

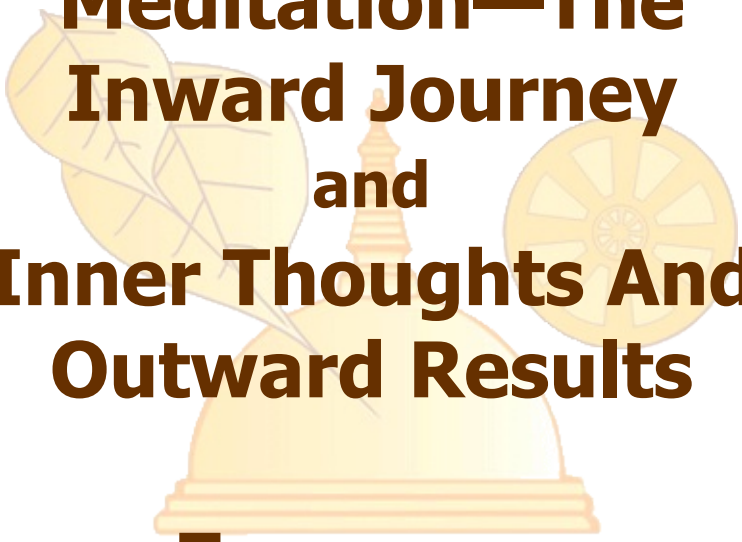
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**Meditation—
The Inward Journey
&
Inner Thoughts
And Outward Results**

*Two essays by
John Andrew Storey*



BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY



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and
Inner Thoughts And
Outward Results**

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by

John Andrew Storey

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Meditation—The Inward Journey

Introduction



M

an has always been an explorer. In earlier times he took to the sea in boats to search for far distant shores. In more recent times with his advanced technology he has turned his eyes to the heavens, and with rockets of unbelievable power has pierced the skies in his search for more distant worlds. Already man has set foot on the Moon, and it is confidently predicted that soon he will visit Mars and other planets. Where all this will end, who can tell? One thing seems certain, that unless man can find sufficient wisdom to match his increasing knowledge it could well end in disaster. With such unthinkable horrors as the nuclear bomb at his disposal he could in a single holocaust destroy himself and all other life on this planet. The acquisition of knowledge leads to cleverness—which is not necessarily a virtue. The practice of meditation leads to wisdom; hence the importance of meditation in the world today.

As I have said, man is by nature an explorer, but as a widely travelled man once wisely remarked “only the inward journey is real.” That inward journey is what meditation is all about. It would be folly to imagine that the elementary advice given in this simple primer will take you more than a few steps on that journey, for it is indeed a long and arduous journey that does not end this side of Nibbāna. But even the longest journey must begin with a single step, and I shall be content if this simple primer helps a few people to take those initial steps. Help can be theirs for the more advanced stages, when by mastering these early steps they have proved themselves ready and worthy to receive it.

The reader should take note of a final word of warning and advice. Do not be discouraged if your progress in the art of meditation seems painfully slow. This is no easy task you are on, and quick results should not be looked for. Most worthwhile things take times to achieve, and it is always the hardest won victory that gives the greatest satisfaction. Perseverance is the key-word, and one should always bear in mind the Chinese proverb, that “One should not be afraid of travelling slowly, but only afraid of standing still.”

The Art of Meditation

Irrigators lead the water where they will,
fletchers shape the arrow; carpenters bend
wood to their will; wise men shape themselves.

Dhammapada

There are many facets to the religious life, and the full religious life is the one that takes them all into account. There is a danger in over-emphasising one aspect, though we are all prone to do this on occasions. Those of us who live in the Western World tend to lay great stress on what we care to believe are the practical aspects of religion. Religion is thought to be of little value unless it is seen to be doing something. One does not despise this. The dictates of compassion cannot be ignored. But there is a danger that in all this busy over-organised activity we may lose sight of the most fundamental thing of all, the development, cultivation, and perfection of oneself. Nor is this a selfish aim, for only as we become masters of ourselves can we truly become the servants of others. The most important thing in all religion life then—in the sense of being the thing we need to do first—is to obtain complete self-mastery, to purify ourselves, to develop the mind and to raise one's level

of consciousness. But how is this to be done? Meditation provides the answer. But how does one make a start in mastering the difficult art of meditation?

First of all one must recognise that in meditation—as in all worthwhile things—little is accomplished if one has no real desire to do it and the work is badly done. One's first task then is to try to overcome one's reluctance and to encourage in oneself the desire to meditate. One must also carefully examine one's motives for wanting to master the art of meditation. The increased mental powers which meditation brings are not good or bad in themselves—it all depends upon the use to which they are put. Do we wish to use any new-found powers we may acquire for the good of mankind? It must be remembered too that meditation should not become an excuse for us to neglect our other duties. The time found for it must be taken from our leisure hours.

As in all things one must give due attention to the practical little details. Experience has shown that the best results are obtained when one sticks to a set time and place. A few minutes a day will probably bring better results than half an hour twice a week. The body should be poised and alert, yet relaxed and comfortable. The lotus position—the cross-legged position on the floor—is advised for those who can

learn to use it without discomfort, but this is not a matter of fundamental importance. Having taken a comfortable position one must then completely relax oneself, and this is best done by breathing slowly and deeply from the stomach. This relaxes the body while at the same time it helps to stimulate the mind.

Even now one is not ready for meditation, for before one can do that one must develop the necessary powers. A would-be sportsman knows that he will do no good on the field of play until he has first of all tuned up his body and developed his muscles. To this end he will dedicate himself to hours of physical exercise. In the same way it is futile to try to meditate until you have first developed your mental muscles. This is done by learning to concentrate, and all manuals on meditation give lists of exercises in concentration which help to this end. The object of these exercises is to learn how to focus one's entire mind on a given thing and to hold it there for a period of time. In short one must learn to use one's mind like a searchlight and to concentrate its full power on any given point.

One exercise frequently mentioned in text-books is that of concentrating one's full attention on a small physical object. A matchbox or an orange will do. Place the chosen object before you a few feet away and then, when you are completely relaxed, focus the

searchlight of your mind upon it. Exclude from your mind all but the object you have chosen for your exercise. See if you can hold this alone in your mind for a whole minute. If you cannot then at least you will have been taught a valuable lesson in humility, for you will have been forced to recognise the gulf which lies between you and even elementary thought control. When you can really carry out this exercise for three whole minutes continuously there will be time enough to move on to the next. There are indeed many exercises which one can use. One can elaborate on the first exercise by concentrating on a matchbox, then after a while closing one's eyes in an effort to picture it in the mind's eye. While looking at it in the mind's eye one should view it from all its different angles, then most difficult of all, try to look at it from all sides at once.

More difficult still one can close one's eye and try to visualise a colour. Take for example the colour blue. With eyes closed, visualise blue, not a blue object but just blue. Then slowly infuse the blue with yellow so that it begins to show as a more greenish blue, not in patches, but simultaneously everywhere. Continue to make it greener and greener until you have a whole world of vivid green. Then just as gradually make your green yellow until your world is a pure and brilliant yellow. Then if you wish, reverse the process

back through green to blue. There are, of course, dozens of other exercises I could mention, but I do not wish to duplicate what can be found in any text book on concentration, and with a little imagination one can easily invent one's own. And, of course, it goes without saying that we should make concentration an integral part of our daily life by giving our complete and undivided attention to everything we do.

How easy it is to let the mind wander instead of keeping it fixed on the job in hand, but in striving to curb this tendency we go a long way towards preparing our minds for the practice of meditation. The exercises I have outlined may seem rather trivial and silly, but then so would the 'physical jerks' of the athlete if we did not understand the aim they are meant to serve. Either you can do these exercises or you cannot. If you cannot then you are in no position to despise them. If you can, then by all means pass from them without delay. When some measure of efficiency in concentration has been acquired then one may turn to the practice of meditation, the double purpose of which is to increase one's own enlightenment and to share it with the suffering millions of mankind.

Broadly speaking meditation may be divided into two: lower meditation and higher meditation—or to put it another way, meditation "with the seed" and

meditation “without the seed,” the “seed” being the subject for meditation. Only those who have considerable experience in the former should attempt the latter, for if it is tried too early, it is apt to produce a negative attitude of mind with a resulting loss of concentration, discouragement and waste of time. Let us then—as this is but a simple primer for beginners—concentrate on lower meditation, i.e., meditation “with the seed.”

The choices for the “seed-thought”—the object for meditation—are infinite. One may choose to meditate upon some particular doctrine of religion, or upon some passage of scripture. One’s subject may be a verse or a saying, or something that one has heard in a sermon. You may choose to meditate upon certain facts of life, the immensity of the universe, the complexity of life in all its forms, that everything in existence—oneself included—is in a constant state of flux undergoing ceaseless change.

Or again, the subject may be one of the great virtues. *Mettā* —loving kindness—provides an excellent subject for meditation. First try to wash from the mind all impurities, lust, hatred and ignorance, and endeavour to suffuse your own being with unbounded love. Then turn your thoughts to a friend and direct the same thoughts of love towards him or her. Then concentrate your feeling upon someone to

whom you are indifferent. Next, and most difficult, visualise an enemy or someone you dislike, and even though at first it is difficult to do so without a feeling of hypocrisy, pervade him or her with the warmth of generous and pure affection. Finally, radiate loving kindness to all mankind, then to all forms of life, and so through all of the universe. Nārada Thera's excellent book, *Buddhism in a Nutshell* (Wheel Publication, Special Issue) has a beautiful meditation on the Perfections which for your convenience I include here. It is a meditation I can heartily recommend.

Meditation on the Perfections (pāramī)

1. May I be generous and helpful (*dāna*—generosity).
2. May I be well disciplined and refined in manners. May I be pure and clean in all my dealings. May my thoughts, words and deeds be pure (*sīla* —morality).
3. May I not be selfish and self-possessive but selfless and disinterested. May I be able to

sacrifice my pleasure for the sake of others (*nekkhamma*—renunciation).

4. May I be wise and be able to see things as they truly are. May I see the light of Truth and lead others from darkness to light. May I be enlightened and be able to enlighten others. May I be able to give the benefit of my knowledge to others (*paññā*—wisdom).
5. May I be energetic, vigorous and persevering. May I strive diligently until I achieve my goal. May I be fearless in facing dangers and courageously surmount all obstacles. May I be able to serve others to the best of my ability (*virīya*—energy).
6. May I ever be patient. May I be able to bear and forbear the wrongs of others. May I ever be tolerant and see the good and beautiful in all (*khanti*—patience).
7. May I ever be truthful and honest. May I not hide the truth to be polite. May I never swerve from the path of Truth (*sacca*—truthfulness).
8. May I be firm and resolute and have an iron will. May I be soft as a flower and firm as a rock. May I ever be high-principled (*adhiṭṭhāna* — determination).

9. May I ever be kind, friendly and compassionate. May I be able to regard all as my brothers and sisters and be one with all (*mettā*—loving kindness).
10. May I be calm, seaceful. May I gain a balanced mind. May I have perfect equanimity (*upekkhā*—equanimity).

May I serve to be perfect,
May I be perfect to serve.

I do not think I need to give any further examples of meditations. Others will suggest themselves to your own mind, and in practice you will find many more.

At the beginning I stated that there are different aspects to the religious life and that many people—particularly in the West—have a great fondness for what they regard as the practical side of religion. Perhaps this is why so many of us have tended to neglect meditation, for to those who have no knowledge or experience of it, it does seem to have little to do with the hard world of reality. Yet in truth, the practice of meditation is of the highest practical value and is a pre-requisite for all real service, for only as we truly become masters of ourselves can we really become the servants of others. The greatest service we can render is that of trying to shed a little light in this world of darkness, a little knowledge in this world of

ignorance, a little wisdom in this world of folly.

As the Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa reminds us: “Practising meditation is like sharpening a knife for cutting cleanly, or like polishing a glass so as to see clearly.” [1] I would add that it is also like cleaning the windows so that the light that is within you may illumine the path around you that others may see the light and tread more safely the road of life. The light is within thee. Let the light shine. Nor should we overlook the fact that even the act of meditation itself—quite apart from the benefit it brings to ourselves—is an act of service, for like radio stations constantly sending out radio waves we are constantly sending out “thought waves” which in ways unseen and undreamed of raise or lower the moral climate of society around us. A fanciful notion? Perhaps. But who has not at some time or other entered a room and immediately sensed the atmosphere of that room even before a word has been spoken—and even in extreme cases if everyone has already left the room. Sometimes, speaking of such an experience, we say: “The atmosphere was so thick you could have cut it with a knife.” Could it not be that in meditation there is an element of “mental telepathy?” If so, the meditation is in part at least a form of “concentrated telepathy” which, when purposefully directed, can convey great benefits to others. In meditation we can

join that unseen Brotherhood whose spiritual endeavours help to form a guardian wall about humanity.

I cannot stress too strongly that in this simple primer we have barely scratched the surface of this deep and complex subject. Yet little though it is that we have learned, it is sufficient to make a beginning, and a start upon the road towards enlightenment. Even the acquisition of a little wisdom can work wonders, for as we learn in the Sutta of Wei Lang (Hui Neng):

Even as the light of a lamp can break up darkness which has been there for a thousand years, so can a spark of wisdom do away with ignorance which has lasted for ages.

The light is there to be found, but so often we are like the man who turns his back to the light and then complains about the shadow in front. To those who doubt their ability to succeed there is but one word—TRY. And in meditation, as in all things, there are only two basic rules: BEGIN and CONTINUE.

Inner Thoughts—And Outward Results

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

Dhammapada

It is now generally agreed that man is a member of the animal kingdom, and that like the other animals—to whom he is related—his existence has been brought about by the long processes of evolution. Like other animals man is born as a result of the mating process, he needs food, drink and rest in order to grow and remain healthy, he experiences pain, sickness, and ultimately death. Yet in one important respect man is different from the lower forms of life, for he alone of all the creatures of this planet has the power to think imaginatively, creatively and constructively. A man can think, and his thoughts make him what he is.

The ability to think, the power of thought, is man's greatest gift. It is thought which moulds civilisation and which created many of the things we take for granted. As a tiny seed can produce a beautiful flower, as a small seed can produce a mighty tree, so can thought produce the most wonderful things. Every book ever written, every symphony ever composed, every temple ever built, every scientific discovery ever made, every religious or political system ever created began in the mind of a man as a thought. Religion, philosophy, art, science, politics, and all the things we mean by civilisation begin as a thought. And it was by his power of thought that Siddhattha Gotama became Buddha and gave his Dhamma to the world.

Among the religions of the world it is in Buddhism that the power of thought is given the strongest emphasis. The *Dhammapada* reminds us that "all that we are is the result of what we have thought," and further reminds us that "the wise man shapes himself." It is of the character-building power of thought in our own lives that I would have us give our main attention.

The creative or destructive power of thought—for it can indeed work both ways—is a great truth that has been known in the East for many centuries. It was the Teaching of the Lord Buddha. In the West we came to the knowledge rather late, but our psychologists now

corroborate the ancient truth and tell us that many of our physical and mental ailments are due to our thoughts. So worry, for example, is one of the major causes of ulcers, while fear anger, hatred, and the constant dwelling on lewd thoughts, all take their toll. The same is true in the moral realm. Evil thoughts, constantly entertained, weaken the character and make one more susceptible to temptation. All evil words and deeds are preceded by evil thoughts, and evil thoughts allowed to remain unchanged will lead eventually to evil words and deeds.

Thoughts then can be either good or bad and can give rise to results that are either harmful or pleasant. It is claimed that some have gained such control over the mental processes that they can suspend thought all together, and for a long period keep their mind a perfect blank. Few of us are likely to achieve this. For most of us thoughts of one sort or another will always be milling around in our heads, and if they are not good thoughts they will inevitably be bad. Since noble and base thoughts cannot co-exist in the mind at the same time, one will always expel the other.

We are not to blame if evil thoughts occasionally enter our minds, but we are at fault if we give them a welcome and allow them to remain there unchecked. As the Eastern proverb has it: "We cannot prevent them from alighting on our heads, but we can prevent

them from building their nests there.” A keen gardener will root out a weed as soon as it appears in his garden lest it should take hold and eventually destroy his good plants. We should act with the same urgency with evil thoughts, for they too will quickly take root and destroy the noblest flowerings of our minds. The surest way of keeping evil thoughts at bay is to discipline our minds to think constantly of that which is beautiful and true and good. When the mind is full of that which is good, the evil will seek for an entry in vain.

The *Dhammapada* warns the wise man to guard his thoughts, for they are, it says, “difficult to perceive, very artful, and they rush wherever they list. Thoughts well guarded bring happiness.” The *Dhammapada* further says:

Let no man think lightly of evil, saying in his heart: ‘It will not come nigh unto me.’ Even by the falling of water drops, a water-pot is filled; the fool becomes full of evil, even if he gathers it little by little.

Let no man think lightly of good, saying in his heart: ‘It will not come nigh unto me.’ Even by the falling of water drops, a water-pot is filled; the wise man becomes full of good, even if he gathers it little by little.

Slowly, like a jar beneath a dripping cave, we accumulate vice or virtue. The choice is ours. The choice is important, for, “If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage ... If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.”

We are thinking beings, and out of our thoughts we can create wondrous things. But more important than any work of art, more important than any majestic building, more important than any feat of engineering is that of shaping our selves. And we can do just that as we direct our thoughts towards pure and noble ends, knowing that by our thoughts—which in turn govern our words and deeds—we are preparing for ourselves a harvest of joy or sorrow.

Notes

1. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Extinction Without Remainder & The Fruit of Meditation*, Buddhist Publication Society, [Bodhi Leaves No. 33](#)
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