

MEDITATION: MINDFULNESS

Sati

Introduction to the readings for February 28 class

Suttas 39, 62, 20, 10, 118, 119

(Optional 128)

What should be done for his disciples out of compassion by a teacher who seeks their welfare that I have done for you, Cunda. There are these roots of trees, these empty huts. **Meditate, Cunda, do not delay or else you will regret it later.** This is our instruction to you.

MN 8.18

The image that most universally represents Buddhism is that of the Buddha meditating. The Buddha's Awakening, without which there would be no Buddhism, was attained while meditating. After his Awakening he seems often to have spent his day in meditation. In at least nine suttas of the *Majjhima* he is described as going off to meditate after his morning alms round. These suttas also report that in the evening, after the "day's abiding," he came out of his retreat in order to teach (e.g., 119.2). Eleven of the suttas report his disciples similarly spending the day meditating, waiting until the evening to visit the Buddha or other monks (e.g. 62.6).

The Middle Length Discourses contains some of the most important and complete meditation instructions in the Pali Canon. While the *Satipatthana Sutta* (MN 10) and the *Anapanasati Sutta* (MN 118) may be the best known, many of the other discourses contain meditation teachings. In fact the focus on meditation seems to be more consistent in the *Majjhima* than in the other four *Nikayas* (i.e., collections of suttas).

Oddly, no Pali word is a good equivalent to our English word "meditation." The verb *jhāyati* means to meditate. However, the noun *jhāna* is mostly used to refer to particular states of meditative absorption, not to meditation in general. As such, *jhāyat* could be translated as "do jhana". *Samādhi* is sometimes a close approximation for 'meditation' although it often more narrowly means 'concentration' and 'mental collectedness'. For the Buddha, meditation was only one aspect of *bhāvanā*, that is, mental cultivation and development.

Meditation is not done in isolation from other practices, but is supported and integrated with the other practices such as restraint of the senses. Sutta 39 gives one overview of the full range of the areas of inner growth that are included in the path of liberation. Formal meditation practice in the cross legged posture begins with the removal of the hindrances and includes the cultivation of the *jhānas*. We will be studying what the *Majjhima* says about the *jhānas* in a subsequent class. For our upcoming February 28 class we will survey what the text has to say about mindfulness.

As you read sutta 39 notice each time mindfulness is mentioned. Furthermore, please consider what role mindfulness might have with the practices it is associated with. For example, what function does mindfulness have with the abandoning of the hindrances? At what point is it mentioned in the descriptions of the *jhānas*? Mindfulness is not mentioned in the sections titled ‘conduct and livelihood,’ ‘restraint of the senses,’ ‘moderation in eating,’ and ‘wakefulness.’ In what ways might mindfulness be implicit in these practices?

Now that we are about two-thirds of the way through our Sutta Study Program, it might be helpful if you spent some time reviewing what we have covered so far. You might re-read the study guides, some of the suttas from the beginning of the year, as well as your notes. If you have the time please read or re-read Bhikkhu Bodhi’s introduction to the *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* as well as the introductory essay for this course title, “Studying the Middle Length Discourses”.

Bhikkhu, be absorbed in meditation;
 Don’t be negligent;
 Don’t let your mind whirl about
 In sensual desire. ...

There is no meditative absorption
 For one without wisdom.
 There is no wisdom
 For one without meditative absorption.
 With both,
 One is close to Nirvana. *Dhammapada 371-372*¹

Absorbed in meditation, persevering,
 Always steadfast,
 The wise touch Nirvana
 The ultimate rest from toil. *Dhammapada 23*

¹ Zen students might find it interesting to compare verse 372 to section 13 of the Platform Sutra.