

Dedication of Merit and the Purpose of Practice

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, meditation practice is not understood as something done only for oneself. At the end of practice, one dedicates the positive effects or “merit” of the meditation for the benefit of all beings. Our practice affects the people around us—our family, our environment, and society more broadly. When we become calmer, more present, and more compassionate, others are naturally influenced by that transformation.

This dedication of merit reflects a deeper understanding that we are not separate from one another. Meditation is therefore not simply self-improvement; it is part of a relational and ethical way of living.

Meditation as Part of a Larger Path

Meditation should not remain confined to formal sitting sessions. Mindfulness practice is part of the broader Buddhist path, especially the Noble Eightfold Path, and should gradually become integrated into daily life.

The goal is to bring awareness into ordinary activities and relationships, remaining connected to the present moment throughout the day. Over time, meditation influences how we live, speak, act, and relate to others. It also helps to create a life that supports mindfulness and nourishment, including connection with nature and simplicity in daily living.

Working with the Meditation Exercises

The practice is presented as a structured system based on a sequence of exercises, likely the sixteen exercises of Ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing). These exercises can be approached sequentially, moving step by step through the practice, but they can also be understood more flexibly.

Different people naturally resonate with different exercises. One person may benefit more from body awareness, another from observing the mind directly. What matters is not rigid adherence to structure, but finding methods that genuinely cultivate presence and awareness.

One practical approach is to divide meditation into timed sections—for example, spending seven minutes on each exercise before moving to the next. Through consistent practice over weeks or months, awareness gradually becomes more stable and begins to arise spontaneously in daily life.

Meditation in Daily Life

The real test of meditation is not what happens during formal sitting alone, but whether awareness begins appearing naturally during ordinary life. With regular practice, moments of mindfulness begin to arise spontaneously: suddenly becoming aware of the body, surroundings, emotions, or mental state during the day.

This develops gradually, like learning any skill. Over time, the mind becomes trained to return to presence more easily. Meditation becomes less something one “does” and more a way of relating to experience.

Journaling and Self-Observation

It can be helpful to keep a simple meditation journal in order to observe one's development honestly and practically. After each sitting, one can reflect on questions such as:

- How present was I?
- Was I engaged with the exercise?
- Was my mind wandering most of the time?

The purpose is not self-judgment but self-understanding. If a particular exercise consistently feels disconnected or ineffective, it may simply not correspond well to one's current condition. In that case, another approach may be more suitable.

Meditation is experiential and adaptive rather than rigid or dogmatic.

Many Paths Toward the Same Goal

The meditation exercises can be understood either as a progression or as multiple paths leading toward the same center. Liberation can be imagined as the center of a circle, while the various exercises are different ways of approaching it.

There is therefore no single correct method for everyone. Different practices may lead different people toward the same insight. The emphasis is placed on sincerity, consistency, and direct experience rather than on performing the "correct" technique.

Direct Experience and Embodied Awareness

A recurring theme throughout the practice is the distinction between direct experience and conceptual thinking. Meditation trains the ability to remain with immediate bodily and sensory experience rather than abstract thoughts about experience.

For example, there is a difference between:

- directly feeling the body,
- and mentally thinking about the body.

The practice is to remain in immediate awareness without becoming lost in mental representations, narratives, or conceptual analysis.

Wrong Perception and Suffering

The philosophical core of the teaching is that suffering arises from distorted or "wrong" perception. Human beings tend to experience themselves and the world as separate, fixed, and permanent. This misunderstanding creates attachment, confusion, fear, and suffering.

Buddhist practice therefore aims to cultivate "right view" or correct perception. Meditation is not merely relaxation; it is a transformation in the way reality is perceived.

This is connected with the Noble Eightfold Path, especially:

- right view,
 - right mindfulness,
 - and right concentration.
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Interdependence and Interbeing

One clear example is the example of a flower. A flower does not exist independently. It depends on sunlight, water, soil, air, time, and countless other conditions.

In this sense, the flower is an interdependent reality rather than a separate object. This is sometimes called “interbeing”: everything exists in relationship with everything else.

This insight applies not only to objects but also to ourselves. Human beings are also relational, conditioned, and interconnected rather than isolated entities.

Impermanence

Connected with interdependence is the insight into impermanence. Because everything depends on changing conditions, everything is continuously changing.

The flower changes moment by moment through sunlight, water, growth, and decay. Likewise:

- thoughts change,
- emotions change,
- sensations change,
- the body changes,
- identity changes.

Meditation allows this to be observed directly in one’s own experience.

Impermanence is therefore not merely an abstract philosophical idea but something visible in immediate awareness.

Non-Self and the Illusion of Separation

As insight deepens, one begins to see that there is no completely separate or independent self. The ordinary sense of “I” or “me” is revealed to be a process rather than a fixed entity.

This does not mean that nothing exists. Rather, existence is relational, interconnected, and constantly changing.

Suffering is rooted in clinging to a fixed sense of self and separateness.

The Final Four Exercises: Insight Practice

The latter part of the practice focuses especially on the final four exercises of Ānāpānasati, which concern insight into the nature of reality.

The thirteenth exercise involves contemplation of impermanence: observing that all phenomena are continuously changing.

The fourteenth exercise is virāga, often translated as fading of craving or loosening attachment. As insight deepens, grasping naturally begins to weaken.

The fifteenth exercise is nirodha, or cessation. This is not annihilation, but the ending of wrong perception and suffering.

The sixteenth exercise is letting go. Genuine letting go cannot be forced through willpower. Only wisdom and insight can truly release attachment.

These exercises are not completely separate from one another but overlap and support each other as aspects of the same process of awakening.

Nirvana and Liberation

Nirvana is explained through the classical Buddhist metaphor of a fire going out. Nirvana does not mean destruction of existence; rather, it refers to the extinguishing of the fires of confusion, attachment, and suffering.

When wrong perception falls away, suffering gradually “burns out,” just as a fire naturally exhausts its fuel.

Liberation therefore comes not from escaping reality, but from seeing reality clearly.

The Broader Buddhist Path

Meditation exists within the larger framework of Buddhist practice. Concentration and insight are important, but they are only part of a wider path that also includes:

- ethical action,
- speech,
- relationships,
- livelihood,
- and daily conduct.

Meditation is ultimately not a technique isolated from life, but a way of transforming how reality, self, and relationship are experienced.