



Weekly Buddhism

Meditation Issue

Meditation has a hundred names, but only a handful of real styles.



Benefits of Meditation

Meditation has been defined as: "self regulation of attention, in the service of self-inquiry, in the here and now." [Wikipedia]. I found dozens of definitions of meditation to post here, some involved self-healing, some with philosophy, others dealt with spirituality, but the fact is that it's different things to different people.

There are so many types of meditation and names for styles of practice that it's hard to keep track. There are literally hundreds of "phrases" that describe various

kinds and styles of meditations, but I am going to focus on a half dozen or so broad categories today.

When you hear the word "meditation" you probably have a mental picture of someone sitting in the lotus position, hands clasped and eyes closed, as in the picture of the meditation group above. That, or something close, is not too far from the truth, but it is an overgeneralized stereotype. Not all forms of meditation involve sitting, but many do. We've briefly mentioned walking and working meditation in the past, and those are quite common and easy to perform.

WEEKLY BUDDHISM?

We've all gotten used to the format of the Daily Buddhism, and it works well for most things. However, there are some topics I'd like to cover that really don't have a place in the daily emails.

There are some ideas that would be better to cover in greater depth than two or three paragraphs in an email will allow. There are "real" news articles, as well as things that are either too small to spend a day on or so large that it could take days to complete. Plus, the PDF format allows a huge range of text and graphic options, so I can put together a much more attractive offering than possible with email or even the website. Basically, I want a wider range of options for these things.

So, rather than change the "daily system" and risk fouling up a good thing, I think its a good idea to add a new outlet to the mix: The Weekly Buddhism is a full-color printable newsletter meant to be printed or saved and perhaps put in a binder. There will be some overlap; most of what goes into the Daily Buddhism will wind up here as well, but the plan is to offer much more expanded, exclusive content in the "Magazine" format.

As with everything things change, and this project will evolve as they all do.

Brian Schell



MEDITATION, CONTINUED

If you're one of the many people who have written in stating that they can't sit lotus-style, have no fear; I can't do it either.

All forms of meditation can help you reduce stress and anxiety. Reduced stress is obviously a good thing, both physically and psychologically, and many doctors prescribe meditation to their patients. It's been proven effective over thousands of years, it's not some goofy new age thing. It's safe and its simple, and absolutely everyone can do it, starting with only 10 or 15 minutes a day. It won't cure cancer or help you lose weight, but it can help reduce physical suffering and give you the mental clarity and fortitude to make big changes in your life. The physical "work" of meditation can be done with no spiritual or

religious trappings, and is a good idea for anyone, of any belief system or any age. Buddhism, of course, adds its own dimension to meditation, but meditation was around long before Buddhism; it goes back at least as far as early Hinduism, and probably far further than that.

Breath Watching / Insight Meditation

This is one of the most popular forms of meditation, and one of the simplest to start practicing. The practitioner sits comfortably in a quiet place and simply focuses on his or her breathing. He or she sits with eyes closed, slowly breathing in and out calmly and regularly, not forcing anything. Breathe in. Breathe out.

Feel the air go in and be let out again. Feel the sensations and the path of the air. Feel your chest rising and falling, the lungs expanding and contracting. Feel the cool air go in and the warm air come out. Hear



the sound of it all. Experience the breathing carefully and consciously, avoiding distractions as much as possible.

For the beginner, that is all there is to it. Take five or ten minutes and try it right now if you are able. You don't need to sit in any particular position, and you can do it in a chair if you like. The important (and difficult) part in the beginning is to avoid distractions, especially your own distracting thoughts. When you become aware that your mind is wandering, calmly go back to being aware of your breathing and move your mind away from the distraction. You can do breath meditation for five minutes or for hours if you like, but it's going to be hard to do for more than a few minutes in the beginning.



Two monks were arguing about a flag. One said: 'The flag is moving.'
The other said: 'The wind is moving.'
The sixth patriarch happened to be passing by. He told them: 'Not the wind, not the flag; mind is moving.'



Empty Mind Meditation

This really is the simplest form of meditation to describe, yet it's one of the hardest to master. Here are the steps involved:

1. Sit comfortably. Pain of any kind is distracting.
2. Think of ... *nothing*.

Yep. That's it. Clear your mind. When your mind wanders, don't chastise yourself or complain about it, just quickly switch back to thinking of nothing. If it helps, visualize blank paper, white void, total darkness, or whatever works for you. Just don't consciously think to yourself; "I'm thinking of nothing," or "Oh, look, it's white paper." That's just thinking of a different kind.

The goal is **absence of thought entirely**. It's incredibly difficult, because our minds tend to wander or go off about all sorts of odd things. This is where the term "monkey mind" comes from. While your body is just sitting there with your eyes closed, your mind wants to climb trees and shout at the top of its lungs.

This form of meditation, above all others, really is done best in a very quiet environment; it's just so easy to become distracted that anything you can do to remove distractions is a good thing. Once you find that you can easily "tune out" everything in the outside world, you are on a good start down the path of meditation. If you find yourself losing track of time doing this, you are doing well; sometimes

you can sit for what seems like hours and later find that only a minute or two has passed, and sometimes it works just the opposite. Being able to quiet your mind is essential to meditation and many of the more spiritual aspects of meditation.

Try sitting in silence, not thinking at all for just five minutes. It's far harder than it sounds.

Walking Meditation and *Kinhin*

We've briefly covered this one, but it is essentially what it sounds like: meditating while walking. You can do this while walking, running, or just pacing around the room in a circle. You focus your mind on how your body moves during the activity. This is not sightseeing, so your focus should be internal. How do your arms swing, how do your legs move, what about the muscles in your stomach and back? How does the



activity affect your breathing?

As with the other forms, once your mind begins to wander, carefully, bring it back to focus on the action and sensations involved with moving.

I personally find this one very difficult, as I tend to pay too much attention to the world around me. Unlike the other forms of meditation, this might be a good time to listen to soft music on your iPod, since it will help cover up the outside noises.

In Zen, practitioners have ritualized this walking meditation into something called "*Kinhin*." *Kinhin* is a very slow walk, going clockwise around the room. One hand is closed in a fist, while the other hand covers the fist. One step is taken for each full breath, so the circle moves very slowly. It is quite common to do *kinhin* between long periods of sitting meditations.

Be aware that *kinhin* is only one form of walking meditation; a faster, outdoor walk can be good for you too.

Mindfulness Meditation

Where are you right now? What are you doing right now? What's going on around you right now? Open your mind, open your senses. Be aware. Absorb.

You've heard the old cliché saying about blind people, that when someone loses one sense, the others senses get stronger. It's true enough, but there is a much less troublesome way to heighten your senses. You can



make your senses stronger by simply paying attention to them. We get busy, we get distracted, we get lost in our everyday patterns, and we stop really paying attention. Mindfulness meditation is all about opening up those closed down senses and being **mindful**. You try to be mindful about your external world, as I hinted above, but this mindfulness expands to include what's going on inside you as well. Be mindful of your thoughts and emotions and everything else going on inside your head.

Buddhists have a common phrase that you've probably seen or heard before, "Be here. Now." That's mindfulness for you. Get your mind on the here and now and be observant, be aware, be mindful.

On a practical note, start out meditating on your breath as in regular breath watching Meditation. Once you have explored and become fully aware of your breathing, expand outward through the rest of your body, then the outside world. Try to be aware of as much of everything as you can. Then come back into yourself and be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and inner workings of your mind. Be aware of what you really think and feel, not just what your daily routine grinds into you.

Mantra Meditation

Some people find it easier to meditate by focusing their awareness on a sound. When meditating, they recite or chant some kind of phrase or sound repeatedly, listening to the sound, being aware of how the sound

is formed, and concentrating on the sound itself.

Some sects of Buddhism rely heavily on mantra meditation. If you are assigned a mantra by a teacher, the mantra may have some meaning in Pali or Sanskrit, or it may just be a sound without meaning. Sometimes, although rarely, a mantra can be an English phrase. You may have heard the phrase, "Om Mani Padme Hum." This is a very common mantra. It's meaning is complicated, but generally involves "the jewel in the lotus." The precise meaning of this mantra isn't important right now, the sound of the words is supposed to be powerful in itself. Another common mantra to be repeated while meditating is "shanti," which means "peace."

Years ago, I was taught to use one, "Ah Re Hum." I don't even remember what it literally means, but I know I like the way the sounds come out as I breathe the words. I breathe in on the "Ah," pause a second on the "Re," and breathe out with the "Hum." It sounds a little silly, but it works. It can be very relaxing. Also, if you are especially stressed out, focusing on the sound is sometimes easier than trying to clear the mind entirely. After a while, you don't actually have to continue to vocalize the words once you have gotten into the mindset; keep the mantra rolling over in your mind as you sit silently.

There is a lot of mysticism and religious thought behind various mantras, some sounds are "holier" than others, some are used for

purification, some are for tuning into your individual energy field or the universal energy field to produce practical results. Various sects of Buddhism treat mantras with differing levels of importance. There are also variations of this style of meditation that employ song, chanting, and rhythm to assist in focusing the mind.



Script for Om Mani Padme Hum

Conceptual Meditation

This is the "big one" that really confuses people. When you hear things like "loving kindness" meditation, or "meditation on impermanence," or even meditation on a koan or physical object, this is the broad category involved. The mind focuses on itself and examines itself as you work through the problem or object or subject of meditation. As you contemplate the subject, you examine your thoughts and feelings as you concentrate on all aspects of the subject.

At different times you may choose to meditate on different subjects; there's nothing wrong with that, and it is in fact encouraged. One of the goals of meditating on a concept like this



is to cut through the layers of untruth we hold about the object. With most ideas, we are taught to “think inside the box” or become conditioned to thinking about something in some regular way. Meditation on a concept encourages thinking differently about the subject at hand.

One famous example of this is the “meditation on the corpse.” When doing this meditation, you first envision a body being buried in the ground. You picture the dirt being shoveled in and the body being covered up. Then you picture the body in dark silence. Then you picture decay setting in, and the

bugs and the worms. You picture a bare skeleton, and then picture it eventually rotting away. Finally you picture nothing being left. You meditate on this until you are calm and at peace. You realize that this will eventually be your fate as well and you accept it. There is no longer revulsion or fear, just acceptance that your life and body will change like everything else. Life is precious and worth living here and now, as you really understand how life will end. This is how you meditate on the corpse; something like meditation for loving-kindness would obviously be quite different, but the process is the same; you envision all aspects of

the subject, breaking it down by stages if necessary.

There are many kinds of conceptual meditation subjects, and **we'll be covering forty of them next week.**

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India: Dalai Lama Undergoes Gall Bladder Surgery

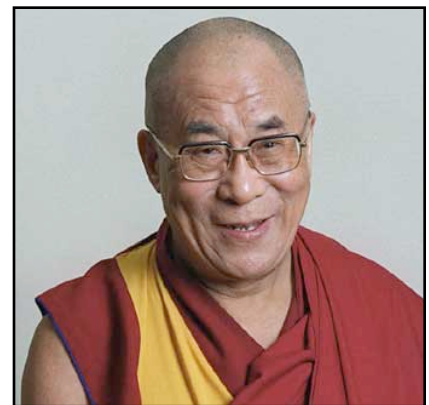
New Delhi, 10 October: Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama Friday underwent a gall bladder surgery at Sir Gangaram Hospital here.

The 73-year-old Nobel laureate was admitted to the hospital Thursday after he complained of severe abdominal pain.

The temporal head of Tibetans underwent a laproscopic surgery to remove stones in the gallbladder, Tenzin Takhla, spokesperson of the Tibetan Government in exile told PTI, adding that he is likely to be discharged in a day or two.

The Buddhist leader had arrived in Delhi earlier this week for a routine medical check-up.

He had undergone treatment earlier at Mumbai's Lilawati hospital for abdominal discomfort.



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INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST FILM FESTIVAL

2008 INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST FILM FESTIVAL TO OPEN IN MEXICO CITY FIRST TIME IN LATIN AMERICA, RUNS OCTOBER 29-NOVEMBER 9

Twenty-five Films from Over a Dozen Nations, Sixteen Mexico Premieres Showcase Presentation of 1925 German/Indian Silent Masterpiece *Light of Asia*

2 October 2008 Oakland The 2008 International Buddhist Film Festival (IBFF) will take place in Mexico City, October 29-November 9, presenting twenty five films from over a dozen nations, all in Spanish or with Spanish subtitles. Previously held in Amsterdam, Singapore and several US cities, this is the first time the California-based festival has traveled to Latin America.

IBFF's presentation partner is Samaya Foundation, an independent cultural organization based in Mexico City. Its executive director, Leonides Guadarrama, a partner at FilmHouse, a leading Latin American indiefilm distributor, says "This is an historic opportunity for Mexico City, the largest city in this hemisphere. This is a chance for audiences here to explore a wide range of compelling works that draw on rich traditions from around the world to shed light on the key issues of our time: war and peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, freedom and suffering, community, the environment...the whole Buddhist cultural emphasis on wisdom and compassion." He adds, "and these films include some real surprises and lots of entertainment: comedies, classics, critical works, and some not so obviously Buddhist too."

Among the special events will be a Showcase Presentation at the Centro Nacional de las Artes (Blas Galindo Auditorium) of *Light of Asia*, a rare 1925

German/Indian co-production based on Sir Edwin Arnold's famous 19th century book. Also known by its Indian name *Prem Sanyas*, the film tells the story of the historic Prince Siddhartha and his journey to becoming Buddha, or awake. The silent black and white masterpiece features a cast of literally thousands of extras provided by the Maharajah of Jaipur, who also lent the production some of his legendary palaces and over two dozen bejewelled elephants. The film will be accompanied by a live original musical performance by a group led by sitarist Sidartha Siliceo, with noted Mexican vocalist Susana Zabaleta and Tibetan Buddhist monks from Gaden Jamgonling Monastery in Nepal.

The opening night screening at the prestigious Cineteca Nacional is the Mexico premiere of *Dreaming Lhasa*, the dramatic feature debut of award-winning documentary veterans from India, Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam (*The Reincarnation of Khensur Rinpoche, Shadow Circus*). Filmed on location in northern India with a backdrop of the Himalayas, the story follows a mystery that explores the full range of expression within the Tibetan exile communities there.

Other titles include *Leonard Cohen: I'm Your Man, Enlightenment Guaranteed, The Cup, Dedication: Matthieu Ricard* (with *Monks in the Lab*), *In Search of Zhang Zhung* and *Milarepa*. Several of the filmmakers are expected to attend. Other events include a seminar, *Buddhism and the Emergence of a New Science* by Ven. Tenzin Priyadarshi, in association with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; a conference, *The Encounter Between Science and Meditation* presented by the MD Anderson Cancer Center and Ligmincha Institute featuring Lama Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, Prof. Lorenzo Cohen, Ph.D, and Prof. Alejandro Chaoul Reich, Ph.D.; and several other workshops, ceremonies and seminars. The full program and schedule are available on the official website.

Samaya Foundation is in strategic partnership with Buddhist Film Society (BFS), the independent non-profit educational organization based in Oakland, California that founded the IBFF in 2000. BFS's Advisory Council includes Philip Glass, Alice Walker, Richard Gere, Maxine Hong Kingston,

Huston Smith, Lisa Lu and Robert Thurman. The Mexico City IBFF comes after successful IBFF presentations in Los Angeles (2003), Washington, D.C.(2004) and San Francisco (2005) in the US, and Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2006), and Singapore (2007). IBFFs are being planned for New York, London, Hong Kong, Vancouver and Kyoto for 2009-10.

BFS, through its International Buddhist Film Festival and Festival Media distribution service, offers cinema as a vehicle for wider appreciation and better understanding of Buddhism by general audiences, particularly for the remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity evident among Buddhists worldwide today. "The filmmakers aren't all Buddhists of course. They're artists exploring issues and ideas that are in alignment with any of the wisdom traditions that value compassion. These films can change the way people see the world," said IBFF's executive director, Gaetano Kazuo Maida, who will be attending and presenting the Mexico premiere of *Peace Is Every Step*, his film about the Nobel Prize-nominated Vietnamese Zen teacher and author Thich Nhat Hanh.

For more information, visit www.ibff.org. The official Mexican website, in Spanish, is www.ibff2008mexico.org. Local media contact (bi-lingual) in Mexico City is Claudia del Castillo claudia.delcastillo@consecuencias.net

About The Author

BRIAN SCHELL

Editor of the Daily Buddhism website and host of the weekly audio show, Brian looks for more time to meditate, but is



usually too busy running websites to stop and smell the lotus.

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