

Talk Starting Inaugural Lockdown Evening Meditations 29/03/20

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 24:24

Very good greetings. This is our inaugural evening lockdown meditation and I want to thank you all for coming, both of you. So I want to first of all just start by thanking Charles Denscombe who runs a firm called Video Micro Video and Paul Ebray who works with him. They really set me up for this very quickly, so I'm really grateful. I'm also feeding back on one of their channels, so I'm even more grateful.

Unfortunately, the screen isn't very good because I've got a cheapo laptop here working on that. I have bought a proper camera and things like that, but it's just not arrived. The post is all over the place at the moment, as I'm sure you're aware of. Audience just come in to tell me to speak up a bit louder. So you can tell me if I'm not speaking loud enough. I think there's a sort of live chat where you can say something on the stream here. I'm here too. You're all here. Thank you so much. Oh, I feel much better now. Oh, wonderful. So I hope you've got my opening gambit there to thank Charles Denscombe and Paul Ebray. Very good. Sounds coming across very clearly. I've just had a little message. Thank you very much.

So what I want to do this evening is just set the process off. The first question is, why have I chosen an evening meditation? So I'm just going back to my own experience as a lay practitioner. And it was fairly easy to establish the morning meditation. In fact, that was almost, I rarely missed it. There'd be a good reason for missing it. You just get into that routine, you get up, you wash your face, and then you sit, and then you go and have breakfast. And that I think most people find fairly simple to establish. No matter for how long, it doesn't matter how long. It's the quality, isn't it? 20 minutes, 40 minutes, one hour, two hours if you can make it.

But the evening sit was always very difficult. By the way, I can see myself talking to myself. It was a very strange situation. So the evening sit was always difficult. But of course, when I did do it, I saw the benefits of it. If you're working, I found that the best time was when you get home and you have a cup of tea or something, and then just to sit in a chair, you don't have to sit formally and just let the day pass through the mind. If it's been a good day and you feel full of joy, then really appreciate that and see where you've been skillful and encourage yourself to be more skillful like that. And when you've had a bad day, some arguments, some anxiety, it's been boring or whatever, to come back and just let that manifest and let it work its way out of the heart and that way you feel so much better for the evening. And then of course later on just before you go to bed to just sit quietly with something, some reading, *mettā* of course. That's the time you tend to fall asleep and you don't want to fall asleep before you get into bed because that messes you up. So if you're working it's a slightly different rhythm I think that works.

As opposed to this. This is really aimed at people who are isolating, like myself. I am actually in splendid solitude. So I'm not concerned about lockdown at all. In fact, I'd be happy if it was a permanent state. I have with me now, actually, Sarah Blackman from the South. People in Brighton will know Sarah. And Noreen is with me. Mark had visited us on last Friday and then discovered later on that he'd been eight hours working with somebody who had contracted CV. So we're in isolation here till next Friday. And Mark's had no symptoms. We've had no symptoms, so we think we're fairly free. At least we're okay till tomorrow.

Now when you're in isolation of course in the spiritual life you call it seclusion. You seek seclusion, you seek solitude. Now of course you'll know that if you're a naughty prisoner you get put into solitary confinement. So you can see it can be used both as a way of spiritual practice and as a way of actually punishing somebody. So we've got to be careful that we don't see it as a punishment.

So evening, of course, we tend to feel a bit tired. We tend to feel a bit bored or whatnot. We're looking to distract ourselves. And so this is the time, the evil one, Māra, the enticer, gets hold of us and we get into old habits. Habits that we don't want. We sleep, for instance, which really messes your sleep pattern up. We eat, butter toast and things like that with jam. Oh, my God. So you can find yourself slipping into old habits which really are not going to do you much good.

So to actually set a time in the evening where you sit obviously is the best policy. And that's why I chose this particular time because I'm hoping that afterwards most of you who are in isolation will actually go to bed and rise early. As they say, what is it? Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise. And I presume that's also true for women. It's an old one, yeah.

So we've got to be careful in the evening. The old ghosts come out. So there's anxiety, depression, a bit of feeling down rather than depression, and we want to escape that so that's why we try to find some entertainment and whatnot. So the idea of this particular meditation at this time of the evening is to stop that happening and I'm hoping that you make it a regular practice with me. So that's the first thing.

There are practices that you can do which undermine certain mental states, sense of despair, for instance, even boredom. It doesn't matter really what mental state it is, unwholesome mental state, really just contemplating the Buddha Dharma Sangha is one way of lifting the heart. The Buddha, of course, is this historical personage but also recognizing that within us the Buddha is here within us and it's seeking liberation and according to the Buddhist tradition everybody will attain liberation at some point or other. And the Dharma, just think about the benefits that you've received from the Dharma, the benefits that others have received, it lifts the heart. And the Sangha, the fact that we have people in the world who've attained some of these paths and fruits, but also that we have a Sangha around us, friends, Dharma friends around us supporting us. And these days that can be a real benefit especially with all this communication business. We've just had an AGM this afternoon. We used teams and it was pretty successful. So there's no reason why we can't communicate with each other these days. Of course, relating

is a different matter. But we won't go into that this evening.

The other thing, of course, is to contemplate the *Brahmavihāras*, love, compassion, joy and peace. And that's what I'll be doing at the end of the sitting this evening. But we'll come to that.

There's also contemplations of sickness, aging and death. It sounds a bit depressing to actually do that, but it's really coming to terms with the reality of our lives. And something that this CV, this coronavirus has brought up is the paranoia that everybody feels around sickness, even though really it's the elderly. And even they have to have some sort of physical problems who are in real danger. Of course, it is killing others, but very minor. Even so, even if you could describe it as a very, very bad flu, people are very afraid of it. Of course, having said that, I know a lot of people need hospital help for breathing and stuff. So I'm not saying we shouldn't take it seriously, but the paranoia is way up there. And we undermine that unrealistic paranoia by reflecting that the body gets sick and eventually we die, and that's the end of it. It's just one of those things.

Also, there's the eight worldly conditions, contemplating sickness and health, contemplating success and failure, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, pleasure and pain and just knowing that these things flow. Sometimes you're successful and sometimes you fail. That's the way it is. Life just moves through that and it's finding that position above it all, a sort of equanimity with it.

And then finally there's *vipassanā*. So it's really just sitting with the mental state that comes up, knowing it is just another mental state and sitting in it. You've got to sit in the bonfire. You've got to sit in the dung heap, not next to it, not above it or around it, but in it. You've got to sit in and you've got to burn. And of course, we wait, if you can wait, until it completely exhausted, then you find that healing at the end of it.

Yeah, this happened to me in the year 2000 when I went on a two month retreat to Burma to Sayadaw U Paṇḍita's place in Yangon. And the six weeks were some of the worst meditations I've had ever. It was absolutely awful. Something came up. I couldn't put my finger on it. It wasn't despair or anything like that. It was just horrible. And I couldn't even do the slow walking meditation it was just so overpowering and after six weeks it finally just disappeared. And the gift of course was this beautiful state of peace that arises. So if you can wait until these negative states exhaust themselves you do see that they're being transformed.

So there's contemplating the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, the virtues, I've forgotten that, the eight worldly conditions and so on. There's contemplating sickness, aging, and death, just to get us into the feel of these things. And there's the practice of *vipassanā* and *mettā*. So that's the first thing. That's what you can do to undermine mental states, unwholesome mental states in the evening.

The next one is the importance of routines. I can't stress that too much. As you know, when you come on retreat, you've got to get into that routine. It takes three or four days and then you're into it. And after five or six days, it's natural. Even if you don't want to get out of bed, your body gets out. So it's that routine that

you want to establish.

And make it simple. Remember Ajahn Tate's words, take it easy. Make it simple, take it easy, and stay with the one who knows. There are things, you've got to do it religiously, remember. Once you've set your routine for the day, you've got to do it religiously until you know it's become a habit. And that takes maybe four or five days. And then if you slip, you've got to reestablish it. You've got to reestablish your commitment to that routine. It's not as though you can't change the routine, but you've got to recognize that you've got to make it some sort of habit.

One thing that you can do, of course, is go a bit slower around the place. Slow eating. You're supposed to chew the food 32 times. That's what I read on Google. 32 times until it loses its texture. It's sort of pre-vomit. Oh, I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry. It's before it goes into the stomach. Remember, the stomach doesn't have any teeth. So if you put hard stuff in there, it's going to be difficult. Closing fridge doors, closing doors, just to bring a certain mindfulness, a slowness and mindfulness around whatever you're doing. So that's the routine. That's important.

The third thing is projects. You've got to have projects. They can be a day's project, a week's project, et cetera, et cetera. I mean, I've set myself one. I'm going to reread as much as I can of the Middle Length Sayings. And in the evening, if there aren't any questions, I mean to use that as a way of giving a small talk or something. My brother, for instance, has taken on practicing the piano so you can get the next grade so it really is anything, anything that you can feel you can commit to, something that you wanted to do but you've never got around to doing it, a new skill, learn a language and there's all this free stuff that you can access on the website so it really is quite simple to get yourself excited about something.

The final thing is exercise. Yeah, you've got to keep your exercise going. And if you're confined to a space, then that's really quite important. When I was practicing in Burma, I didn't do any exercise for about six months and I lost muscle. I felt really, really weak. I determined to find something that would give me just that little bit of muscle tone. And what I discovered were the Canadian Air Force exercises which were famous at the time. I mean basically you just within the space of your own body you do push-ups, press-ups, jump-ups and all sorts of ups and that keeps you going, running on the spot, things like that. The one thing that they showed you was straight legs if you do sit-ups or that is a killer, don't do that at all, bend your legs. That's one of the reasons I've got a bad back. I didn't get around to suing them.

But if you go on there, there's all sorts of things. You can do some shadow boxing. Yeah, just get it out of the system. Jog around the room. In one retreat I was in, the only real, because it was in North America, and it was at the Forest Refuge, and it was during winter, and it was minus 20 or something. So in the morning when I used to run up, I used to walk up and down stairs. And that was pretty good. Anyway, again, if you go on to the websites, you've got all sorts of suggestions. There's one for cardio workout for small places.

And there's one that he suggested, which is called a burpee. So I looked that one up, a burpee, that sounds

interesting. And this is what you do. You have to stand upright, stand upright with your arms to your side and your feet apart. And then you lower your body into a squat. And then you put your hands on the floor and you kick back so that your body is straight, straight and you do a push up. And then you jump back into a squat and then it says explosively jump into the air and when you land you die. No, no, when you land you go back into a squat and you do the whole thing again. So I'll try and build up to that over the two months, bit of luck.

So with those little pointers in mind, I'm probably teaching grandmother how to suck eggs but sometimes it's worth saying the obvious. That's my inaugural encouragement to use this time, especially if you are in real lockdown, people who've got physical problems. Roy, for instance, who's done all our work here on the ground, digging the trenches, putting in the septic tank and all that, he doesn't have any kidneys. And so he's basically locked into his home. So there are many people like that. And I know some of the people who come here are like that. So I'm aiming a great deal of this towards them, but it also works with people for those of you who are working and you have to go out, to come back and come and join us in the evening.

Okay. So we're moving up to 8:19. I just want to say what I mean to do this evening. I hope you were able to download the evening contemplations. Yeah. So I'm going to start with the refuge and precepts and then I'm going to do the evening meditations. So this is what we do here on retreat, of course, the old sickness, aging and death. Can't get away from it.

And then towards the end, I'll spend about 15 minutes or so just going through the *Brahma Vihāras*. First of all, compassion, then joy, and then *metta*. Equanimity, I'm presuming, is sustained underneath it. And I shall read out the discourse on loving kindness and then chant.

Now, during that chant, some of you know the chant, so you can chant along. Chant along a monk, you see. You sit along a monk and you can chant along a monk. So you can do that or just put some good intentions into your heart. May you be safe, well and happy. The ones that we use here, may you be safe, well and happy. May all beings be safe, well and happy. You can bring individuals to mind and just use it to express your loving kindness.

Well, I've done my inaugural speech and whatnot. And I'm just wondering if there's any questions that have come up about that. I see there's lots of people have joined us. Nice comments. Thank you very much. So we have somebody from Sweden and Italy.

Oh yes, you're on the continent, of course, then you're one hour ahead of us, so it's actually past nine really. What might be possible if you don't want to stay up that long is that eventually I will have the meditation itself as a separate video, and if you wanted to, you could use that to encourage yourself and then at eight o'clock, which would be your nine o'clock, you can join me live for whatever we're doing, for the talk or for the discussion.

If you do want to ask a question, it would be good if you emailed it to me in the morning or sometime during the day, definitely before six o'clock, or then five o'clock really, and then it gives me time to prepare some answer, because usually it comes off the top of my head. But it would be nice to prepare something.

So it's lovely to see everybody here. That's very lovely. Yes, so thank you all for coming. That's fantastic. So if you can, of course, stay with me every night. But if you can't, at least come and join me when you can.

So unless there are... I'm presuming everybody who's going to join has joined now. So if there's any... unless there's an actual question, I shall then proceed to the meditation. That's lovely. I'm just looking at all the people who come and join. Fantastic. Surprisingly, I've got here 127. That's not bad, is it? I can see that, 127. I might become famous at last.

So there's the offering every evening at eight o'clock, some small talk or answering some questions, and then we'll start the sitting. Join the sitting.

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