

Meditation: For Mental and Physical Fitness

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नमो तस्स भगवतो अरहतो सम्मासम्बुद्धस्स

Buddha Vandana

I prostrate myself at the feet of Lord Buddha for teaching me and billions of others how to meditate. Although Vidarshana meditation which is practised in South and South-East Asia is not exactly the same as Zen (Japanese for the Sanskrit word Dhyana) which is practised in Japan, Korea and China, all Buddhist meditation is based on the Smritipratishthana Sutra (The Sermon on Establishment of Concentration) which Lord Buddha delivered in the ancient north Indian town of Kalmashadamyia near Kurukshetra. Meditation is immensely beneficial for both mind and body and young men who develop a habit of meditating every day after waking up in the morning are more likely to succeed in all facets of life than men who do not. I shall strive to present the basic technique of meditation in this article.

After waking up in the morning, a man should sit alone, cross-legged, in a quiet room in the full lotus posture (Padmasana) or, failing that, in the half-lotus posture. His spine must be vertical. There must be no slumping of the back, the head should be straight. An immediate physical benefit is that the knees, legs and vertebral column remain flexible and damage-free. However, to maximise his physical fitness, a man must sit in the full lotus posture, something that he must be taught as a boy, as I have been. The hands may be placed in the Bhumisparsha Mudra (Bhumisparsha gesture), a Mudra in which I find so many statues of Lord Buddha. Bhumisparsha literally means “ touching the ground”. Alternatively, a man's hands may be in the cosmic Mudra with the left hand on top of the right, middle joints of middle fingers together and the thumbs touching each other. The hands should be held against the body. This gesture is very popular in Japan and the rest of East Asia. The Samadhi Mudra consists

of the right hand placed on top of the left hand with the tips of the two thumbs touching each other. Yet another Mudra consists of the hands straight, placed on the knees, and the thumb and the next finger touching each other with the other fingers straight. This gesture of the hands is called Gyana Mudra. Having sat correctly, a man must close his eyes and focus on the inhalation and exhalation of his breath. There must be no tampering with the natural respiration, a meditator's job is simply to focus his attention on his nostrils and observe the natural flow of breath. Respiration is natural, one has no craving or aversion towards it, it is always in the present since a man breathes from the moment of his birth to the moment of his death and it is within the physical framework of the body. Respiration is thus an appropriate object for concentrating the mind. The mind does not usually want to stay in the present moment; it resides either in the past or in the future. A little effort is needed to prevent the mind from wandering about. This is called Right Effort. At this stage, there may be strong distractions in the mind that prevent the mind from concentrating. Sometimes these distractions appear to be overwhelming. The effort to focus on respiration should be continued in such cases. The key is never to give up. A man starting to practise meditation soon discovers one thing; meditation is hard work for a beginner. Right Mindfulness, which is mindfulness of the activities of one's mind, that is of one's thoughts, follows Right Effort immediately.

Right Concentration is maintaining a sustained awareness of one's thoughts. There must be an ability to merely observe one's thoughts without interfering in the natural flow of thoughts in any way. This is relaxing and also results in a man having more control over his mind leading to his developing an ability to concentrate better in any mental activity that he engages in including, but not limited to, studies and research. Meditation also purifies the mind by dissolving latent feelings of anger, craving, sadness, and so on. The exact nature of the pattern of his mental activity is exposed to the meditator and he is able to remove undesirable elements in his thinking process; therefore he becomes more positive towards his career and life in general. His behaviour becomes more enlightened. His external world does not change but his way of psychologically processing his external world undergoes a drastic change. He becomes more peaceful with himself and with others. He goes about doing his daily activities, but his way of processing his world has fundamentally altered for the better. He realises that he cannot and need not control all aspects of his external physical world. He realises that he gains more by letting go. He becomes aware of the non-peaceful moments in his life and tries to reduce their frequency and intensity. He opts for harmony in his mental processes rather than chaos.

At the initial stage, it is wise to start meditation by meditating for around ten minutes. This can be gradually increased to thirty minutes. Experienced meditators have the ability to meditate for around three hours at a stretch, though an opportunity to undertake such intense meditation may not occur more than once a year because of the busy world that we live in.

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