

文論學佛

TOPICS ON BUDDHISM

The Beginner in Meditation

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ONCE a lay disciple of the Sixth Patriarch (Wei Lang-Hui Neng) came to the patriarch and said: "Master, I have great difficulty in meditating; there are so many obstacles that stand in my way." The patriarch replied: "Are these obstacles on your path or are they in your mind? If they are actually on your path, then show them to me and I shall help you remove them." The story continues that the lay-disciple went away and gave careful thought to the master's statement. Soon he realized that his "problem" wasn't any problem at all and all the obstacles he thought were on his path were only in his consciousness. The two biggest obstacles that SEEM TO BE on the path are just words—IF and BUT. They are obstacles placed on the path by the mind, and they can be removed by the mind. The Sixth Patriarch wanted to SEE the IF and BUTS created by the mind of his lay-disciple. Naturally the disciple could not produce these unreal "obstacles."

I give here some simple rules that I think may be of help to beginners. They do not require much technical knowledge, nor deep education. The first rule is the one most likely to give trouble. Unless it can be complied with, there's not much use in bothering to try meeting the other requirements. I am condensing and simplifying as much as possible. In cutting down the rules to a mere half-dozen, I am taking for granted that the background requirements of morality and freedom from the grosser defilements are acknowledged by the prospective meditators. Here are the six:

(1) The first rule is: You must actually have sincere will to meditate for serious purposes. If your motive is only curiosity or the seeking after some strange thrill, then the start is wrong and everything

following such a start will be wrong. At the very beginning just be sure you really want to meditate and for reasons that are genuinely spiritual.

(2) After right will and right intention comes right place. Get as quiet and peaceful a place as possible. It may be either indoors or outdoors. If indoors, then a clean, well-ventilated place is best. It will be better if there are no odours, such as of cookery, animal smells, or any scent that will attract your attention. It is good to burn an incense stick in the meditation room before the meditation starts, in order to purify the air, but do not use an exotically scented incense.

(3) Next comes rightness of body and attire. The body ought to be clean both outside and inside. If the body is laden with toxins, then hallucinations may come instead of true meditation. Do not try to meditate while you are still digesting a heavy meal. Meat and all other blood-foods must be avoided. A meditator who uses alcohol, even sparingly, exposes himself to actual danger. Madness in some degree has been known to come to those who are so-ill-advised as to try to mix alcohol and meditation.

The clothing should be fresh and clean, and free from odours of perspiration, perfumes, medicines, etc. The looser the clothing the better. Tight belts, neckties, and anything that binds or constricts the body will draw attention to the point of discomfort and thus work against accomplishing real meditation. Many find that a sarong or loose-fitting pajamas are the best clothing to wear for meditation in one's own room. Early morning is generally the best time. Both body and mind are rested then. But do not meditate in the clothing you wore to sleep in. Bathe and go outside to draw in some deep breaths of fresh air. To get out of bed and try to meditate is a mistake. The body is still in a drowsy state. Without the freshening-up there is likely to be torpor instead of alert concentration.

(4) Now we come to the right posture to use. There is no set rule on this point. Those who always use chairs instead of

sitting on the floor may find the lotus postures (the single and double cross-legged postures) quite painful. To avoid being too technical, let's just say that the individual must select the posture best suited to himself. But certain rules apply whether the traditional (cross-legged) position or a chair is used. It is necessary that the body be erect, chin in line with the navel, shoulders squared, eyes partly closed, the right hand placed in the left and with thumbs lightly touching. If you're chair-sitting, then keep the knees apart and the heels together, but with the toes pointed slightly outwards. If you use the single lotus posture, then place the right foot on the left thigh, sole up. The full (or double) lotus position is not at all recommended for beginners, unless the beginner in question has been accustomed to such postures since childhood and finds them easy and comfortable. Do not allow your body to slump at any time during the meditation. If you experience some discomfort as the session goes on, then try lightly revolving your body, upwards from the hips, in a clockwise direction for a few times. At no time should a beginner protract his meditation to the point he feels semi-paralysed. Most masters recommend twenty minute periods at the start. Gradually the periods can be lengthened. Remember that extremism is not a part of Buddhism.

(5) To "monkey with" the breathing and attempt advanced exercises in breath-control is deeply dangerous. No beginner in meditation ought ever to attempt these Pranayama exercises. Even after long experience in meditation, the advanced breath-control exercises require the presence of a well-qualified master in order to insure safety to the practitioners. Many of these techniques are well-guarded secrets and have never been committed to print. These secrets are handed down directly from master to pupil. The only breathing exercise the beginner need bother with is a simple one. It serves two purposes. One is to tranquilize body and mind and the other is to get a good, handy and easy-to-use means of con-

centrating the attention. Here's how it's usually done: Take in a deep and slow breath while you are mentally saying to yourself, "one I breathe in." Hold that breath for a moment or so, then exhale slowly and effortlessly, saying silently, "one I breathe out." Do this up to the count of ten and keep the attention fixed on the breathing. Your attention will wander but, in every such instance, you must immediately refocus fully on the breathing. When the point of ten is reached in this simple and safe breathing exercise, then concentrate your entire attention on the idea of goodwill. It is common to make the mistake of passing at once from the breathing exercise to the radiation of goodwill to all sentient beings. This is the third step, not the second. The second consists in giving intense concentration to establishing goodwill towards oneself. Only after this is done are we ready to radiate goodwill to others. "If you wish to make peace with the world, first make peace with yourself."

(6) Now we come to a point that seems to ask a lot of the restless mind of modern man. This point involves an intensive use of self discipline. The human mind is like a monkey in a tree, jumping from limb to limb. The mind jumps from one idea or fragmentary idea to another, and it is hardly difficult for us to understand why it is the masters of meditation make clear that there can be no real success in meditation until such time as the "monkey mind" is brought under control.

I've just compared the undisciplined mind to a monkey. Now let's compare the disciplined mind to a river. Actually this comparison is quite apt, for the mind is really a stream of consciousness. Let us say we wish this stream of consciousness, this river, to flow along a selected line and no other. But in just the same way that a log might fall into a river of water, ideas find their way into the stream of consciousness when we are trying to concentrate on a single point. But, just as the river is undisturbed by

the presence of the log and does not at all try to grasp the log or clutch at it, even so we must not grasp or clutch at ideas or sensations that intrude into the stream of mind when we are meditating. An idea or sensation drifting into the mind will drift out of the mind-stream if it is not clutched at.

There are various devices that are helpful in obtaining concentration. A coloured disc of paper is often used, or a bowl of water, a pebble, a grain of rice or any material object that suits the meditator. Or an abstraction may be used, such as the idea of peace. But, whether your chosen point of concentration is an object or an abstraction, stick to that point and don't be at all disturbed or discouraged if ever so many ideas float through your mind. One of the oddest things about beginners in meditation is that nobody expects immediate perfection of the beginner, except the beginner himself!

There's far more to meditation than I've outlined in this paper. I trust it is understood that I'm merely pointing a finger to show the way to those who want to make a start. Don't let early discouragements cause you to stop trying. Any meditation master will tell you that it is ever so much harder to be a good, persevering beginner than to practice the advanced stages that come later on. The elementary part is undoubtedly the hardest part. But if you'll just keep on keeping on, you'll find rewards that are so satisfying you'll be glad you didn't let initial discouragements overcome you. The best part of meditation can never be put into words. It goes beyond words.

**APPEAL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO
FOUNDATION OF
KWAN-YIN FREE SCHOOL AT
RENNIE'S MILL REFUGEE CAMP,
HONG KONG.**

1. RENNIE'S MILL:

700,000 people have taken refuge in Hong Kong since the change of status on the mainland of China in 1949. For convenience of administration, the Government of Hong Kong established a refugee

camp at Rennie's Mill to accommodate those in need. Up to this moment, 20,000 refugees still live at the camp.

The majority of this group were adherents of Buddhism in their native home. The rest were theists or atheists. Only a very few were Christians.

2. BUDDHISM GOES UNDERGROUND:

Churches now dot the camp. With the exception of one high school operated by relief authorities, the rest of the schools are missionary institutions. Here we have a unique situation warranting the attention of conscientious men and women. It is the plight of the 10,000 Buddhists, who have no choice but to pretend to be Christians and attend services regularly as prerequisites to obtain relief and the wherewithal to live.

Conscientious Buddhists not only have no place to go for their spiritual needs, but have to worship "underground" in their ramshackle shacks with framed portraits of Lord Buddha for fear of being detected. As a result many families make it a practice to take Buddha's portrait out of the chest to pay their homage and return it to its hiding place after the ceremony.

3. THE PROBLEM:

It is a comforting thought that the older generation of Buddhists still adhere to their faith under such trying circumstances. It remains to be regretted, however, that children of Buddhist families have to go to missionary schools and church services and to undergo baptism. To go to school and obtain an education is essential to living, but at Rennie's Mill not only Buddhist schools are not available but ordinary schools are nowhere to be found. Parents sigh and send their young to missionary schools, the only schools available, if they want them to be educated at all. And so the innocent soul, void of prejudices and susceptible to impression, is imprinted with the image of Jehovah for the sake of education.

4. THE SOLUTION:

The problem of religious freedom and the requirements of Buddhist youth have

come to the attention of the leaders of the camp's 20-odd organizations. Together with Buddhist groups outside the camp, they petitioned the Social Welfare Department for grant of Government land to build a Kwan-Yin Temple and a Kwan-Yin School. As a result a spacious lot of more than 1,000,000 square feet covering an entire hill facing the open sea was allocated. Plan is now under way to inscribe three white 10-foot-tall Chinese characters on the slope of the hill, to name this hill "KwanYin Hill," and to build a Kwan-Yin Temple with premises for a Kwan-Yin Primary School and a Kwan-Yin High School. The name "Kwan-Yin" is used because this is a refugee camp and Kwan-Yin is the saviour Bodhisatva. It is hoped that both passing steamers and local residents will see "Kwan-Yin" and hear "Kwan-Yin" and be saved, regardless of their faith.

5. BUILDING PROJECT:

We have now obtained the land, but only on condition that we build within the set time limit. Our preliminary project is to level down two 5,000-foot lots in the smoother terrain. The front lot will be used for drilling grounds, and the rear lot for building construction.

The building lot will contain one 5-room building facing south, for dual use as Kwan-Yin Temple hall and school auditorium. On both sides will be erected 5-room auxiliary buildings for classroom use, to accomodate 320 pupils in four morning and four afternoon primary classes. Four or two rooms built in front will serve as office and lounge, with a main entrance to the school provided.

Stone for building use is available on the spot. Piled-stone walls with asbestos-tiled roofs are simple to construct and economical in expenditure. The entire construction is estimated at HK\$35,000. If we can raise \$60,000 as foundation fund, we can start the high school simultaneously.

6. APPEAL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:

We therefore appeal to you, men and women of conscience and compassion, in the name of Religion and humanity, to

contribute generously to the cause: First, to give the followers of Lord Buddha at Rennie's Mill a place of worship; Secondly, to save the children of Buddha from temptation; Thirdly, to add another institution of learning and house of worship for the propagation of the Faith; Fourthly, to retain the land granted by the Government.

For the sake of the Law and humanity and the Bodhisatva, this is a golden opportunity for meritorious deed. May the Bodhisatva Kwan-Yin heed you and bless you.

Brothers and sisters and friends of Buddhism, come and join us in our endeavour.

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A Spiritual Restaurant Opened in the Cultural City

A Storehouse of Wisdom Established in Taichung

The Chihkuang Library Established by Buddhists Was Unveiled

It Was Accompanied by One Night of Entertainment and by Five Days of Preaching

【Taichung】Prepared for two years by the Buddhists of Taichung, as a cultural center in the middle of Taiwan, the Chihkuang Library was established at 15 Lihsing North Road, This was the first library ever established by private persons in Taiwan. They had six copies of the Tripitaka, more than fifty thousand volumes, two copies of the index of the Tripitaka, 887 volumes of old books, 2902 volumes of new books, seven copies of a Buddhist dictionary, one set of the Tai-