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## THE CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION TO THE CURRENT PROBLEMS IN SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

**H**umans as biopsychological beings have an inherent need for peace and joy in this world. People want that; they want peace in their lives, they want some tranquility in their lives inside of them, and in the most intimate relationships they possess in families and in communities, and on and on and on - to be free from trouble; to be free from stress; to be free from threats, fear, anxiety, depression, despair, conflict. In general, we all seek inner peace and joy in various ways. The importance of this basic human need for inner peace is more evident nowadays, as mental restlessness abounds due to present day hi-tech and complex societies in which we live.

**KEYWORDS:** biopsychological , mental restlessness , complex societies.



### INTRODUCTION –

Life in the modern world makes enormous demands of the mind. Nevertheless, the mind being a very versatile instrument is quite capable of meeting all these demands. However, there is a residual effect. As modern day activities become more and more myriad and complex, the mind equally becomes more and more restless. Often the mind is ceaselessly engaged in a number of mental activities at a time throughout the day, this gradually creates a pattern or groove through which mental energy flows. We all feel the need to slow or calm this flow of mental energy after our normal

work-a-day activities. For that reason, meditation is an important problem to the above demands but what is the meditation, and since when did it originate? We will explore these questions. The first, we mention to the origin of meditation. As we understand that, nobody knows the exact historical date when meditation first began but most scholars agree that, the origin of meditation had since ancient times.

“Researchers speculate that primitive hunter-gatherer societies may have discovered meditation and its altered states of consciousness while staring at the flames of their fires. Over

thousands of years, meditation evolved into a structured practice. Indian scriptures called “tantras” mentioned meditation techniques 5000 years ago.”

Therefore, these were so called primitive people passed their knowledge down from generation to generation, setting the groundwork for the history of meditation. The histories of meditation have developed since then until the Buddhist time; meditation has progressed to no end, largely because of the historic icon Buddha. The Buddha’s teachings have been around since 500BC, forever changing the historical trajectory of meditation. In fact, the teachings of the Buddha evolved meditation into what we know it today.

### Secondly, what is the meditation?

Meditation is “The practice of thinking deeply in silence, especially for religious

reasons or in order to make your mind calm”

Meditation may be defined as an altered state of consciousness, which is induced in a controlled manner. There is nothing very mysterious about it, and people slip in and out of trance-like states akin to meditation spontaneously in the course of waking life. A good deal of waking life is punctuated by daydreams, reveries and fantasies in which the mind withdraws to contemplate an interior landscape. Or “The word meditation is a very poor substitute for the original term Bhavana, which means 'culture' or 'development', i.e., mental culture or mental development. The Buddhist Bhavana, properly speaking, is mental culture in the full sense of the term. It aims at cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as lustful desires, hatred, ill will, indolence, worries and restlessness, skeptical doubts, and cultivating such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will, and energy. The analytical faculty, confidence, joy, tranquility, leading finally to the attainment of highest wisdom which sees the nature of things as they are, and realizes the Ultimate Truth, Nirvana.”

Regard to Buddhist, Meditation in Buddhism can be appreciated by recalling that it was while meditating that the Buddha gained enlightenment. Virtually all schools of Buddhism see meditation as the high road to enlightenment, and it constitutes a major part of the aspect of Buddhism as religion.

Such, meditation offers us the most effective tool to calm these waves of mental energy. Inability to stem this flow of energy when desired causes mental restlessness, which often leads to all sorts of inner tension and disharmony. Meditation refers to a broad variety of practices that includes techniques designed to promote relaxation, build internal energy or life force and develop compassion, love, patience, generosity and forgiveness. A particularly form of meditation aims at effortlessly sustained single-pointed concentration single-pointed analysis, meant to enable its practicing to enjoy an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any life activity.

The word meditation carries different meanings in different contexts. Meditation often involves an internal effort to self-regulate the mind in some way, it is often used to clear the mind and ease many health issues, such as, depression, anxiety, melancholy, etc. On the other hand, meditation may involve generating an emotional state for the purpose of analyzing that state, as anger, hatred, etc. or culture particular mental response to various phenomena, such as compassion. The term "Meditation" can refer to the state itself, as well as to practices or techniques employed to cultivate the state. In addition, meditation has a calming effect and directs awareness inward until pure awareness is achieved, described as being awake inside without being aware of anything except awareness itself.

In the Buddhist tradition, meditation is used to defuse the source of all the trouble the illusion of self and other. On the other hand, in meditation, the aim is to overcome thought and defilement. Having done this, and with thought no longer stirring, the real substance of mind becomes evident. Without thoughts and without the illusion of self and other, greed, anger and hatred have no place to arise; and the energy that was tied up by those illusions becomes available, helping to provide an overall improvement in health. That is why we are saying the contribution of Buddhist meditation to the current problems in society.

And so that, the founder of Buddhism was the Buddha, the Buddha deeply concerned about life, death and suffering, he discovered a solution to these deepest of human problems. His insight was universal and radical. It addressed suffering as such, not just this or that sort of suffering. Neither the cause nor the cure of suffering was revealed to Him. The Buddha simply discovered them, as others could have before or since. He was a doctor for the ills of humankind.

Buddhist liberation, nibbāna, requires neither the mastery of an arcane doctrine nor an elaborate regimen of asceticism. In fact, the Buddha condemned extreme austerity, as well as intellectual learning that do not directly address the urgent questions of life and death. The Buddha's original teaching remains a common fund for all branches of Buddhism, and it is expressed in the Four Noble Truths: Suffering; the Cause of Suffering, namely desire or craving; the Cessation of Suffering; and the Way to the Cessation of Suffering, namely the Eightfold Path. It is not enough merely to attain an intellectual understanding of these propositions. One has to practice them to make them part of life.

The early Buddhists enumerated many kinds of suffering. We try to ignore the sad, dark aspects of our

lives by using external distractions like television, music, and our own business. We are busy all the time, always thinking or doing things, incessantly fleeing this basic experience of things. When we look deeply at our inner lives, we cannot deny that there beings many things that cause us to suffer. The Buddha said that we would never be at ease until we overcome this fundamental anxiety, and he offered us a way to do it.

We cannot avoid contact with suffering. To be a Buddhist, we must be willing to share the suffering of others. The Buddha taught that gain and loss, dignity and obscurity, praise and blame, happiness and pain are all worldly conditions. Most people seek positive experiences and try to avoid the negative at all costs, but those who practice the Buddha's teaching take both positive and negative as they come. They do not grasp after one or the other, and in this way, they continuously test their inner spiritual strength in the midst of the world.

To practice the teachings of the Buddha, one must practice mindfulness. One must look deeply into one's own body, feelings, mind and the objects of mind. It may sound simple, but to sustain oneself in the practice, one generally needs a teacher and a community of fellow practitioners to remind and encourage one. Good friend is the technical term to describe such a person. Of course, one's good friends need not call themselves the Buddhists. Living masters of any faith who are selfless and compassionate can be good friends. People of any faith or any age can help each other. Members of the Buddhists; the community of monks and nuns in Buddhist countries; must join us in our efforts, so that the sangha can become relevant again. The Buddhist can be a great resource for bringing openness, love, and selflessness to many people.

Many people in the West think that Buddhism is only a vehicle for deep meditation and personal transformation, not for social involvement. To speak of Buddhism in this way is to ignore the Buddha's doctrine of no-self, or interdependence. Buddhism is primarily a method of overcoming the limits or restrictions of the individual self. Buddhism is not concerned just with private destiny, but with the lives and consciousness of all beings. This inevitably entails a concern with social and political matters, and these receive a large share of attention in the Buddha's teachings as they are recorded in the Pali scriptures.

In South and Southeast Asia, the Buddhists have long been concerned with both the attainment of personal liberation and the maintenance of proper social order. To suggest that Buddhism has been unconcerned with the organization of society is to ignore history. Traditionally Buddhism has seen personal salvation and social justice as interlocking components. In Vietnam, the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh is the founder of Van Hanh University and the School of Youth for Social Service. He has taught at Columbia University and the Sorbonne. He has offers his teachings and shares the practice of mindfulness in different parts of the world. During the war in his country, members of both institutions showed great courage and compassion. Many years ago, he proposed that modern Buddhists need retreating monasteries and spiritual centers that would be places of serenity and repose. For those of us who work constantly in the city, daily mindfulness practice alone may not build enough strength, so Thich Nhat Hanh proposed that clergy and lay people who care for the social welfare of others retreat regularly to such centers. Without renewing their inner strength, social workers will find it difficult to endure the tumultuous world outside.

Buddhism enters the life of society through the presence of men and women who practice and demonstrate the way (magga) toward the ultimate goal of nibbana through their thought, speech and actions. The leaders of most societies are themselves confused and engrossed in greed, hatred and delusion. They are like the blind leading the blind. If they do not have peace of mind, how can they lead others?

In Buddhism, we say that the presence of one mindful person can have great influence on society and is thus very important. We use the term emptiness of action or non-action to mean to act in a way that influences all situations nonviolently. The most valued contribution of masters of the way (magga) is their presence, not their actions. When they act, however, their actions are filled with love, wisdom and peace. Their actions are their very presence, their mindfulness, and their own personalities. This non-action, this awakened presence is a most fundamental contribution.

The presence of individuals who have attained awakening is not passive or lacking in zeal. Those who have attained the way are living individuals who speak a living language. Their thoughts, speech and actions express their views towards contemporary life and its problems. If spiritual leaders speak only in clichés and words that have no meaning for the modern world, their religions will die. There may be many churches,

temples, pagodas, and rituals, but these are only outward forms of religious practice without spiritual depth or content. For masters who live their religion, awareness is born from their own experience, not just from books or tradition.

True masters may be theologians, philosophers, scientists, artists or writers. Their awareness is not of the intellect nor is it based on the views of partisan groups or ideologies. They live according to their own true self and not according to public opinion or the pronouncements of authorities. Their thoughts, science and art are permeated with the characteristics of love, wisdom and humanism and they reject the path of war and ideological conflict. They envision and work for a society that unites humanity.

Buddhism is simply a way of mindfulness and peace. The presence of Buddhism does not mean having many schools, hospitals, cultural institutions, and political parties run by the Buddhists. Rather, the presence of Buddhism means that all these things are permeated and administered with humanism, love, tolerance and enlightenment. These are characteristics that Buddhism attributes to opening up and developing the best aspects of human nature. This is the true spirit of Buddhism.

All our efforts to preserve Buddhism or Buddhist society may fail, or they may succeed. The outcome is irrelevant. Our goal is to develop human beings with enough inner strength and moral courage to begin restructuring the collective consciousness of society.

In the crises of the present day, those of us who work in society, who confront power and injustice on a regular basis, get beaten down and exhausted. At least once a year, we need to visit a retreat center to regain our spiritual strength so that we can continue to confront society. Spiritual masters are like springs of fresh water. We who work in society need to carry that pure water to flood the banks and fertilize the land and the trees, in order to be of use to the plants and animals, so that they can taste something fresh and be revitalized. If we do not go back to the spring, our minds will get polluted, just as water becomes polluted, and we will not be of much use to the plants, the trees or the earth. At home, we must practice our meditation or prayer at least every morning or evening.

We who work in society must be careful. We become polluted so easily, particularly when we are confronted by so many problems. Sometimes we feel hatred or greed, sometimes we wish for more power or wealth. We must be clear with ourselves that we do not need much wealth or power. It is easy, particularly as we get older, to want softer lives and more recognition, and to be on equal terms with those in power. However, this is dangerous. Religion means a deep commitment to personal transformation. To be of help we must become more and more selfless. To do this, we have to take moral responsibility for our own being and our own society. This has been the essence of religion from ancient times right to the present.

The Buddhist tradition focuses on looking within as the means to achieve this. Meditation is the most important and distinctive element of Buddhism. Through deepening awareness comes acceptance and through acceptance comes a seemingly miraculous generosity of spirit and empowerment for the work that compassion requires of us. With this self-awareness, we can genuinely join those of other faiths to work for our mutual betterment.

Over the last few decades, meditation has become enormously popular throughout the Western hemisphere. There are published medical findings on the health benefits of meditation, the spread of meditation and the martial arts, the publication of books on comparative meditation, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama's rise to prominence as a respected spiritual teacher of the world. With Eastern meditation methods dominating the worldwide meditation scene, we may wonder if the West has produced any forms of meditation. Here too, the answer is yes. Aside from the aforementioned transmission meditation and technology-induced meditation, another form of meditation is indigenous to the West.

To the West also goes credit for guided meditation; if not for its invention (its exact origin is unknown, it may have developed from campfire story telling or shamanic healing practices), then certainly for the spread of it. Practiced widely today, usually for general well being, or to effect physical or psychological healing, guided meditation is an excellent tool for connecting with the inner presence and for receiving guidance. It also works to empower the imagination, a faculty of mind valued more highly in the West perhaps than in the East.

In brief: nowadays, nations have reached the pitch of insanity, especially in the armament race of

building up military hardware that endangers all forms of existence on the earth. If mankind does not start learning how to live peacefully with one another and use science and technology with responsibility, it is doubtful if human civilization, as we know it, can long exist. In every country today, people are trying to produce nuclear weapons for the destructive purposes. It is a big competition. They also produce biological and chemical weapons for the destruction of the human beings. Just as a chain is as strong as the strength of its individual links, for there to be peace and happiness in the world, individuals comprising of families, societies and ultimately the world must be at peace of mind with itself. If we want to get to that stage of mind, we must try to training the mind by the meditation way. It is also like a pyramid, its various components within the levels must be strengthened. In the modern times, man is reaching out and seeking more and more sense stimulation. The popularity of the portable radio with or without earphones, and television is a clear indication of the present trend to seek for more and more stimulation. By all this, we have become alienated from ourselves; we do not know our own real nature, or the real nature of mind to be more precise. Moreover, we go about our business in social life wearing masks appropriate for each occasion. We often do not show our true feelings of jealousy, greed, hatred, pride or selfishness. We hide them in socially accepted ways of formalized verbal expressions such as congratulation, thank you, deepest sympathies. However, there are times when our negative emotions are so acute that they come into the open in the form of violence, stealing, quarreling, backbiting and so forth. But generally we try to keep these venomous snakes of negative emotions inhibited. When we are able to train the mind to attain peace and forgiveness through mediation, that mean the contribution of meditation is to resolve the current problem of social life.

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