

Meditation and Action

by:

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Talk given on 27th November 1966 at the Brighton Conference of THE CENTRE FOR SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES; grateful thanks are due to the above society for kind permission to reproduce this talk here. Its author is a Lama from Eastern Tibet who escaped to India in 1959 and is now resident in this country: the story of his early training and subsequent adventures when escaping from the Chinese Communists forms the subject of a book entitled BORN IN TIBET and recently published by Allen and Unwin. After consulting the Venerable Trungpa it was agreed that his talk on Meditation should be printed just as it stood (having been recorded on tape in the first place) because it seemed to the editor that what little might be gained by recasting it in literary form would be more than offset by a loss in characteristic vividness and suggestive power. Therefore the author has confined himself to a very few indispensable adjustments in the text, leaving the rest as it stands.

MEDITATION and its practice is of course a very vast and deep subject to discuss in a short period, but I will try my best to comment on certain principal methods and aims of meditation, leading up to its fruition. I am sure that most religions in the world have some form of meditation or contemplation, and that this is the only way to achieve a higher state of realization. I think one must make clear that meditation is not the invention of any religious school in the world, but that meditation is something which already existed even before any religion known to us by name existed, and that only certain *methods* were introduced by various great religious masters and teachers. Particularly in Buddhism, meditation is one of its essential practices, *the practice*; but there are of course great varieties of technique, numerous ways of practising. Before we go into this, however, let me give you the general pattern of Buddhism.

Buddha was born in a Hindu family and India was a Hindu country; but he was not satisfied with the existing religious establishment and social structure. Not only that, but he saw that life in the royal family, or any worldly pleasures and pursuits, are not the final way to meet the challenge of existence; in fact he saw them merely as a drug to make one forget death and suffering. Buddha was very concerned at that time with finding out more about life itself, and so he made several journeys outside the palace, meeting peasants and simple country people. He saw them dying, saw old age, sickness, all sorts of suffering and hardship that people were going through. Then he thought and felt that his own life in the royal house was too artificial, therefore in order to find the true meaning of life he decided to leave his kingdom and meditate in the jungle under a Hindu master. He studied for a long period, but still found that certain questions remained unanswered, so he then went and meditated alone, without any teacher and finally found the answer he sought and achieved what is known as *Enlightenment*, the state of Bodhi, which means the awakened state.

In the course of Buddhist history one might say, perhaps, that at different periods there have been different developments of particular aspects of the teaching of Buddha. For instance, there was a time when there were many Buddhist disciples "leaving home" and leading contemplative lives in the jungle as monks and nuns, and they followed what is known as the First Turning of the Wheel of *Dharma* (= Doctrine or Law). Buddha's teachings were divided into three different groups, the First, Second and Third Turning of the Wheel of Doctrine. The First concerned the existence of suffering, the origin of suffering and the cessation of suffering. The Second Turning of the Wheel of Doctrine, which was revealed some ten years after Buddha attained Enlightenment, concerned further teachings about the cessation of suffering; and not only the cessation of suffering, but about freedom and about the presence of freedom in all things; this is known as the doctrine of *Sunyata*, the doctrine that the emptiness which is the essence of all existence is in itself a state of freedom. The Third Turning of the Wheel of Doctrine consists in not only seeing things as emptiness, negatively, but seeing the void from a positive point of view as *Prabhasva*, the Sanskrit word meaning 'illumination.' Everything is not only emptiness, impermanence, but there is light, there is brilliancy, there is a kind of great force of wisdom, great force of a *living* element in spirituality. This is the last turning of the wheel of the doctrine.

These Three Turnings of the Wheel of Doctrine are the subject of the Buddhist 'bible,' so to speak, of which there are one hundred and eight volumes. A lot of these volumes not only contain the Buddha's own words, but tell us what people discussed in front of him; the Buddha encouraged people to ask questions many of which have been put on record, so that the *sutras* amount not only to what he said, but also describe how he lived his life—and all his life offers an example of active spirituality, whatever he did, from the age of twenty-nine up to his death.

So one might say that during the early part of the Buddhist period people followed the First Turning of the Wheel of Doctrine. This was largely because India was divided into a caste system, and Buddha saw that this was essentially non-existent for one who was able to see beyond the set limits—these limits are merely conventional and therefore illusory—and he wanted to introduce the concept that in spiritual life there is no caste and no race, since everyone has to suffer alike. Therefore he induced people to realize the original nature of suffering, but also the way to be freed from it. After some time, however, Buddhism was developed in India not only as a teaching of the contemplative life, but also as an explicit metaphysical theory, especially by Nagārjuna. He did not incorporate some non-Buddhist philosophy or other into Buddhism, but simply put the great Truth into logical language, founding the philosophical school called the Middle Way (*Madhyamika* in Sanskrit). People had tended to think of Buddhism as too extreme and felt doubts about it, especially at that time when scholars expected questions and answers always to take a logical form. So Nagārjuna introduced this logical way of interpreting the teaching of Buddha through the philosophy of the Middle Way. At this time he was much concerned not only to codify Buddhist logic, but also to establish a kind of meeting-point of the First Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine and the Second Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine, and this in fact is the Middle Way.

The Third Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine came later on, some three hundred years after Nagārjuna's time, and this is sometimes known as the Tantric teaching; but it

is not only a theoretical teaching, for it is always accompanied by an appropriate method whereby the teaching can be effectively realized. There are, of course, great *sutras*, like the Sutra of Mahaparinirvana and other Buddhist texts, which together represent the Third Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine. But there is also the mystical aspect of Buddhism, that is to say the teaching of Yoga, of a specifically Buddhist Yoga. "Tantra" is the text, and "Yoga" is the practice, the following of that Path. Tantra is the shortest way to achieve Enlightenment through various methods, suddenly or else in stages. The Third Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine shows that the Middle Path meant finding certain ways, certain methods, rather than just studying a theory. Tantra introduced numerous methods and techniques of meditation, which later on in the history of Buddhism became known to the spiritual masters of Japan, China and Tibet.

So there has been, as one might say, a flow, starting from the founding of Buddhism on the principle of first learning about life, suffering, and so on, and gradually moving from there towards the highest peak of realization. This was not invented, of course, by the Buddha's followers; rather this is, one might say, a human development: a particular teaching was (or is) needed at a particular time and certain aspects of that teaching were introduced later on when the time was ripe. This is how Buddhism developed and continued to fulfill people's need.

Now we come to the question of meditation itself. Perhaps we might start with the four Principles of Being which are Impermanence, Suffering, Emptiness and Selflessness. These four subjects cover all aspects of Buddha's teaching.

Starting with Impermanence—taken in the ordinary sense, it means that all existence is subject to decay. If a thing is created, then it is also subject to death, to decay. But there is another thing too—each moment, each minute is also birth and death, and so comes the study of Time. The present becomes the past, the future becomes the present and then the past, and so things are always moving and changing, everything is subject to change. People sometimes find this rather a grim idea—it makes everything seem unreal, so they say, but in saying this, they miss the essential point. In order to see the beauty of things, in order to see their reality, you have also to know their impermanent aspect. For example, a flower. We know it cannot live for a long period, for a year, say; we know it will only be beautiful for a few weeks or a few days. So one is able to enjoy it all the more just *because* it obeys the law of impermanence. I am sure most of you would agree that to have a plastic flower in your room gives you quite a different feeling, because it always remains the same, is always the same colour; but if you have a real flower, you see something in it which is subject to decay, and therefore there is beauty in it as well. There is beauty in the teaching of the Impermanent. Further to this, we also have to find out about Suffering. Perhaps Suffering isn't the right term to use: the word *dukha* actually means pain, but it does not only mean ordinary suffering, ordinary physical pain, but also wrongness or maladjustment in some aspect of life. One might say that in the present day people suffer, they find that life is not worthwhile, there is something wrong, and they complain about the world, about their life, about society, and so on. This is not only a problem of our own particular age, the twentieth century. Things have always been so, throughout all time. If you read books written in medieval times, people then were also extolling the glories of the previous generations and were not satisfied with their own lives. Perhaps especially in this age, when material progress and communication have

become so rapid, the law of Suffering becomes even clearer. The other day we were talking about the suicide rate, saying that every day a thousand people commit suicide. It is not that one particular time is necessarily worse than another, for materialism is always there in greater or lesser degree; with changing times a different aspect of materialism will express itself. Whatever happens one will find that something is not right with life, and unless one is able to discover the seed of it, one will remain subject to Suffering.

Next comes Emptiness. This is rather a difficult subject to explain. One might say that the "Divine Nature," the "Godhead" is everywhere—the Void is everywhere. Take as an example the word 'silence': when you first think about it, silence means simply 'absence of noise.' But if you are able to go deeper, silence is not only absence of noise but there is in it, as it were, a positive aspect, there is 'quietness.' And if you take it even further, there is not only quietness, but there is a kind of 'music of silence' in it. In a sense silence is also another aspect, another dimension of sound—another dimension of music. In the same way, *Sunyata*, Emptiness, is in everything. Not necessarily just in "religious" objects, but even in quite mundane things—in everything there is an element of Sunyata. This is the essence, this is the Divine Nature, if you like to call it that, this is in Christian terms the Creation of God, therefore everything has an aspect of God in it. This is a very, very crude and rough way of expressing Sunyata, but perhaps we may come to it again later on in the study of meditation.

The fourth Principle of Being is *Anitya*, Selflessness. This links up with meditation.

But before we come to the actual doctrine of Selflessness, I think we should first say something about the *kāya* concept, the concept of three principal aspects of Buddhahood, namely the Dharmakāya Buddha, the Sambhogakāya Buddha and the Nirmanakāya Buddha. You can read of this in the Diamond Sutra and the other great Sutras associated with the Third Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine. Take first the Dharmakāya: one might say that the space *outside* existence, if you define it, is the Dharmakāya—Dharma is the Sanskrit word for "law" or "norm," and *kāya* means "form" or "body." So the outline is the thing which defines space, for example in a cup—in order to see the space one might first have to take the cup and say, "inside of this is emptiness," and then break it so that, by breaking it, inner space is merged with outer space. So the Dharmakāya exists before time and after time, and even before the definition of the Dharmakāya itself existed. It is sometimes referred to as the Buddha with one eye, the Third Eyed Buddha, the Buddha who sees into everything. It is referred to in certain mystical texts as "Buddha, the Four-Faced One," that is to say one who sees in all directions at once because he is not involved in the idea of back and front, since all parts of him are in an equal state of illumination. You will find this explained in certain Hatha Yoga Tantra texts.

Then we have the Sambhogakāya Buddha, occupying the middle position: this word means "Body of Bliss." "*Sam*" means 'complete,' "*bhoga*" is 'enjoyment,' and I have shown it in the centre of my diagram¹ because it is not separate from the Dharmakāya, but is its expressive force. And so the Dharmakāya is like the space outside, while the Sambhogakāya is the living light in it, expressed as compassion and wisdom and other divine virtues. And thirdly we have Nirmanakāya, the Body of Manifestation, and that is the 'Seeingness' of everything; without this, one cannot see.

Something needs to be said about the common background of existence: the Sanskrit term for this is *Vijnana Alaya*, which literally means "repository of discrimination"; it denotes the background of all that exists. And then we have what might be called the primary ignorance, the first moment of "ignoring" the all-seeing Eye. Here "ignorance" is not to be taken in the ordinary sense, but in the sense that the Seeingness of the Eye "ignores" the existence of the Eye itself. Thus ignorance develops. And as you go on, at first the ignorance is in the form just of confusion, of mere ignoring, of becoming fascinated by the vision instead of realizing that the seer and the thing seen are not separate, but are simply possibilities included in the One. As we become fascinated by the vision, we begin to shift away from the centre, and the more we become involved, the further we travel astray, with this deviating tendency becoming ever more accelerated by our desire to lay hold of the world of appearances. Then the element of time creeps in. You see something in a sudden glimpse, a wonderful flash, and then after this you want to "make another flash," with effort, with desire. And of course you cannot.

Hence arises the existence of ignorance and from Ignorance the subconscious creates the various fetters, such as pride, envy, craving, hatred and others. The first one is pride, and this is a less extreme form, less evolved emotionally, and as it builds up in intensity, the last degree is hatred, which makes a very extreme division between 'I' and 'you'—thinking that "I" am definitely in the right, and "you" in the wrong.

By this stage we might have had the purpose and practice of meditation explained to us in such a way that we misunderstood it; in which case, instead of turning our meditation inward, we might try to search for freedom outside, while also trying to press on as fast as possible. And of course in the very moment of trying to chase this or that, you go further and further away from that freedom all the time, further and further out. Therefore there is no existence of 'self' as such, *atman* as such. There is, in a sense, this inner circle of "ignorance," which is the self-conscious idea of "I am," and "I want to go forward." If you ask, "But is not this self, this centre, something?" I think the answer is 'No' Because if you say this *is* the centre, there is a chance of the ignorant aspect of self influencing all the rest. There may also be a danger of an inward view in reverse, because the state of enlightenment or freedom is not one of oneself becoming greater, a greater 'me' in a bigger version. Realization of freedom is not just that—it is something of quite another dimension.

And this brings us on to the question of the practice of meditation. We are in fact confused as to where we are going, in which direction, so we have first to find a regular pattern of the movement of thought, before we are able actually to deal with the centre. Therefore there are various practices in meditation. In the beginning you have the practice of 'mindfulness.' Of course, there are different traditions, different methods, and the teacher must know the disciple, and the disciple must have personal instruction and follow the method which is suitable for him particularly. But the general pattern of meditation is first to develop a habitual mindfulness; and often in the Buddhist tradition we use the movement of breathing with a view to cultivating this quality. You sit quietly and just watch your breathing going in and out, in and out, mentally saying 'out', 'in.' In some traditions they count the breaths, 'one,' 'two,' 'three' and so on. Obviously this is still a form of thought, you are still thinking 'out' and 'in' and this is a thought-process. But this is necessary. Before we get to the true mystical experience, we must first have an

imitation of it. And even this can be difficult. And another problem, of course, when we talk about this aspect of meditation is that it does not involve thinking in terms of a particular mystical symbolism and trying to focus upon it. In fact it is the opposite—one is trying to *undo* things and trying to solve the problem of the over-learning which has been done by the "ignorant" within. You have to un-learn, as it were. Therefore the first thing we have to do is to develop a regular pattern of mind—thoughts will keep coming into the mind and you will want to express them, and so on. And here again, an important aspect of meditation is that it is not a battle! It is not at all a case of standing, as it were, in the sight of God and trying to fight evil. In fact it is the opposite. You are trying to ignore both the feeling of wanting to fight and of wanting to develop something in particular; you are trying simply to get on with the very moment's actions, the very moment's thoughts. One must be able, as it were, to 'disconnect' one's active thoughts—neither to welcome them, nor go into them in detail, nor to hate them nor to love them, but simply to let them pass through. For example, if someone knocks at your door and you answer, 'Hello, come in!' and call him by his name, then you are already involved with that person. But if, on the other hand, you answer "What do you want? You are a stranger!" you will put him off, you will not get involved with him. Similarly, thoughts need a certain kind of response from us—the thought comes from outside and a sort of inner 'agent' in ourselves welcomes it, but if we are able to overcome this inner agent there is then no place into which the thought can come, in which it can dwell. Then one begins to develop a regular pattern, one is able simply to concentrate on 'out' and 'in,' the movement of one's breathing, and for quite a long period of time one is able to be quite still. This is of course not an actual contemplative state, but simply an imitation of one.

The next stage will be, probably, that you have a longing to remain in that state. You begin to 'enjoy' it—for although there is no thought, there is a kind of still feeling and one may have the experience of extreme pleasure, of happiness, and one may feel wonderfully calm and at peace, and so on. So then one wants to remain in this state, and this in itself is another temptation which must be overcome. For no single method or technique is valid *all* the time, from the beginning to the end—they are all simply *temporary* methods. I am sure you have heard the Buddha's saying: one does not carry the boat on one's back after one has crossed the stream! You find another means of transport and you leave the boat on the river bank. So similarly, you must not hang on to a particular method because you find it is nice and comfortable. And then again, this method of meditation is not seeking to go "into a trance," so to speak, nor is it a case of going into the depths of yourself and enjoying the inner bliss. You are, in fact, trying to overcome the desire to enjoy inner bliss—so that ultimately you may enjoy a universal and selfless bliss which is outside, inside, everywhere.

So first you have to develop a pattern of thought which is regular. And then the next step is that you should forget even the fact that you are meditating. Up to here, you have had to make a great effort to meditate, but there comes a stage when one is able to forget that one is actually sitting and meditating. One has to overcome these desires and simply 'hold' one's personality and concentrate on the one thing, and then one is able to go into what is known as "formless" meditation. In breathing, there is the 'out' and the 'in,' the 'out' and the 'in,' and between these there are gaps—'out,' silence, 'in,' silence, and so on. These silences are in a sense the actual meditation. (One often finds after one has finished a formal meditation time that the best experience of meditation comes at the end because

one is detached from the actual desire to do it properly). So now one tries to learn this 'meditation beyond action,' and with this there will be a kind of 'radiation' in the meditation—up to then one has been meditating within the 'you' and concerned about breathing and so on, and now one is able to break through and radiate out, and so you radiate your whole being outwards. Sometimes one finds this very difficult, because ego-gravity holds one back, telling one it might be dangerous, and then you find a false Middle Way. So one has to try to overcome this gravity and endeavour to release entirely out, though one might feel fearful, feel that one doesn't want to go too far, that one wants to come back to the inner bliss and enjoyment of the previous stage of meditation.

Finally then, in your formal meditation time you will be able to meditate and overcome these obstacles. But still things are not progressing. When you go into meditation and start meditating, everything goes very well, but still something is missing. For now one has to bring meditation into practical everyday life—this is known as *meditation in action*. While one talks, walks, does anything, one should be able to radiate. When any problem arises, far from its being a hindrance to one's meditation, it becomes a kind of opportunity. These experiences may be negative ones—they may be temptations, they may cause distress. Whatever kind of difficulties one has to go through, these difficulties are the *Guru* from whom one will ultimately learn. Suppose you are going for a pilgrimage in the mountains and a tree falls and rocks roll down on your path. Instead of treating them as obstacles, you make the trees into ladders and the rocks into steps and use everything possible to help you on your pilgrimage. Similarly, one is able to use everything as part of one's meditation experience. Of course, at the beginning we are concerned with elementary things, we practice walking etc., with mindfulness, we try to be mindful of each step, and so on. But then comes a stage when one is able to overcome this rigidity. There is a kind of inner wisdom which speaks to you and acts as a kind of "eye" for you, so that you are able to listen to someone's conversation and walk and do things, but without becoming too involved, without emotional entanglement, and one is able to radiate fully. One is able to talk and do everything within the light of radiation, just as, when the sun rises, one is not consciously aware of the sun though everything one does is done in the light of the sun.

Of course you meet difficulties not only when you are in the meditation cell or in church; you will meet them when you go outside, and this is the only way you can put your practice into effect; but gradually one comes more and more back to the centre. And at this stage, even religious practices sometimes can become a hindrance. Though they may be necessary in order to develop serenity, a feeling of peace, and so on, they are but a method, another method. As Buddha said, one is expected to overcome attachment even to the Buddha; the Buddha is not a final refuge, only Dharma, Truth, is *the* final refuge. In the history of India, King Krita once had a dream which he took to be a bad omen for his kingdom. He told the Buddha of his dream, which was that an elephant was in the house and trying to get out and the whole body got through, but the tail stuck. The Buddha said, "This dream is not about your kingdom, this is telling you the future of a follower of Buddha; though he may be able to renounce big things, the very last thing of all remains."

Finally, everything goes beyond the stage of words. The teacher is only someone who will introduce you to a method of meditation and practice, and eventually one has to find the inner teacher. At first the obstacles and problems that arise are the inner teacher. And

then one goes beyond that, to a stage where 'awareness' is the inner teacher.

At first you feel, 'I am going to practice a method of meditation,' and then you go into it. Then at the second stage, you just feel conscious that you have to go into it and then you go into it, and finally even the desire to meditate is non-existent; meditation occurs spontaneously, it just happens. An analogy is that one's thoughts are like a thief going into a deserted house. He wants to steal but he finds nothing and goes away. Similarly thoughts come, but if there is nothing to react to them, they just pass through.

You don't have specially to stress the morality of the pilgrim. If a person is able to practice meditation and he is carrying it out effectively, then he doesn't have particularly to worry about "am I being a good religious person?" at all. Because the very desire for this does not exist any more, and when he has a certain desire, the desire itself acts as a reminder, so he doesn't have to lead a consciously defined religious life, but it just happens.

And then finally comes the last stage. Up till now he has been able to make himself stable, balanced, but he has not had any higher mystical experience. But now finally everything he hears and sees becomes heaven, as you might call it. Not in the sense that the landscape becomes full of flowers, or buildings made out of precious stones, but that they are *equivalent* to precious stones. He may live in a very simple brick house, but for him there is beauty in it, it is equivalent to a house made out of precious stones. He doesn't have to have visions of heaven, heaven just happens wherever he is. For if one is still unbalanced and full of a desire to go to heaven, then even in heaven one would probably feel tired of seeing beautiful things, because one has this instinct to search further and further on while thinking that "I want this." As long as one wishes to search further and as long as one is unable to free oneself, one is not able to find the centre.

So finally, the last experience will be that one reaches heaven and sees everything as wonderful, as a reminder of spiritual things, and through this realization one is also able to influence other people. Not because one becomes excessively clever and able to read other people's thoughts like pictures, but because one is in a state of truth, because one is 'clear'; therefore whatever one does is also done for other people. This happens automatically, it is not consciously acted. Whatever one says is the word of truth, because there is no conscious effort and one is never involved in the idea of duality. Finally there is no self, no 'I' left. Therefore whatever one does becomes an act of compassion. In the Buddhist tradition we sometimes worship the footprint of Buddha, because this represents the fact that Buddha walked from one end of India to the other without riding on a horse or an elephant, nor in a chariot. He simply walked on his bare feet and delivered his message.

¹ While speaking, the Lama drew a diagram on a blackboard in order to illustrate various points. (*Editorial note*).