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 Mediation 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**

• **Therapeutic Nature of Buddhist Meditation**

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

• **Development of More Practical Skills**

• **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**  

• **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**  

• **Other Classifications – Braking Away**  

• **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.