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Key to the Practice of Meditation——Maintaining Right Mindfulness

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(Can you see my PowerPoint slides? Ok, I'll start.)

Provost Shengmiao and Miss Deng good afternoon. My name is Ye Yushi, today I'd like to share with you the topic of 'Key to The Practice of Meditation——Maintaining Right Mindfulness'. The presentation will be divided into five parts. First is the introduction, then I'll explain what is maintaining right mindfulness. Besides, I will discuss the specific practice methods and the benefit of it. Finally, it's the conclusion.

1. Introduction

Nowadays we are under too much life pressure from all aspects. Although today our material life is rich, many people are still looking for a place to rest their heart. A Colleague of my tutor in China attended a three-day meditation course in Thailand eight months ago. In the course, they should sit for meditation 打坐 from 4:45am to 8:45pm and walk barefoot for 30 minutes every morning and evening. When they communicate with the teacher of the Dharma, what he said the most is 'let it go'. It means let all incorrect thoughts go. After the course, she felt peaceful and she even didn't have any quarrel with her husband those days, just like going back to 8 years ago.

And indeed it is, meditation can rest our mind, help us reduce our stress, calm our emotion, improve our concentration, and even change our eating habits and sleep quality. Nowadays A lot of people gradually find the importance of meditation. There have been many meditation centres in Britain and other European countries, most of which follow Buddhist principles and methods. We are happy about that.

If you ask me what the secret of happiness is? I will say ‘concentrate on this moment’, in other words, maintain right mindfulness. But what exactly it is and how to practice it? We will discuss them as follows.

2. What is Maintaining Right Mindfulness?

2.1 Four Bases of Mindfulness 四念處觀

According to *Nirvana Sutra* 涅槃經, Ananda 阿難 asked the Buddha sorrowfully, ‘where should all monks rely on after your Nirvana 涅槃?’ The Buddha said, ‘relying on four bases of mindfulness’. According to *Mahsatipatthana Sutta* 大念處經, Buddha also said, ‘Four bases of mindfulness is a single path for all beings to be purified, to go beyond sorrow, to eliminate pain, and to achieve the right path and Nirvana.’ Because four bases of mindfulness like elephant footprints. There are no any other animals’ footprints bigger than the footprints of elephant in the world. So, four bases of mindfulness can cover all kinds of practice methods. We should observe the present state of our mind and body with it.

Since we understand the importance of four mindfulness, what are they exactly? Four mindfulness include contemplation of the body as impure 觀身不淨,

contemplation of sensation as inseparable from suffering 觀受是苦, contemplation of the mind as transient 觀心無常, and contemplation of all Dhammas as being without self 觀法無我. Especially for contemplation of the body as impure, it includes different practice methods. For example, concentrating on our breath 安般念, concentrating on our postures 四威儀, keeping in correct awareness 正知, meditation on impurity 不淨觀, observing the four elements (earth, water, fire and wind) of our body 四界分別觀, and observing nine state of corpse in burial ground 九種墳場觀.

When we use the four bases of mindfulness, we can keep right mindfulness when we observe our body, our sensation, our mind, and mental objects. After realising the truth, we can put down desires and worries to the world. So, keeping right mindfulness is of great importance. what does it mean?

2.2 Keeping in Right mindfulness

Right mindfulness develops from meditation, and it is focusing our awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting our feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Do it without making any judgment, analysis, but simply being aware of it.

So even annoyance appears, we didn't follow the feeling, but we know it. Then annoyance will disappear. Because the current moment will not stop, it becomes the past continually. If we just letting past go, we can concentrate on every present moment. So that we don't need feel regret for not performing perfect just now or feel unhappy that we are not in good state. Keeping right mindfulness can lead to staying away from worry, sorrow, and pressure.

The practice 修行 of Buddhism pays much attention on keeping right mindfulness. They think that only when we keep in right mindfulness it is practice. If we don't live in the moment, we are just a dead-alive person 行尸走肉. For we have lost our soul though we have body, which wastes our life and precious time.

3. How to Maintain Right Mindfulness?

The main method of maintain right mindfulness include concentrating on our breath and paying attention to our postures. Here we will focus on the method of concentrating on our postures for the moment.

Firstly, knowing exactly what we are doing now. For example, when we walk, we know that we're walking. If we take our left step, we know that 'I'm taking my left step'. If we take our right step, we know that 'I'm taking my right step'. When we eat, we know that 'I am eating'.

Secondly, do not do two things at once. Trying to train us to do one thing at one time and concentrate on it. For example, when we eat, we should chew food slowly. After food swallowed, we start to take another food. Do everything step by step. It not only benefits for our stomach to digest food, but also we can actually enjoy the taste of food.

It sounds not difficult. In fact, we tend to eat food on the bowl but think another food on the pot. When we are chewing, we just picking up food at the same time and looking at a third food. Besides, we always consider to many things while walking. So, we can find that we are too busy all day long, but we don't know what we are

busying for. Our mind is too busy! Even we may forget what we did one minute before, we should practice doing things one by one.

Thirdly, take our time and don't rush. We don't need to rush to achieve a good result in a few days. Mindfulness cannot be willed. It requires our mind to remain calm and keep in right mindfulness. It is a natural process, instead of a result of coercion. Then we could gradually accumulate and improve. So, if we find that our mind has escape to another things, don't be upset, it doesn't matter, just go back to the right mindfulness, and concentrate on the moment. Because the more we want to control our mind, the more it wandered.

Fourthly, continually practicing and developing a good habit. Simple behaviour in daily life are all opportunities to maintain right mindfulness, like walking, eating, and drinking. Also, do not use mobile phone when we are walking, which is very dangerous. Through daily practice, we can gradually improve our concentration.

There is another warm reminder, we should choose the right thing to practice. If we concentrate on playing computer games or watching TV, it is not maintaining right mindfulness. Because our mind is obsessed and restless, and the power of our mind is weak. The criterion for choosing is what makes our mind peaceful and sensible.

4. The Benefit of Maintaining Right mindfulness

4.1 the Mental Power

Maintaining right mindfulness can improve our mental power. Because we have trained the ability of concentration. If our mental power becomes stronger, we can

improve our working efficiency. Whatever focus on one point will have a strong power which even beyond our imagination. For example, when light is scattered, a piece of paper can block out the light. But if it focuses on a point, it would be laser which can penetrate a thick steel plate. Water is soft and powerless. But when it focuses on a point, it would turn into water knife which can cut through ice.

There is a story about the power of concentration of a monk in Thailand. He was admitted to the Academy of Medicine of Bangkok University with top of the list, and graduated with top of the list, too. At the same time, he was the president of the Buddhist Society of Bangkok University. It is well known that Thailand is a Buddhist country, so the Buddhist Society was very large and had many activities. As the president of the Society, he was very busy. So, he would go to the Buddhist society to lead morning class and evening class. Even he often went to the society to deal with different affairs after specialized courses. He was so busy that he only spent half as much time as other students in reading and studying, but he still ranked first.

Someone once asked him how he could do twice as much with half the effort. He said that 'when I am studying, I only concentrate on study. Although the Buddhist society has many affairs, I would not think about it. When I'm in the Buddhist society, I just focus on what I'm doing and don't worry about my studies.' That is the reason why he always ranks first. Someone also asked that is it his natural aptitude for being so smart? He said 'I was only average in high school. But after going to a Buddhist meditation camp in my second year of high school. I learned how to sit for meditation and calm my mind. Then I applied the method to study, and my grades became better and better.'

So, we can also apply the method. When we are student, we can concentrate on listening to lectures, so we can learn it well. When we read books, we are wholly absorbed by the knowledge, and there is not any other wandering thought. Also, when we work, we could do things mindfully, without distractions. The method can improve our work efficiency. It also makes us to be a more reliable person.

4.2 Pure Land practitioners

Therefore, we should train to maintain right mindfulness and have a good habit of concentration. In the future, we can achieve high achievement in whatever we do. Because our mind is powerful.

Especially for Pure Land practitioners, we can concentrate on our postures in the moment and chant ‘Amitabha Buddha’ (阿彌陀佛) at the same time. Someone may ask that, ‘but we will have two thoughts at once’. It certainly great to have only one thought to chant ‘Amitabha Buddha’, but it’s difficult. In fact, we have to pay attention to what we do in the moment. When we consider that we only have one thought of chanting ‘Amitabha Buddha’, we even let our imagine run away. So, the method of maintaining right mindfulness is useful, and we only need to concentrate on two things.

Besides, the time of chanting ‘Amitabha Buddha’ should be short and many times especially for beginner. Because at first our mental power is not strong enough, a short time practice makes us to concentrate. Venerable Master Chin Kung also advise that we can apply *Shinian fa* 十念法. Chanting ten ‘Amitabha Buddha’ every time and chanting nine times every day. Including after getting up in the morning, before going to bed in the evening, before three meals, and before and after working

in the morning and afternoon.¹ The method is easy and efficient because people can concentrate on the short time. Nine times have been divided evenly throughout the day, so the mind of remembering ‘Amitabha Buddha’ continues. Practitioner would gradually have a purer heart and have the habit to chant ‘Amitabha Buddha’.

5. Conclusion

So if someone asks you that, ‘what is practice 修行? when are you practicing’? What would you reply? My answer is ‘When our mind concentrates on the moment, that is practice’. Venerable master Hui Neng 惠能大師 did only cutting firewood and pounding rice for eight months in Huangmei 黃梅, but he was in meditation all the time.² Master Yong Jia 永嘉大師 also said, ‘act is meditation, sit is meditation. Whether speaking, silence, action, or stillness all can show the state of peace and quiet.’ (行亦禪, 坐亦禪, 語默動靜體安然).

So, it’s important to train us to have the habit of maintaining right mindfulness. There is no any other investment like investing in our own growth and ability. If we can increase our concentration, then we have it. So just practicing keeping right mindfulness on daily life, when we are walking, eating, reading, working, and even preparing for examination.

This is all for my presentation. Any feedback and suggestion would be appreciated. Thank you very much.

¹ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Jingtu ji* 淨土集 (Taipei: Zhonghua huazang jingzong xuehui, 2013), p.1-2.

² Ding Fubao 丁福保, *Liuzu tanjing jianzhu* 六祖壇經箋註 (Taipei: Fotuo jiaoyu jijinhui), p.5.

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