
ROLE OF VIPASSANA IN BUDDHIST EDUCATION

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Abstract: Vipassana is a great science, the science of understanding mind and matter phenomena. It is a process of mind purification and is free from any sectarian, caste or belief-based approach. Further, it works at the experiential level and leads to a happy life through continuous purification of the mind.

It is said that the major part of the mind is the subconscious or unconscious mind. Generally it is difficult to reach this part of the mind, which keeps on reacting according to its past conditioning. This reactive mind is the storehouse of our impressions (*sa"mkhaaraa*) of cravings and aversions, and makes our reactions to external events biased and thus lacking in objectivity.

Vipassana helps in breaking the barrier between the conscious and unconscious mind. Through the process of observing without reacting, the mind is cleansed of its negativities. With the technique of Vipassana, one reaches deep down to the unconscious level of the mind and experiences sensations within the framework of the body without reacting to them. The law of nature is such that whatever actions we perform are stored in the form of its effect in the unconscious part of the mind. The collection of such impressions (*saizkharī*) is not only from this life but also from earlier lives. This storehouse is the guide to our reactions to the outside environment.

Introduction:

Beginning Insight Meditation: For the beginning mediator I believe it would be helpful to establish an order in the various steps taken in meditation. First, then, it would be wise to establish a place of quiet to which one may retire daily and not be interrupted in his endeavors. Then wash carefully face, hands and feet. Better yet, if time permits, take a cleansing shower and put on loose, comfortable clothes. It is wise to meditate at the same time daily to establish a habit. I do it at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. when the birds begin to retire in the evening. Then when you begin to meditate consider your posture. With spine erect and a spirit of awareness be mindful of sitting without strain but with complete alertness. Now you are ready to begin. But, first, some introductory thoughts.

The first stages of meditation should be simply observation of breath. Concentrate on the nostrils where the breath flows in... out... in... out. Be aware of the touch of air as it strikes the passage through the nostrils. In fact be aware of everything and nothing. This sounds contradictory. Yet it is really not. For this is no time to daydream, to entertain vagrant and migratory thoughts. You are aware of your physical posture. Then you forget that also. You are aware that the past is dead, that it is gone. Yet specific consciousness of your whole preceding life is absent. The future does not yet exist. All you have is "right now"... the in... out... in... out rhythm of the breath of life.

The idea is to "empty the mind," to get rid of all "garbage," all fleeting and intruding thoughts. Simply to breathe -- in out -- in out, never forcing the breath. You are not even the breather, but the breathing breathing you, the you, which as time goes on, will

grow more and more vague as it begins to dissipate, disappear.:

Vipassana Meditation: Viewed from the perspective of holistic education, *Vipassana* meditation can be described as a technique of purifying the mind of its baser instincts so that one begins to manifest the truly human qualities of universal goodwill, kindness,- sympathy, tolerance, humility, equanimity, etc., and simultaneously gains an insight into the true nature and purpose of human existence. This is achieved in a very scientific manner through a systematic cultivation of Right Mindfulness coupled with non-reactivity; that is to say, development of the habit of paying penetrating attention to whatever is happening in our total organism-the body with its five senses and the mind which operates in and through it-without any admixture of subjective judgments or reactions. The quality which purifies the mind at the deepest level is the mental factor of objectivity, or equanimity, which develops from the constant, thorough understanding of the impermanence of all components of the mind-body phenomenon (ref. [8], p.258).

An important prerequisite for the systematic practice of *Vipassana* is scrupulous observance of five basic moral precepts-viz., abstention from killing, stealing, false speech, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants-since any willful violation of these precepts causes violent mental agitation which makes it impossible to observe the mind objectively. Of course, *Vipassana* practice also helps one to gain the mental strength needed to observe the moral precepts in day-to-day life. While the complete details of this systematic practice are best learnt in a meditation camp under the careful guidance of a teacher, some salient features of the technique and its

theoretical basis are explained here.

The most significant consequence of *Vipassana* practice is that it gives the mind a natural slant towards the goal of full enlightenment, the complete liberation from all bondages. Simultaneously, one develops the steadfast confidence that all hindrances on the Path can be overcome.

Role of *Vipassana* in Education: We can now understand how *Vipassana* can fill that vital gap in modern education-viz., the training of mind, leading to a balanced, harmonious and purposeful life. *Vipassana* meditation imparts a way to observe all the phenomena of this sensory world objectively and impersonally under the penetrating gaze of an equanimous mind. The multifold benefits which accrue from this practice are being discussed at length in this seminar and have formed the basis for research conducted by the *Vipassana* Research Institute (Igatpuri, India) in many areas of human activity. Here, only those aspects related to the field of education are being discussed.

The attitude of "bare attention" (bestowed by a mind at once aware and non-reactive) slows down the transition from thought to action, allowing the practitioner more time-those crucial few moments needed to come to a mature decision. The tendency of the base, animal instincts to overpower the faculty of human reason can thus be effectively checked, leading to a gradual reduction in negative traits such as rashness, intolerance, intemperance and aggressive behaviour which characterize modern youth. This emotional education should naturally lead to a marked improvement in the student-teacher relationship, which has been constantly deteriorating over the years due to the corroding influence of a materialistic world view coupled with the negative traits mentioned above.

The attitude of Right Awareness coupled with equanimity closely corresponds to the disposition of the true scientist and scholar, which is characterized by clear definition of the subject, unprejudiced receptivity for the facts, exclusion of the subjective factor in judgment, and deferring judgment until a careful examination of the facts has been made (ref. [6], p.39). This practice should therefore be of great help in augmenting the scientific temper.

Vipassana meditation reinforces the scientific outlook in another much more direct way. Every meditator, after some length of practice of mindfulness of sensations, reaches a state where he experiences the whole body as a mass of vibrations. This experience is in line with the quantum-relativistic description of matter [12]. This direct experience provides much more clarity about the nature of matter than the scores of mathematical

formulae produced by classroom descriptions.

Another important benefit of the systematic practice-especially of mindfulness of breath, which is of crucial significance in education-is improvement in one's ability to concentrate on a task. As explained earlier, the essence of the practice is to train the mind to keep the attention continuously on an object (viz., the breath), and to minimize the drifting of the mind into futile daydreams, which are the chief obstacle to concentration. The training of observing the mental states also comes in handy. Once such daydreams have arisen (whether during meditation or during normal activity), if one briefly makes these daydreams themselves an object of close observation, their power of distraction is drastically curtailed and they get quickly dispersed. This results in a quick retrieval of concentration.

The attitude of impersonal non-reactive observation is of profound value in the ultimate deliverance of the mind from all bondages, which is the true purpose of spiritual education. To quote Venerable Nyanponika Thera (ref. [6], p.43): "The inner distance from things ... as obtained temporarily and partially by bare attention, shows us, by our own experience, the possibility of winning perfect detachment and the happiness resulting from it. It bestows upon us the confidence that such temporary setting aside may well become one day a complete stepping out of this world of suffering. It gives a kind of foretaste, or at least an idea, of the highest liberty, the 'holiness during lifetime' that has been alluded to by the words 'in the world but not of the world.'"

To achieve this objective, the principal requirement is to develop an insight into the basic characteristics of life. Impermanence (*anicca*) is the fundamental characteristic with which a *Vipassana* student is continually confronted. As this experience becomes ingrained, realization of the other characteristics-viz., of suffering (*dukkha*) and egolessness (*anatta*)-automatically develops, leading one to a clear understanding of the purpose of life and the way to achieve it-the very acme of spiritual education.

Concluding Remarks: It should be evident from the preceding brief description that *Vipassana* meditation is a purely scientific technique, a universal culture of mind, which does not subscribe to any sectarian beliefs, dogmas or rituals. It should be universally acceptable, therefore, as an integral part of education. Its benefits have been corroborated by thousands of practitioners-both young and old belonging to diverse castes, creeds, countries and religious beliefs. Vivekananda's dream of evolving a "man-making education" [2] could be fulfilled by the integration of *Vipassana* into modern education. It is high time that an action plan in the field of education be drawn, at least on an

experimental scale, to scientifically validate the efficacy of *Vipassana* over an extended period. Some of the crucial issues which need to be addressed include:

1. How to motivate the students, teachers and management of schools and colleges to introduce *Anapana* and *Vipassana*, and reduce resistance from unwilling students and teachers?
2. The extent of training needed before authorizing educational staff members to teach meditation in schools and colleges.
3. The format and minimum duration of in-house camps organized to initiate young students to *Anapana* meditation, keeping in view the practical constraints (especially of overnight stay).

4. How to maintain continuity of practice within the tight schedule of schools and colleges?

5. Should there be a formal course on meditation in the curricula of schools and colleges?

6. How to assess the beneficial influence of *Vipassana* on teachers, students and the teaching-learning process?

7. How to integrate *Vipassana* with the student counselling services in the schools and colleges?

A properly thought out action plan if sincerely implemented should ultimately pave the way for the formation of institutions, which can impart truly holistic education. Such institutions would make a crucial contribution to developing wholesome individuals and a harmonious society.

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