:

Has two aspects: The relative means perfecting ourselves through the six liberating actions for the benefit of all beings. The absolute is spontaneous and effortless activity without thought or hesitation. The experience of subject, object, and action as a totality makes this intuitive state automatic.

Bodhisattva:

One who has taken the great promise to rescue all beings from suffering and guide them to enlightenment.

Paramitas:

The six liberating actions of a bodhisattva for the benefit of all beings: generosity, ethics, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom.

Samsara:

The beginningless and endless wheel of conditioned existence.

understand the nature of our negative emotions. If you go into the details and discover how many negative feelings you actually have, there are something like 84,000 negative emotions. To simplify this, you can put them into three different categories. We hear about these three every day. They are used in every culture and in every language.

Because of each of our different cultures, languages, and mentalities, we have different understandings of what these three disturbances mean. In Buddhist terms, the first one is attachment, the second is anger, and the third is ignorance.

With attachment, we mean the attachment to ourselves. We see ourselves as the physical form—our body. We also think that our thoughts or our mind are the “self.” We believe that if we take care of the physical form and obey whatever it needs, it will bring us happiness. The fact is that it doesn’t bring us any kind of happiness. Instead, we are more of a servant to this physical form. This form that we have right now is a result of mostly mixed and some negative actions.

Therefore, through our attachment, we see our physical form or our “self” as being permanent and perfect.

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circumstances can arise. In that moment, if we lack awareness or carefulness, we will give in to our negative emotion. If that negative emotion is hatred, and if you develop this emotion toward another sentient being, then you will do something very harmful. And just because of that one moment of anger, you will completely destroy the very roots of your bodhicitta.

Some of us have taken the Bodhisattva Promise and entered the Bodhisattva Way in many previous lives. With that one moment of anger,

states, and we experience negative emotions or results. This is because of our confusion. The way to break that confusion is to improve our wisdom—meaning that we have to improve our knowledge and understanding of the dharma, so that in time, we can let go of our ego.

The best way to do this is to



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➤ stand that it means not just one or two sentient beings, but all sentient beings. For that reason, all beings are equally important to us, and we try to develop a compassionate mind. By developing a compassionate mind, we can truly help them find a happiness that is ultimate. From this, we can generate bodhicitta.

After we make the promise, we get a bodhisattva name—but this is only the first step. We have far more to do and improve upon. Once we make the promise and receive the name, it doesn't mean that we are all buddhas or that our work is done. This kind of thinking is less intelligent than not knowing anything at all. There is no free ticket to enlightenment. It is important to understand that it is only the beginning. Once we take the promise and understand how things are, we have to put forth our best efforts to improve our opportunity. From this point, we apply ourselves on the Bodhisattva Path.

In order to apply this path of a bodhisattva, there are countless positive methods that we can use. Yet, there is one method that has been used by all previous and present bodhisattvas. It is called the Six Paramitas.

The Six Paramitas are: generosity, meaningful behavior, patience, enthusiastic effort, meditation, and wisdom. All six have to be combined. The first five paramitas are the structure that you build, and wisdom is the result. It has been taught this way many times, because it is a very logical approach, one that allows us to engage or use the methods properly. As a beginner, one cannot accomplish all of the paramitas in one go.

The easiest paramita to apply is generosity, because it is simply about giving. We all have the ability to apply this. Generosity is categorized into three different parts. The first is materialistic generosity. This is something we can all train, such

as helping the poor and so on. The second type of generosity is helping the one that needs help, both physically and mentally. It is more about giving a hand and bringing others security. But the paramita of generosity is really referring to explaining or giving the teachings of the dharma. This is the best tool we can use. It opens our minds so we can develop wisdom. This is the ultimate application of generosity. From this, all the paramitas can develop.

All the paramitas complement one another very well. So, in order to improve the paramita of generosity, we have to apply the paramita of meaningful behavior. The meaningful behavior involved in the act of generosity is that we are generous because we ultimately want to help others. And we help others without wanting anything in return. It seems that it is our habit to want something in return after helping another. That is the nature of samsara. To avoid this habitual reaction, we need to practice the paramita of meaningful behavior.

In actuality, all of the paramitas have much wider explanations and meanings. For example, the paramita of meaningful behavior involves everything we want to do, everything we want to accomplish, both worldly and/or spiritually. If you want to accomplish something, you have to stick to the things that are necessary. In this case, if you want to practice the bodhisattva way, you must engage yourself in what is necessary. And what is necessary is that we become more mindful and careful, meaning that we are always mindful of whatever we think, say, and do. We need to constantly watch ourselves with regard to the three gates of body, speech, and mind. It is through these three gates that we can do something negative and thus ruin everything.

In a very simple way, one can say that it is more or less about being on the lookout for negative circumstance coming your way. If you guard the three doors of body, speech, and mind, then you have a better chance of avoiding negative emotions. From this, you gain more positive opportunities.

To practice the bodhisattva way perfectly, one must apply the paramita of

patience. When we think or talk about patience, we typically think about it in a general way. For example, if someone is really making you angry, in order to be patient you would not say anything and instead walk away. This is patience on a very relative level; but, ultimately, the real generosity of patience in its essence is that we have the patience to understand and bear the truth of all phenomena. Of course, developing patience in everyday circumstances is very positive. It is necessary and improves our mind very much. It makes us better people and develops our behavior. The positive benefits of patience are countless. And simply improving ourselves and engaging in these paramitas will naturally bring all the right circumstances together.

The biggest obstacle we face to accomplish anything is laziness. It is also something that we all know from everyday life. Laziness can be a very big obstacle, especially when you are practicing the bodhisattva way. The perfect antidote for laziness is to be joyful, to give yourself a lot of enthusiasm in the activity that you want to accomplish and achieve.

When we say "effort," we generally think of working hard. This is, of course, something that is necessary from time to time. But when we are talking about practicing the bodhisattva way, effort means to enjoy whatever you do. We are not performing the activity as if it were a burden or because we were made or ordered to do it. Instead, we perform such activities because of the positive benefit that will come from it. Therefore, it is very important that we remind ourselves from time to time to bring the necessary effort or enthusiasm with us when we come across obstacles. This can be any kind of obstacle, but, most specifically, obstacles that disturb our mind.

The second-to-last paramita is the development of meditation. It is equally as important as the rest of the paramitas, because without this we cannot understand the truth of all phenomena. The first thing we must do is to understand what the paramita of meditation is. There are many different interpretations of meditation all over the world. When living in

this materialistic and hectic time, some forms of meditation can be very useful; they can bring some peace of mind. But when we talk about meditation in the bodhisattva path, it is quite different. It is not just about meditating on an object or nothingness. Instead, it is about bringing about the circumstances so you can calm your mind. We need a very stable mind, because if we are constantly disturbed, we cannot concentrate on anything. But, at the same time, one must not swing to the other extreme. We must not get too dull, or the result will be that we fall asleep. Instead, we are in a state where you can actually control your mind. You can bend your mind wherever you want to. In the case of the bodhisattva way, we want to bend our mind toward perfect wisdom. So, in order to improve our primordial wisdom, we must have the paramita of meditation.

Finally, we come to the paramita of wisdom. When we say wisdom, it can be seen as a very general word and mean a lot of things. When we engage in different types of wisdom, we can have tremendous results. If we engage in worldly wisdom, such as politics or science, it brings about huge results. In science, for example, we can see an improvement of technology on a daily basis. Science is almost at the point where it can make everyone believe in a lot of impossible things. This has its own positive benefits, but with this type of wisdom we will not obtain perfect happiness, lasting happiness. No matter how strong or how great our worldly wisdom, it cannot save us from our negative emotions. It might even bring out negative circumstances in some ways, and then we engage in more negative emotions. Of course, there are great types of knowledge. With positive motivation, we can bring about good results, but it is not the ultimate result.

The ultimate wisdom would be to realize the nature of our mind or the nature of phenomena. This is perfect wisdom. In these terms, it is also called the non-worldly wisdom, meaning that it is a wisdom that will understand the nature of phenomena as being "selfless," without inherent existence, just as we understand

that it is not permanent. With that type of method or application, we can bring our bodhicitta to fruition.

Everything that I have said so far was given in a very brief way. There is a saying that it is like food for thought. I hope this is true; but, ultimately, it is up to you. I would greatly appreciate it if you would put some effort into finding the real nature of mind. 🙏



Questions and Answers (...Continued from page 36)

how people live in Africa, or ask them to keep a stiff upper lip and be proper examples to others. In this way, they begin to understand that it is possible to be unshakable. One can keep one's style through life. Thus, one becomes a healthy pillar in their lives. Of course, they will keep going up and down for years. They will like us

if they feel successful, dislike us when our example seems unreachable, and then gradually see that they learn. One Buddhist teaching I understood from the first day—and already knew—is that highest truth is highest joy. And I live that. When meeting people, I always aim to spread the best energy any of us might have, and for the benefit of all. In youth, one wants to lead, but later in life, the totality becomes more important. Then, one examines who has the finest contribution to the group and lets them speak. Here, one may act without sentimentality. If the examples offered are a waste of time, one should block them and put something else on the table. Life is too short for unconvincing presentations.

Some years ago, I advised my students to compare their minds to cigar factories that only serve millionaires, and to examine all thoughts or feelings from this point of view. Only what is truly perfect is passed on. If the product or mental state is crummy, insecure, or strange, it is sent back.

Are jealousy and envy the same, and how do you treat them?

I never had much experience of either, but one could think that people could be dead tomorrow. Then how can we envy them, be jealous of anything or not wish them every happiness? 🙏



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6 Liberating Actions – the Paramitas

Editor's Note: Common to all Buddhist teachings is the role of the bodhisattva, one who has made the great and generous promise to rescue all beings from suffering and guide them to enlightenment. The work of the bodhisattva is summed up in the paramitas, the six liberating actions. The following text is an excerpt from the new and revised edition of Lama Ole Nydahl's The Way Things Are (to be published in 2007 by O Books www.o-books.com).

Whoever wants to succeed in life, and perhaps also hold responsibility for others, will have to skirt a few constricting rules. With welfare states encroaching ever more on people's lives and the search of human beings for freedom, it is hardly advisable to be totally law-abiding in the world. For this reason, Buddha taught the way of the bodhisattvas. It supplies the motivation and insight for practical people who maintain societies and have families. With this attitude, they can transform their everyday choices and experiences into steps toward liberation and enlightenment.

Sanskrit has the word *ita*. It means an action that is simply good (i.e., that would be recognized as such whether on Greenland or in the Congo). Buddha, however, speaks of *param-itas*. What does this prefix *param* mean? It means "trans" or "that which takes one beyond." "Normal" kind deeds fill mind with pleasant impressions. They mature under given conditions as states of happiness, making mind confident. Mind then dares to observe that which knows and surrounds its experiences; that is, itself. As long as the notion persists that a subject does something to an object,

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positive acts do not liberate but should still be performed. They provide the basis for future happiness and mental freedom. Activity only liberates beings when combined with the insight that the doer, the thing done, and the receiver are all interdependent parts of a whole and that they possess no permanent own nature. Given that such satisfying wisdom is new to non-Buddhist cultures and in most cases will unfold only gradually, which skillful actions can best anchor them in one's life?

1 The advised entry is through **generosity**, the first paramita. One may well see the world as a splendid hall decorated for huge celebrations. Everything is there—every richness of potential experience is present—but if nobody starts to dance, no party evolves. One breaks any ice and affirms one's confidence in beings' fine qualities through giving, in this case by showing one's trust in what is shared. Since such acts are inspiring, others will pass them on for the benefit of many.

The traditional Buddhist texts mention three kinds of basic generosity, which will obviously be expressed in different proportions according to the prevailing conditions of the times, cultures, and countries involved. The first kind of generosity is giving what people need for their immediate survival. It benefits them for awhile but makes them dependent. Second, one supplies education, which enables people to take care of both themselves and others



during this life. Finally, one shares the liberating and enlightening teachings, which alone bring lasting happiness. Pointing to mind's absolute qualities, they stay effective in this life, at death, and during all future lives, until mind recognizes its timeless essence and reaches enlightenment.

For the 85 percent of humanity that lives today in overpopulated countries, poor and in misery, victims of religions that prefer quantity to quality in their human resources and, like Islam and Catholicism, forbid them the necessary family planning, this classical division among three kinds of generosity is still valid. In the richer countries, however, where many die from too much fat around the heart and where our cities surround people with so much glass, steel, and concrete that they can hardly get together physically anymore, the most important gifts on the first two levels of generosity are probably sufficient neighborliness, trust, time, and warmth. The ultimate gift for idealists is more visible today than ever before: Guiding others in bringing enlightening teachings to them, one really helps them grow. There exists no better tool than generosity for showing how precious others are to us.

The bonds generated through this fine quality are basic and should be developed meaningfully. Since they are such effective motors for growth, it is important that one not squander them through clumsy or harmful actions and words.

2 For that reason, Buddha's second liberating action is **meaningful behavior**. Educated people cannot use the word "morality" for this. They know that the ruling classes worldwide always use morality against those below. For example, for over a thousand years in Europe, church and state worked seamlessly together, blocking the creativity of highly capable populations. Whoever the state did not catch in this life, the church promised to send to hell afterward. Still today, the Islamic world functions on fear and suppression, with some childish rewards for the afterlife thrown in. So it is surely dangerous to use one single word for such a wide range of lifestyles and behavior. It can be manipulated much too easily. To encourage people to reflect before making knee-jerk judgments about others and to activate their life-experience, Buddhists prefer expressions like "useful activity," "intelligent comportment," or "circumspective action."

The terms refer to three actions of body, four of speech, and three of mind. And while Buddha's ten pieces of advice in the Small Way (Skt. Hinayana) focus on what it is better not to do, say, and think, the mindset of his more mature students on the Great Way (Skt. Mahayana)

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calls for a positive approach to causality. Here he shows the potential of beings' three "gates" for useful actions: One may use one's body beneficially to protect others, to give them what they lack, and for non-celibates to give them love. The task of speech is to say what is, to bring people together, to show them the world, and to guide them to meaning and joy. Finally, working skillfully with mind means wishing everything good to everyone, sharing joyfully in the meaningful actions that others perform, and trusting causality also in one's own life. "Thinking clearly" would today imply finding places for Western reasoning inside Buddha's life oriented "real" systems. These work and bring results in daily life.

3 The third liberating action preserves the accumulated good energies. Under the heading of **patience**, it also includes perseverance and endurance, for example going through hardships to learn. Since anger so massively destroys the good impressions that one has built up, Buddha calls patience "the most beautiful but most difficult garment that one can wear."

4 Buddha's fourth recommendation is to develop **enthusiastic effort**, or the "joy of doing." This means to gladly perform what brings benefit, thereby overcoming laziness. Whoever lacks such expansive diligence will become older without becoming wiser, and nothing is more directly transferred from one life to the next than one's level of activity. Therefore, it is important to go beyond one's comfort zone and habitual limits. Regardless of what one may wish to learn or achieve, it requires energy. Even the rapid building up of muscles happens best beyond the threshold of pain, and results will only be satisfying if one leads one's projects with decisiveness and joyful effort.

The benefit of these four liberating actions should be evident to anyone with life experience: Generosity brings human connections. Meaningful behavior directs them well. Patience makes them firm. And enthusiastic action

gives them power and growth.

5 Whoever wants to increase their capacities and solidify their realization should definitely learn to **meditate**. Non-meditators cannot stabilize their mind, but instead shift from one emotion to another, often without being aware of it, and this wears them out. As recent brain research shows more and more, the results of meditation are visible and beneficial in many ways. Research also shows that imprints of useful or harmful thoughts, words, and deeds (called karma) may be skillfully enhanced or dissolved through absorption, leading to confidence and good feelings. If this is not done, such tendencies affect people as heavy moods and disturbing emotions. Worst of all, if harmful feelings control body and speech, one may easily destroy something expensive, lose face, and make enemies. **Meditation**, here the fifth of Buddha's advised actions, encompasses both the simple methods for calming and holding mind to create a mental distance to events, and the more exquisite method of knowing mind. This may happen either through the





recognition of emptiness and the view of the Great Seal (Skt. Mahamudra) or by awakening the body's inherent wisdom energies through deep breathing. Most useful in all situations is identifying with one's preferred buddha form or lama. Using this last approach, called Guru Yoga, one may effectively retain the feeling of freshness and meaning also between one's meditations. Alternatively striving for mind's development and at the same time relaxing any expectations, the afore mentioned paramitas are brought to the level of enlightenment by and also nourish the sixth of the liberating actions, that of **wisdom**.

In the Buddhist texts, the five actions mentioned above are often compared to strong legs. They provide the power to make one's life meaningful and to benefit all. But where do they take one? The eyes that give them direction are the deep wisdom of Buddha's 84,000 teachings. Here, building on the liberating understanding of the Small Way that there exists no lasting or vulnerable "self," "ego,"

or "I," Buddha's Great Way continues to negate any truly existing "outer" world. This goes beyond both materialism and nihilism, bringing about one's freedom from concepts and ultimately full enlightenment. The observation on both levels is that for something to truly exist there must be some permanence, but all things inner and outer change everywhere and all the time. Buddha expressed this truth through his statement: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form; form and emptiness cannot be separated." Contemporary scientists in Hamburg, Germany, recently collided quarks, the smallest parts of the atom, sending them back into space. Shortly after this, near San Francisco, CA, other scientists were amazed to see particles appear in an absolute vacuum. Removing disturbing feelings and then keeping ideas of being and non-being from limiting reality, Buddha frees mind to express its full potential. Here it is recognized that only awareness is lasting and all pervading.

At this point, doing good becomes self-evident. And why? Because all things are interconnected. Thus, what-

ever one sets into motion and does not decondition through meaningful acts or meditation will necessarily return to oneself.

The Bodhisattva Promise formulates one's wish to develop for the good of all beings. Above all, it targets anger, the most harmful of mental states. As it is an inner practice, logic and motivation are the realms to watch. One's most effective tools are thus the transformation of feelings and seeing events as passing dreams. The recognition that beings behave the way they feel should evoke protective compassion—but not politically correct leniency—toward criminal ideologies or behavior. In addition, one should spread the understanding that anger and brutality are signs of weakness and impotence, not power. This is to make such roles less attractive, even to the immature. Deep psychological methods for accomplishing this belong on the third and ultimate level: the Diamond Way.

Until a few years ago, this part of Buddha's advice—not to give attention to negative states but rather to transform or simply observe them—was not part of most

and reaction function, and whatever one gives out always comes back. Something absolutely negative must therefore automatically self-destruct and cannot exist.

Therefore, Buddha explains the root "evil" not as a mega-turbo-devil smelling of sulfur, but as levels of ignorance. They direct one to search for happiness through actions that can only bring the opposite result. However, being ultimately illusory, they can be removed. A dualistic view and any moralistic finger pointing are therefore meaningless. The ultimate essence of all beings is their buddha nature; and although one creates a potential for pain, mind has the power, through methods and view, to remove whatever has not yet matured.

Evolving means enjoying what is pleasant as blessings to be shared with others and experiencing anything difficult as processes of learning and of mind's freeing itself of negativity. One here wishes that all beings have not only joy but also its lasting cause, that of meaningful activity. What follows logically from this is the wish that they may also be without pain and the negativity that

"The world needs beings with this view and a powerful, forward-looking motivation, with little sentimentality and no disturbing feelings."

psychological theories. Still today, "realist" groups resist that view. If one compares the customers in this form of therapy, however, who get stuck in assigning guilt and in countless expressions of anger, or chronically unhappy feminists, with mature practitioners of Buddhism, it becomes clear that the thick-skinned Far Eastern approach is preferable. Although precise crackdowns on harmful behavior, including preemptive ones, are often useful and appropriate, anger and paranoia become a growing burden on everyone. Looking back over the last six decades in the quickly evolving West, blame—also for one's own shortcomings—was laid first on the Nazis and Communists, then on imperialism, after that on society generally, and most recently on dominating mothers. To the many who cannot see the future danger of today's rampaging Muslim mobs, it is child-molesting priests or uncles. Whereas anything harmful to people should of course be stopped, the habit of blaming others is a serious shortcoming. It makes one feckless and weak. Whether one likes it or not, the law of cause and effect applies to all beings and things. What others do to one now, one must therefore have done to them in an earlier life and not managed to purify. Action

causes it. Two further wishes round this inner disposition off and make it complete: that others may have the greatest happiness totally beyond suffering and that they may feel the same strong love for all, making their actions ultimately meaningful. Anger, on the other hand, halts one's natural disposition to benefit others. It thus disturbs the human exchange, makes people lonely, and in addition destroys their good seeds for later happiness. The world needs beings with this view and a powerful, forward-looking motivation, with little sentimentality and no disturbing feelings. With that arises an unshakable conviction in everyone's inherent buddha nature. It becomes logical that truth, to be absolute, must be all pervading and that one can only imagine enlightenment elsewhere because it is already inherent in one. Thus, the consequential way of the accomplishes—the level of Buddhist yogis—is established. 🙏



About Lama Ole Nydahl

Lama Ole Nydahl is one of the few Westerners fully qualified as a lama and meditation teacher in the Karma Kagyu Buddhist tradition. In 1972, after completing three years of intensive meditation training, Lama Ole began teaching Buddhism in Europe at the request of H.H. the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, the spiritual head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. He has since transmitted the blessing of the lineage in a different city nearly every day, traveling and teaching worldwide as an authorized lama. His depth of knowledge and dynamic teachings inspire thousands of people at his lectures and retreats in North and South America, the UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, and Asia.

THE BRAIN in Meditation

by Peter Malinowski

Part 2

PART 1 of this article, published in *Buddhism Today's* Spring/Summer 2006 issue (number 17), discussed the role of the scientific investigation of Buddhist meditation within the context of the emerging dialogue between Buddhism and science. The exchange between the two developed through different phases: from conflict or ambivalence during colonialist times, to ideas of compatibility of science and Buddhism; and from there to the current understanding that both spheres can complement each other, a view held by many proponents of the Science-Buddhism dialogue today.

PART 2 of this article will focus on what science has discovered about the brain in meditation and will consider the relevance of this understanding. While in principal it is possible to discuss studies of various meditations using various measures, this article will concentrate on studies that analyze how Buddhist meditations influence brain and brain activity.

METHODOLOGIES

Broadly speaking, research in this area follows one of two main lines of investigation: Studies either look at what happens to the brain during meditation, or they analyze the effects or changes that are brought about by meditation. In scientific jargon, these two aspects are often referred to as states and traits of meditation, respectively. The investigation of meditation states is fairly straightforward. Measurements of brain activity during meditation are compared to measurements taken when the participant is not meditating (the baseline measurement). The differences

between these measurements are said to indicate what happens to the brain during meditation. An extension of this approach compares different phases of meditation directly to each other.

A widely used approach for investigating the long-lasting effects, or traits, of meditation is similar to the principles underlying medical studies. Here, meditation may be seen as an intervention or treatment to move participants from a relatively unhealthy condition to a healthier one. Such studies would measure certain variables before the start of meditation training, and again after several weeks or months of training, and assess the changes. Ideally, these changes would then be compared to a control group, which would receive a placebo treatment, such as guided participation in a standard relaxation program. Any changes observed in the meditation group different from those present in the control group would then be interpreted as resulting from the meditation training. The relevance of the findings may be further increased by investigating whether the observed changes or improvements remain stable over longer periods of time. This scientific approach to meditation is frequently employed when analyzing the effects of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR). Developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues, MBSR is a meditation-based intervention that aims to alleviate the problems of patients with chronic diseases aggravated by stress, such as fibromyalgia and psoriasis.

Another way of looking at the lasting effects of meditation practice is to compare novice meditators to experts with many years of meditation experience. To draw valid conclusions from such studies, it is crucial to ensure that novices and experts differ only with respect to their experience in meditation, while all other aspects are as similar as possible. But even if this criterion is met, it is not possible to establish a clear causal relation between extended meditation practice and the observed differences with this cross-sectional—or snapshot—

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approach. Even if significant group differences are found, it is impossible to determine whether these effects are brought about by years of meditation practice or whether they were already present when the participants first started meditating. The observed differences could be the reasons for “success” in meditation, while others lacking specific qualities could give up more easily.

These approaches and their variations have been used for many years to investigate the effects of meditation on a variety of measurements, including physiological measurements (e.g., heart rate, oxygen consumption, hormone levels in the blood), neurophysiological measurements (e.g., electroencephalography and other brain imaging procedures), and psychological indicators of anxiety, experienced stress or pain, depression, or cognitive performance.

However, attempts to integrate these findings into a coherent whole have so far been unsuccessful, and no clear picture of the effects of meditation has emerged. The reasons for this are probably manifold. Although the types of meditation investigated are diverse, they are often not clearly described or distinguished. Of course, meditations with different goals and techniques will have different effects. If all meditations are lumped together and considered to be the same, contradictory findings should be expected. In addition, early studies of meditation tended to lack the required scientific rigor, equipment, and/or expertise to still be relevant today.

TECHNOLOGIES

Developments in meditation research became particularly exciting when new, sophisticated technologies became available. They allow us to observe what is happening in the brain while specific cognitive tasks are performed or participants are in various emotional states. The oldest and most widely used technology is Electroencephalography (EEG), where electrodes are placed on the scalp of the head to measure voltage deflections that correlate with mental states or processes. In a typical EEG setup, 16 to 256 electrodes are placed on the scalp to detect voltage changes with as much precision as possible.

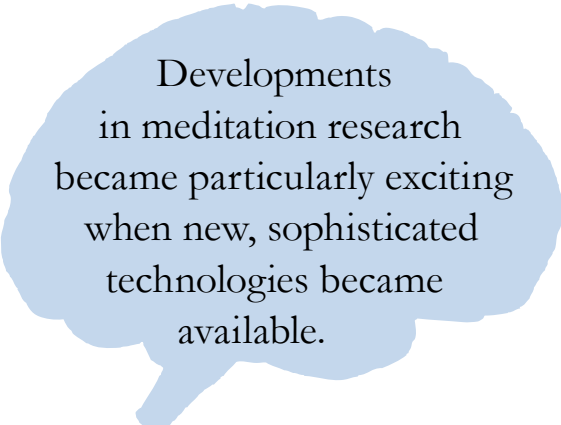
During Positron Emission Tomography (PET), a short-lived radioactive substance releasing gamma rays is injected into the blood stream. When an area of the brain increases its activity, the blood flow into this area also increases and transports the radioactive

substance there. Sensors arranged around the head detect these gamma rays and, with some sophisticated algorithms, it is then determined which areas of the brain experienced a significant increase in blood flow. Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) also utilizes the increase in blood flow to determine brain activity related to specific cognitive processes. In this case, however, differences in magnetic properties of tissue are exploited for determining the changes.

BRAIN RHYTHMS AND MEDITATION

The main focus of meditation research using EEG technology has so far been on rhythmic brain activity. These brain rhythms, which are traditionally classified into different frequency bands, are routinely used to identify different states of mind or awareness and, for instance, are prominent markers of the four sleep stages one goes through at night. Probably the most solid finding regarding neurophysiological changes due to meditation is that brain activity within the alpha band (8 Hz–14 Hz) increases in power during meditation compared to a resting period. And, as comparisons between meditators and non-meditators show, meditators even tend to have stronger alpha rhythms when they are not meditating. While for a long time it was assumed that these increases in alpha power are robust changes emerging from meditation, later studies suggest that they are not as specific to meditation as expected. As high alpha power is a reliable

If all meditations
are lumped together and
considered to be the same,
contradictory findings should be expected



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indicator of relaxation, it is likely that these changes merely reflect a general increase of relaxation levels resulting from meditation. This is possibly the only feature that even very different types of meditation have in common.

Of course, the conclusion that meditation leads to more relaxed states of mind is not unexpected. To gain a more precise understanding of the influence of meditation on the alpha rhythm, studies need to distinguish between different types of meditation and carefully analyze the distribution of alpha activity over the whole head.

A recent study went in this direction and yielded interesting results. A US-based group of scientists, headed by Richard Davidson, built on evidence that stronger activity in left-frontal areas than right-frontal areas of the brain is related to the experience of various positive emotions, while the opposite pattern reflects more negative emotional states and traits. It is also known that a reduction in alpha power measured over a certain area of the brain is indicative of an increase of brain activity in this area. Thus, comparing the alpha power over the left and right frontal areas of the brain gives an indication of current emotional states and can be used to estimate dispositional, long-lasting mood factors. In Davidson's study, a group of participants took part in the MBSR Program for eight weeks, while a control group did not receive this training. The results showed a clear increase in left-frontal brain activity (i.e., reduction of alpha power) in the meditation group—directly after the meditation training as well as four months later (see figure 2a, region A). Also, those who took part in the training program reported (via a specific questionnaire) less anxiety after completing the training. Another intriguing aspect of the study was that those involved in meditation training had a stronger immune response after receiving an influenza vaccine, suggesting that meditation may positively influence the immune system. This study is of particular significance, as it provides a first indication that brain processes involved in the experience of emotions may directly be influenced by meditation. It thus hints toward the positive effects of meditation on our emotional life.

The alpha rhythm was also used to test the assumption that meditation has an effect on the quality of perceptual awareness. As explained in Part 1 of this article, the reduction in alpha activity that appears immediately after presentation of a stimulus is called alpha blocking. Usually, when the same stimulus is repeatedly presented, the alpha blocking is reduced and ultimately does not occur anymore, an effect interpreted as habituation to a stimulus. In meditators particularly trained in meditations that aim at reducing the influence of sensory impressions (a form of Hindu meditation), the habituation was very pronounced. In contrast, Buddhist meditators, trained in being mindfully aware of every aspect of experience, did not show the typical pattern of habituation; their alpha blocking did not diminish over time. As some studies failed to replicate this effect, it is currently unclear how substantial it is.

Another frequency band that has been linked to meditation is the theta band, with frequencies between 4 Hz and 7 Hz. Theta activity that is observed centrally over the frontal part of the brain is correlated with attention-demanding tasks and is linked to a reduction of state and trait anxiety. Several studies found an increase of theta power as state and trait effect, while others found a decrease, for instance, when comparing resting periods and meditation in novice meditators. However, as some of the data relating to theta activity appear to be contradictory, the relevance of this frequency for meditation is not yet fully established. Further studies will need to distinguish between different forms of meditation more clearly and use more electrodes to analyze the scalp distribution of theta activity.

The most recent development is to analyze yet another frequency band, the gamma band. Some scientists equate gamma with the frequency of more or less exactly 40 Hz, but the accepted understanding is that it includes frequencies from about 30 Hz to 90 Hz. All these studies are characterized by highly specialized and advanced procedures of recording and analyzing the EEG data, which open up a new line of investigation that until recently was not available.

In 2001, a Swiss research group headed by Dietrich Lehmann published data from a single case study with a highly experienced meditation master of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Vajrayana (Diamond Way) Buddhism who went through a typical Tibetan Buddhist meditation sequence consisting of the four phases: visualization,¹ mantra, self-dissolution, and self-reconstruction. During the first phase, the meditator calls a certain buddha aspect to mind, a hologram-like form of energy and light that represents a specific quality of the enlightened mind. During the subsequent mantra phase, a connection to the buddha form is established on the level of sound by repeating a mantra,

¹ During this phase, the meditator rests his or her awareness on a mentally created buddha form. The term visualization that is commonly used for this type of meditation is slightly misleading. Some meditation teachers prefer to use the term "calling to mind," to point out that the mind rests in the qualities of a buddha form and does not necessarily create a visual image of it.

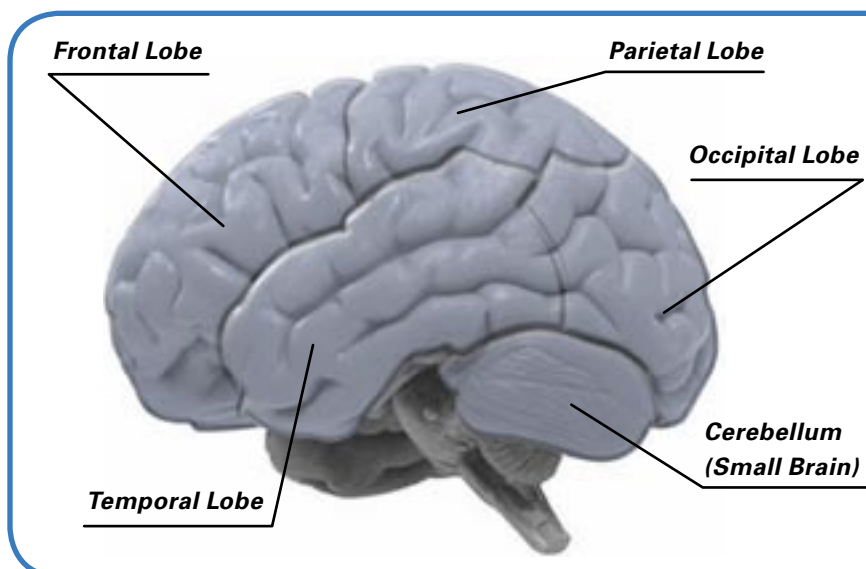
or protective sound. The main feature of the self-dissolution phase is that the meditator dissolves all outer form and rests in the open space of naked awareness. This is then followed by self-reconstruction, where the meditator concentrates on outer forms as they “reappear” out of the open space. As it was the first of its kind and was conducted with high scientific rigor, this study became the reference point for several subsequent studies with a similar orientation. When analyzing the likely origin of the observed EEG activity, the researchers found that differences between the four meditation phases were present only in the gamma band. During the first two phases, visualization and mantra repetition, brain areas that are classically linked to these types of cognitive processes were active. Areas of increased gamma activity were located in right posterior occipital regions during visualization (see figure 2b, region A) and left central-temporal regions during the mantra phase (see figure 2a, region B). The findings related to the subsequent two phases were new: during self-dissolution, increased gamma activity was observed in right superior frontal areas (figure 2b, region B), areas that have been linked to processes of self-recognition, retrieval of autobiographical information, and self-evaluation. The center of gamma activity during self-reconstruction was similar, but localized more toward the back of the head (figure 2b, region C), suggesting that it involves processes linked to body schema, which are ascribed to these areas of the brain. The data clearly show differential involvement of the left and right hemisphere. Only during the mantra phase was the activity left-sided, the side of the brain mainly involved in language processing. The predominant right-hemispheric activity during the other phases may reflect that the right hemisphere is generally more involved in the control of attention and/or that these phases require more holistic processing that is commonly linked to the right hemisphere.

Another study compared the gamma activity of highly experienced Tibetan Buddhist meditators with that of beginners in a meditation evoking non-referential love and compassion. Only for the experienced meditators was observed a sharp increase in gamma activity between rest and meditation, which was particularly strong over frontal and parietal-temporal areas of the left and right hemisphere.

A further study investigated different types of Tibetan Buddhist meditation, but instead of recording brain activity, it used two experimental techniques known as binocular rivalry and motion induced blindness. Both are commonly used to investigate fluctuations in conscious awareness that occur without any changes in the presented stimuli.

In binocular rivalry, different images are presented to each eye by means of specifically designed goggles. Untrained observers are usually aware of only one image—either the one presented to the right or the left eye—and this awareness changes frequently between the left and right image. In motion induced blindness (MIB), stimuli that are very salient and clearly visible are made to visually disappear as if erased in front of the observers’ eyes. In this study, the effect has been achieved by embedding stationary yellow dots in a cloud of blue dots moving randomly.²

Figure 1: The main structures of the brain



When presented with the binocular rivalry task during a meditation involving focused attention, participants reported that images remained stable for extended periods of time, an effect that also prevailed after ending this meditation, but was not present during a meditation of non-referential compassion. When tested with MIB displays (prior to meditation), the monks reported periods of stimulus disappearance that were much longer than in non-meditators. In one extreme case, a monk with more than twenty-five years of extensive meditation experience reported that he could maintain the disappearance indefinitely. This study shows that meditators can alter the normal fluctuation of conscious states to an extent not observed in meditation-naïve participants. It furthermore

² Visit <http://www.weizmann.ac.il/~masagi/MIB/mib.html> for a demonstration of this effect.

highlights that this effect depends on the type of meditation they engage in.

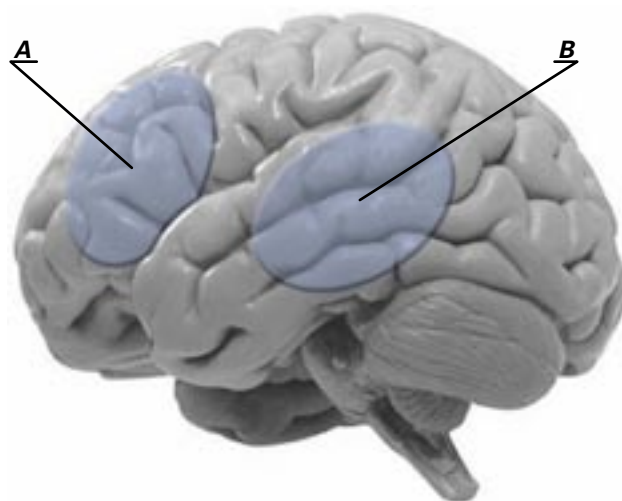
Taken together, the reviewed EEG studies that went beyond describing general changes in alpha and theta activity indicate that the definitions of different meditations—even those found within one Buddhist tradition—are not mere labels, but refer to different states that can clearly be distinguished by analyzing the related brain activity.

Figure 2a: Changes in rhythmic brain activity during and as a result of meditation

View of the left hemisphere:

A—These regions of the left frontal cortex are related to positive emotions and showed increased activity (decreased alpha amplitudes) after eight weeks of mindfulness training.

B—This central temporal area is related to language processing and showed increased amplitudes in the gamma frequencies during the mantra phase.



FUNCTIONAL NEUROIMAGING OF MEDITATION

So far, not many neuroimaging studies that assess the changes in regional blood flow (as PET or fMRI do) and give a more precise indication as to the location of functional brain activity have investigated meditation, and only a few of them analyzed Buddhist meditators. In a SPECT³ (Single Photon Emission Tomography) study, experienced Tibetan Buddhist meditators were scanned twice, measuring brain activity at rest before engaging in meditation and again approximately one hour later after they indicated having entered the deepest level of meditation. Their meditation consisted of calling a buddha form to mind and ultimately becoming one with this form, described by the author as “a sense of absorption into the visualized image associated with clarity of thought and a loss of the usual sense of space and time.” This “peak” experience in meditation was associated with increased activity in the frontal lobes and decreased activity in the superior parietal lobe. The increase in frontal lobe activity may reflect a heightened attentional state, while the decrease in parietal activity may be linked to an altered sense of space during this phase of meditation. Although not described precisely enough, the phase of meditation investigated here is most likely what is called the “completion phase” in Tibetan Buddhist meditation (Tib. dzogrim) and appears to be similar to the

self-dissolution phase investigated in Lehmann’s gamma-band study with one experienced Diamond Way meditator. Interestingly, both studies report increased activity in frontal areas during this phase. Although not investigated directly, the decreased activity in the posterior parietal lobe observed in the SPECT study might be related to the subsequent increase in similar brain areas during self-reconstruction, the phase following self-dissolution. However, the significance of the differences between left- and right-hemispheric activity is still unclear. An increase of activity in frontal areas of the brain was also found in two fMRI studies that investigated Zen Buddhist practitioners during short periods of meditation, although these studies also reported partially contradictory results.

MEDITATION AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO THE BRAIN

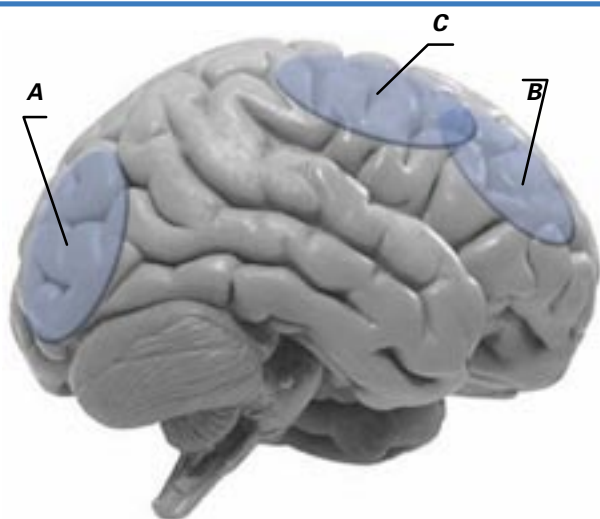
Studies concerning changes in the activity of the brain are many, but interestingly the first report of structural brain changes due to meditation has recently emerged. A US-based research team led by Sara Lazar took brain scans of both meditators experienced in Buddhist Insight meditation and beginners. The authors described the meditation as the “cultivation of attention and a...nonjudgmental awareness of present-moment stimuli without cognitive elaboration,” often referred to as vipassana (Skt.) or lhaktong (Tib.) meditation. They then employed sophisticated algorithms to measure the thickness of the cortex, the outer layer of the brain that is the home to most cognitive processes. The comparison between the experienced and beginning meditators showed that a part of the brain called the “insula” was clearly increased in thickness in

³ SPECT is a procedure very similar to PET, but less complicated in its application.

experienced meditators (figure 3, region A). Interestingly, the insula is an area of the cortex thought to play a critical role in regulating the body's autonomic functions, including breathing. It may be that the strong focus on the breath and the perception of inner states during this type of meditation contributed to this effect. A smaller effect was also observed in the frontal cortex, an area involved in decision-making and short-term memory, which—contrary to the usual pattern—showed no decrease of thickness with age (figure 3, region B). An area in the occipital temporal cortex showed the strongest relation between cortical thickness and the experience with meditation, which in this study was quantified by the breathing rate during meditation (the lower the breathing rate, the more experienced the meditator).

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

The recent studies presented here have added significantly to our understanding of what happens to the brain during meditation. What the studies highlight most evidently is that the types of meditations—and even the phases within a single meditation—need to be distinguished clearly in order to arrive at meaningful interpretations of the results. When scientists did so, different patterns of activation were evident. The EEG study of



one experienced Diamond Way meditator showed that within one single meditation session, at least four physiologically different states of meditation could be observed. A neuroimaging study that assessed brain activity during one of these phases, the “self-dissolution phase” or “completion phase,” confirms that particularly frontal areas of the brain are involved.

Overall, these studies show that meditation may lead

to changes in the activity of brain areas that are crucially involved in emotional and cognitive processing, and thus seem to support the claims of meditators that their practice leads to significant changes in emotional as well as cognitive states and traits. But a review of the existing research also reveals that we are just beginning, and that much more research is needed to establish these findings beyond all doubt. As the benefits of Buddhist meditation practice are increasingly recognized within Western societies, and growing numbers of scientists turn their attention toward it, we can expect more elucidating studies to follow soon. Indeed, some scientists consider meditation research to be an important area of research for years to come. One of the most famous advocates of this view is Andrew Newberg, a Professor of Radiology with a keen interest in religion and spirituality. Newberg claims that meditation research will be one of the most important areas of med-

Figure 2b: Changes in rhythmic brain activity during meditation in the gamma frequency range

View of the right hemisphere:

- A** – Increase in right posterior occipital regions during “visualization” of a buddha form.
- B** – Increase in right superior frontal regions during the dissolution phase.
- C** – Increase in right superior frontal regions situated more toward the back during the self-reconstruction phase.

ical science, as it “offers a fascinating window into human consciousness, psychology, and experience; the relationship between mental states and body physiology; emotional and cognitive processing; and the biological correlates of religious experience.”⁴

I think a similar view could be embraced by Buddhists. With science playing a pivotal role in Western societies, it seems legitimate to ask whether the claims made by Buddhists can be verified with the methodologies of science, which are the prime tool of our times for estimating the validity of any claims. Furthermore, such research may reveal some underlying principles that may fend off diseases by improving the immune system, or by promoting positive emotional states, well-being, and cognitive abilities. Results from such studies may thus provide insights and ideas of relevance to our societies.

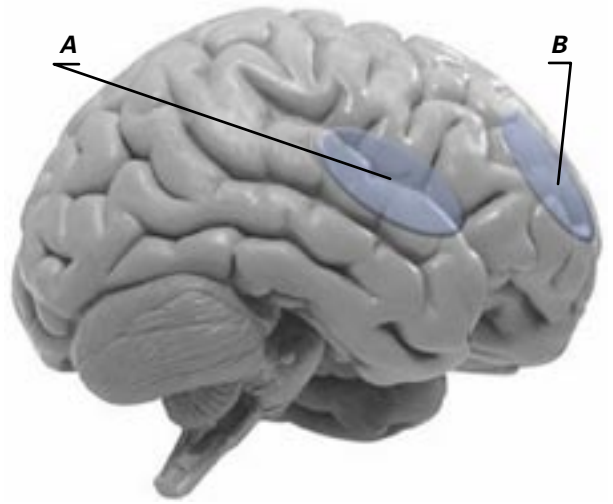
Although there are some possible benefits for science and Western societies, it is worth remembering that in previous centuries and millennia, Buddhists could meditate, reach high states of realization, and even reach the ulti-

⁴ In: Newberg (2002). Studying the meditating brain. Complementary/ Alternative Therapies at the University of Pennsylvania Newsletter, Vol.2, No.2 [online at: <http://www.med.upenn.edu/progdev/compmed/>]

Figure 3: Structural changes to the brain

View of the right hemisphere:

- A** – The thickness of the insula is increased in meditators. The insula lies below the highlighted areas and would become visible when these areas were pulled aside.
- B** – This area of the frontal cortex did show no age-related decrease in thickness in meditators.



mate goal—enlightenment—without any reference to Western sciences. I expect that this is going to happen in the West, too. While the dialogue may be beneficial and desirable, I do not conceive it as ultimately necessary for “producing” human development. In the end, the best proof that meditation works is not a sophisticated EEG trace. The most convincing effect is that we can live happier, more fulfilled lives and become increasingly beneficial for others. The reflection of such developments in the brain should be expected, but this ultimately is only of secondary importance. 🙏

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PETER MALINOWSKI

Peter Malinowski holds a Ph.D. in Psychology and is working as Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience at Liverpool John Moores University in the United Kingdom. His research focuses on brain mechanisms underlying attentional processes, and he is currently extending this into meditation research. Peter has been practicing Diamond Way Buddhism for over fifteen years and gives lectures internationally on the subject.

Meditation Basics

by Charlotte Jorgensen

“We all have a mind, but since we are also hostage to our emotions and limited perspective, without applying the right methods we will very likely never come face to face with its radiant nature.”

Why is Buddhism more than a fascinating theory of the nature of mind and phenomena? Because beyond logic and philosophy, the Buddha taught practical methods to reach enlightenment—a state in which joy, fearlessness, and active compassion are as unconditioned and effortless as sunshine is for the sun. Today, more than 2,500 years after Buddha taught these methods, their results and effectiveness can still be observed in the great meditators through whom they are passed down as a living transmission of experience.

Every sentient being has the potential to reach enlightenment; or, more accurately, to uncover it, since mind is the origin of all of our experiences. For most of us, our pursuit of happiness and love, as well as the adventures, triumphs, and losses we encounter along the way, keep us plenty busy. So busy, in fact, that we quickly forget that nothing in the outer world can bring to us or those we love the kind of fundamental happiness that is lasting; lasting because it is not conditioned by anything. If we take a step back from our quest in this largely materialistic society (or are made to stop by circumstance), the conclusion that nothing lasts forever is natural and logical, even for non-Buddhists. “Money can’t buy happiness,” or “All good things must end,” are just a few examples of popular wisdom addressing this, our most basic challenge.

Buddha was a young man when he decided to address this inherent flaw, eventually breaking through the barrier of his habitual tendencies, emotions, and limited perspective to discover what lies behind it all: mind itself. This realization of mind’s unchanging and radiant nature is what meditators seek to meet in direct experience.

Since mind is not something that sits in a closet until we decide to take it out and look at it, but instead is interwoven with everything we do, think, and say, our “practice” can be as varied and multi-leveled as the lives we live. In fact, our emotions and habits are so strong that the more ways we can tackle them the better! This multi-level approach is probably the most important staple of lay Buddhists today. For all his students, the Buddha’s advice can be summarized into three main categories, all aimed at helping us reach our goal: things to know about mind and conditioned existence; things that are helpful or harmful if one wants to reach enlightenment; and methods to use in order to transform the goal of liberation and enlightenment from an idea to an experience.

Of these three, the last might require the most diligence, but it also brings about the most profound effect in the long run. Far from being an exotic pastime, meditation is in many ways just like any other training. We are born with the potential to do countless amazing things—to become great athletes, learn many languages, or play beautiful music. But if we do not train, study vocabulary, or practice our scales and technique, that potential stays theoretical. It is the same with the methods the Buddha taught to help us discover our mind. We all have a mind, but since we are also hostage to our emotions and limited perspective, without applying the right methods we will very likely never come face to face with its radiant nature.

In truth, any number of skills we acquire on an outer level can serve as an example of what we might go through when we first start to meditate. For example, when we first start playing the violin, we might be surprised at the squeaky sound that comes out of the precious instrument. Or, we might be fascinated that any sound is produced at all. Similarly, when we sit down to meditate for the first time, we might be surprised to discover how readily our mind is preoccupied by its own fabrications, or we might experience a warmth and feeling of happiness that seems to come from nowhere.

If we continue our study of the violin, we slowly discover that every time we pick it up, it is different. Sometimes, we are very inspired, hit the right notes, and convey something as we play. The next day, however, we might be bored or tired, and listlessly play our practice piece only because we know we need to if we want to get better. It is then that we realize that even though we might recognize great music if we hear it, we cannot play well ourselves unless we have a solid foundation of skills and technique to carry the music, no matter what our mood. Once hitting the right note and producing a beautiful sound is no longer

a struggle, we can play freely, bring great music to life, and experience the joy that comes from it.

It is quite similar when we start to meditate. Soon we discover that there are days when we can concentrate well and feel good in our meditation, and other days when we are faced with a lot of impressions and emotions

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surfacing that we had no idea existed. If we then decide that we want to lay the foundation for true realization to appear, we can do so by entering the “high school” of meditation. In the Karma Kagyu lineage of Diamond Way Buddhism, this would be the Refuge Meditation followed by the Four Foundational Practices (Tib. Ngondro). These practices are very effective in training our mind. At the same time, they enable us to enter the living transmission of realization that has been passed down from teacher to student since the historical Buddha. While this represents a full Diamond Way (Tib. Vajrayana) practice, each practice can lead to enlightenment by itself. When completed with the right instructions and motivation, these exercises also serve as a solid and necessary basis for any practice that one might continue with upon their completion.

To learn these meditations, we need to receive three things: Buddhist refuge, a transmission of the text by an authorized teacher, and the proper explanations, normally at a local Buddhist center where groups of people meet to practice together several times a week. The Foundational Practices work on many different levels. They may result in increasing stability, transform negativity, and aid in the

accumulation of positive impressions needed to develop further. This can provide a deep inner awareness through identification with the goal itself, represented by the lama and the teachers of the transmission lineage.

To draw a final parallel to other skills we might acquire in our lifetime, we could say that even if we diligently perfect our technique in playing the violin, we may still not be able to play truly beautiful music that deeply touches an audience until we ourselves are touched by the play of a great master. Such inspiration has the power to take our development further than a thousand hours of carefully exercised musical notes ever could. This power of inspiration and direct identification with the goal is also what makes Diamond Way practice different from other Buddhist paths and one of the most powerful methods to achieve enlightenment.

This, though, is as far as the analogy between music, sports, or other activities and meditation can go. Because, in the end, outer skills take conditioned experiences only to a more refined level. The goal of Buddhist meditation is the transcendence of the very method that makes it possible. It is through meditation that we have the tools to go beyond the ups and downs, likes and dislikes, and fears and hopes of our lives, and instead realize our buddha nature. What hobby could ever beat that? 🙏

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About Charlotte Jorgensen

Charlotte Jorgensen is thirty-one years old and manages a small accounting firm in San Francisco, CA, where she lives with her husband, Jesper. She took refuge in 1991 and teaches meditation and other Buddhist basics in Diamond Way Buddhist centers around North America.

Glossary

Buddha Nature

All beings have buddha nature. It is the basis for enlightenment. As long as a being is not enlightened, the buddha nature is covered by veils. When these veils are purified and the pure essence of buddha nature is experienced, enlightenment is attained.

Ngondro

A set of four repetitive but intensely rewarding meditation practices that create masses of good imprints in one's subconscious. The Ngondro is the basis for recognizing mind through its nature as both energy and awareness. The four practices are: Prostrations, Diamond Mind (Dorje Sempa), Mandala Offerings, and Meditation on the Teacher (Guru).

Refuge

A reorientation toward values that can be trusted. One takes refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), and to practice the Diamond Way one needs additional refuge in the Three Roots (Lama, Yidam, Protector). They are the sources of blessing, inspiration, and protection along the way.

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To learn these meditations, we need to receive three things: Buddhist refuge, a transmission of the text by an authorized teacher, and the proper explanations, normally at a local Buddhist center where groups of people meet to practice together several times a week. The Foundational Practices work on many different levels. They may result in increasing stability, transform negativity, and aid in the

accumulation of positive impressions needed to develop further. This can provide a deep inner awareness through identification with the goal itself, represented by the lama and the teachers of the transmission lineage.

To draw a final parallel to other skills we might acquire in our lifetime, we could say that even if we diligently perfect our technique in playing the violin, we may still not be able to play truly beautiful music that deeply touches an audience until we ourselves are touched by the play of a great master. Such inspiration has the power to take our development further than a thousand hours of carefully exercised musical notes ever could. This power of inspiration and direct identification with the goal is also what makes Diamond Way practice different from other Buddhist paths and one of the most powerful methods to achieve enlightenment.

This, though, is as far as the analogy between music, sports, or other activities and meditation can go. Because, in the end, outer skills take conditioned experiences only to a more refined level. The goal of Buddhist meditation is the transcendence of the very method that makes it possible. It is through meditation that we have the tools to go beyond the ups and downs, likes and dislikes, and fears and hopes of our lives, and instead realize our buddha nature. What hobby could ever beat that? 🙏

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About Charlotte Jorgensen

Charlotte Jorgensen is thirty-one years old and manages a small accounting firm in San Francisco, CA, where she lives with her husband, Jesper. She took refuge in 1991 and teaches meditation and other Buddhist basics in Diamond Way Buddhist centers around North America.

Glossary

Buddha Nature

All beings have buddha nature. It is the basis for enlightenment. As long as a being is not enlightened, the buddha nature is covered by veils. When these veils are purified and the pure essence of buddha nature is experienced, enlightenment is attained.

Ngondro

A set of four repetitive but intensely rewarding meditation practices that create masses of good imprints in one's subconscious. The Ngondro is the basis for recognizing mind through its nature as both energy and awareness. The four practices are: Prostrations, Diamond Mind (Dorje Sempa), Mandala Offerings, and Meditation on the Teacher (Guru).

Refuge

A reorientation toward values that can be trusted. One takes refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), and to practice the Diamond Way one needs additional refuge in the Three Roots (Lama, Yidam, Protector). They are the sources of blessing, inspiration, and protection along the way.