

**Institute of Buddhist Studies - Graduate Theological Union**  
**HRSP-1508: Introduction to Buddhist Meditation**

Instructor: Bhante M. Seelawimala

Class Meetings: Thursday, 9:40am to 12:30pm at JSC Room 131

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**Course Description:**

The focus of this class will be given to the Early Buddhist Meditation practices that are found in the Pali Buddhist Texts and commentaries. Early Buddhist Meditation is a carefully design program for the gradual evolution of critical thinking and compassionate behavior. The goal is the simple comfort of day-to-day life and the final achievement of ultimate mental perfection and mental health. The meditation practices prescribed for various mental disorders in both *Samantha* (calm) and *Vipassana* (insight) techniques of Buddhist meditation will be examined. This class will explore how *Samantha* meditation practices lead to transformation of negative emotional tendencies of a person into positive emotional balance. Forty different Samantha meditation exercises are discussed in the Visuddhimagga, i.e., different exercise for different benefits. For example, an unkind person practicing loving-kindness meditation will becomes a compassionate and caring person. These positive effects are the temporary results of *Samatha* practice but it is the foundation to prepare a person for the cultivation of insight or *Vipassana* meditation, which permanently removes all roots of negative emotional tendencies. This meditation is popularly known as mindfulness meditation. A person with well developed mindfulness is capable of capturing the arising emotions and thoughts before the consequent verbal and physical actions take place. Insight meditation results in clear comprehension of the causes and conditions of one's frustrations and fears (*dukkha*). Ultimately, this is the knowledge that leads to final elimination of suffering which is the goal of all Buddhist practices.

**Course Format and Requirement:**

Generally, one half of the class will be the lecture and the other half will be the class discussion. A portion of the class time may be utilized for actual practice of meditation exercises, as necessary. Class participation of all students is a requisite. Each week a designated student will be responsible for leading the class discussion after a brief presentation on an assigned subject. All participants should prepare a glossary of technical terms during the course. A research paper of 12-15 pages before or during the final week is expected.

**Required Reading:**

Vajranana Mahathera, Buddhist Meditation

Khantipalo, Calm and Insight

Silananda U, The Four Foundation of Mindfulness

Nyanaponika, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation

## Supplementary Reading:

Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga, Nanamoli Translation)

Gunaratana, Mindfulness in Plain English

Sayadaw U Panditha, In This Very Life

Sony, The Only Way to Deliverance

Joseph Goldstein, Insight Meditation

Harvey Aronson, Love and Sympathy in Theravada Buddhism

Goldman Daniel, Buddha on Meditation & Higher States of Consciousness

Bibliography

## Proposed Topics:

- **Introduction**

Place of meditation in the structure of Buddha's Teaching - Buddhist definition of the term meditation – *Bhavana* – Fourth Noble Truth and meditation – Transformation of the personality – Interaction of verbal, physical, and mental spheres – Elimination of mental illness (*Dukkha*) – Definite goal and definite method of reaching it – Three areas of cultivation – *Sila* – *Samadhi* – *Panna*.

- **Therapeutic Nature of Buddhist Meditation**

Analysis of the types of personalities – Major disorders of human mind – Buddhist approach of correcting them – Not a religious practice but a series of psychological exercises – Concentration exercises for beginners – Ten *Kasinas* – Using visual objects.

- **Re-conditioning of Personality – Passionate Types**

More serious set of exercises – Strict supervision of an instructor – *Vipallasa Gahana* – Negative conditioning – Ten *Asubhas* – Advantages of this practice – Utilizing ones own weakness for the good – Ten Contemplations – Positive Conditioning – Contemplation of *Buddha* – *Dharma* – *Sangha* – Devine etc.

- **Development of More Practical Skills**

Loathsomeness of food – Analytical observation of the four great elements – The most popular positive conditioning – Development of a friendly personality – Becoming Divine here and now – Practice of *Metta* - *Karuna* - *Mudita* - *Upekkha* – Becoming one with God– Normal and healthy emotional states of mind.

- **Meditation of Friendliness**

*Dosa* – Anger or hatred – One of the three major causes of personal discomfort in the present society – Self-centeredness – Unpleasant experiences a person goes through – Consequent mental wound and *Metta*, the cure – Three types of complexes – Competition and resulting pain – General benefits of this mental exercise – Other three healthy emotions grow together with *Metta*.

- **Levels of Concentration – Additional Psychic Powers**  
*Jhanas* – Form and formless – Buddhist analysis of the psychological states – Eight *Samapattis* and Five Psychich Powers – *Abhinnas* – Buddha’s unique attainments – *Trividya* – *Jhanas* in related to Karma – After life – Inadequacy of all these attainments.
- ***Vipansana* Method of Meditation –Cultivation of Mindfulness**  
 Buddha’s unique contribution to the existing knowledge – Direct observation of the mechanism of mind – Only way to the highest knowledge – Insight or ultimate wisdom – *Satipatthana Sutta* – Four Foundation of Mindfulness – Direct observation of one’s own mental process – processing information input and output - Becoming conscious of consciousness.
- **Introspective Awareness and Insight**  
*Asava*, influences – *Sanna*, perception – *Vinnana*, discriminaive consciousness – *Abhinna*, deep knowledge – *Parinna*, full knowledge – *Panna*, insight and mindfulness – Full knowledge– Three Characteristics – Knowledge of things as they come to be – *Yathabhuta Nana* – Seeing Four Noble Truths the *Dhamma* – Causality – *Paticcasamuppada*.
- **Other Classifications – Braking Away**  
 Development of Eight Fold Path – Five Faculties – Ten *Paramitas* – Seven Factors of Enlightenment – Other Classifications – Braking Away – Five hindrances – Ten Fetters – Four stages of braking away – *Sotapatti* – *Sakadagami* – *Anagami* - *Arihat* – Temporary and permanent stages of awakening – Freeing from all bonds.
- **Final Goal of Buddhist Meditation – Nirvana**  
 Buddhist definition of perfect mental health – Total absence of three poisons - irreversible cure – The most balanced state of mind a being can achieve – Awakening from the stream of delusion – Total absence of fear - Deathlessness - Freedom from all conditioning – Buddhist explanation of this achievement from psychological, ethical and behavioral points of view.
- **Uniqueness of Buddhist Meditation**  
 A brief comparison and contrast of Early Buddhist meditation and other Buddhist and non Buddhist practices – Zen Buddhist meditation – Buddhist esoteric practices - Hindu Yoga meditation – Transcendental meditation – an Early Buddhist analysis of them.