

The Mind of Meditation.

Rev. Daishin Morgan

Serene reflection is a method of meditation that can be summarized as ‘just sitting’. To just sit still is the simplest of all activities and yet within it we obstruct ourselves with all manner of unnecessary complexities. The essence of serene reflection meditation is to simply *be* without adding anything or taking anything away. It is based on the fundamental teaching of the Mahayana tradition that the Buddha Nature is the foundation of our being. The Buddha Nature is the source of all compassion, love, and wisdom. It is the place from which real love flows out to all without distinguishing one from another. It is this love we all seek, for the ability to give and receive this love is the ability to know perfection, it is the experience of true peace.

The Buddha Nature is not something that exists inside of us like a soul, nor is it something external and apart from us like a god. It is all of existence for it rejects nothing. Infinite compassion, love, and wisdom are the characteristics by which we recognise it but it also embraces what we regard as negative within ourselves and the world around us. The Buddha Nature is enlightenment itself and since it embraces all of existence it includes us. We are not separate from enlightenment but we have mistaken where our true refuge lies. Instead of trusting the Buddha Nature, that which is in tune with all of existence, we take refuge in an illusory sense of self, a self that is fundamentally at war with all of existence. Serene reflection meditation is the means we have of healing the rift we have created between ourselves and the Buddha Nature. Enlightenment is inherent

within every one of us, but to know that enlightenment we have to look towards it for our refuge and cease to involve ourselves with greed, hate, and delusion.

Buddha Nature is the essence of stillness; it appears whenever we neither reject nor hang on to anything. To do serene reflection meditation means that you accept everything that arises in stillness, without judgement and without excuse. You must be still with whatever arises in all its exposed and revealed nature. This is to learn how to see without preconceptions. Meditation is the means we have of coming to know and experience for ourselves that which is true and real. This experience must be direct; that is, it must not take place through filters of past conditioning. If anger arises in meditation we learn to be still with it and simply accept that anger has arisen. We add nothing to it by continuing a series of thoughts about the incident which caused us to get angry, indulging a running commentary justifying our position, going over what we will say next time we meet the person who made us angry, and so on and on. Equally, we do not try to pretend we are not angry by refusing to look at what is actually happening. The way to meditate when anger arises is to sit there and be willing to be angry without judging ourselves as bad or unworthy, and without indulging the anger by carrying on the mental jabbering.

To illustrate this I will describe how it feels to come to terms with anger in myself. Having settled myself down to formal seated meditation, a memory from the past comes to mind of a particular incident that made a deep impression on me. There is a lot of anger associated with this memory and, as I find myself getting involved in the apparently inevitable commentary that always seems to accompany the memory, I become aware that I am involved in a never-ending cycle of thought that just keeps going round and round. I then deliberately let go of the thought process and each time the mind

returns to it I simply say to myself quietly and firmly: No, I do not want this, I wish to be still. Since meditation is not a state of vacuity, when I let go of the thoughts I start to become more aware of the underlying feelings. By letting go of the commentary, I start to feel first hand what is actually happening. I become aware of a sense of outrage. To keep the meditation going I must not judge or excuse this, but simply be willing to know the outrage that exists at that moment. This, put another way, means I allow the outrage to be enfolded in the stillness. Complete acceptance is the hallmark of love; it is there within love that the outrage is embraced. I can now see that the outrage is covering a deep sense of hurt and grief. To continue meditating, I must allow the grief to arise and be still within it, allowing this, too, to be embraced within the loving acceptance that is the stillness. I then become aware, not in words but by simply seeing it unfolding, that behind the hurt and grief lies a fear that I am inadequate and in some fundamental way will never measure up. Again this knowledge is not to be falsely anaesthetised by justification, or by rushing off to prove it is not true by desperately seeking some external worth in the eyes of others. Instead, just as before, this deep sense of inadequacy must be embraced; I must sit there and feel inadequate without running away. When I do this something quite remarkable then takes place. I realise that there is something beneath the inadequacy, I begin to see there is something infinitely still and accepting that embraces all of this—I cannot say it is me, I cannot say it is not me—it is just that when I am still all that arises is embraced within a great loving acceptance. I am embraced within it, it is all of me and there is nothing inadequate, there never has been, and there never will be.

This is what it means to just sit still. When this is done the anger I started with has led me directly to the Eternal Buddha, the Buddha Nature. Thus I begin to understand how it is that there is nothing outside the Eternal Buddha, even

that which at first sight seems negative. Indeed, all things point to the Truth when they are looked at with the eye of meditation.

There is not necessarily a strong and powerful memory that comes to mind every time you sit down for formal meditation. Many people experience longish periods where nothing very much seems to happen. Some people even sit for years and years waiting for something to happen and it never seems to. This is a condition in which one needs to learn to look deeper at what is going on. There is always plenty happening within meditation but we have to learn how to see it.

I mentioned earlier the importance of having the body in an alert position. This is because mind and body are not separate things; if the body is alert it helps to keep the mind bright. In a similar kind of way all the layers of delusion we get involved in give rise to corresponding tensions within the body. Very often these tensions, or some of them at least, become apparent in the abdomen area. When you take up your sitting position you need to relax your abdomen, let your stomach hang out. When we try to achieve this relaxed posture we become aware of tensions in this area. We are unable to just relax; there is a bit of a knot in there we do not seem able to let go of. For many people it can seem as though there is a whole web of tensions preventing the abdomen from returning to its naturally relaxed position. If you start to get all worried about these tensions you only add to them. They come about because we constantly try to present an image to ourselves and to the world that is not accurate. We feel our self-respect depends upon the maintenance of this image and so we are very afraid of letting it go. The way forward is to just be aware that the tensions exist, and, as it were, cradle them within the loving acceptance I spoke of earlier. If you have your hands in the recommended position for formal meditation they are at the

level of or below the navel; your arms surround the abdomen and all its tensions and it is as though your arms are the all-embracing arms of the Buddha Nature. Just be still within this loving acceptance and do not try to make the tensions go away or you will end up playing the same old game. Just be still and embrace the tension, being willing for it to be there. When you do this you find that the tensions begin to unlock; you begin to see directly what causes them without a lot of discursive thought. I must stress that this is not analysis but looking directly, embracing. You will begin to see what the causes are but you may not be able to put them into words. That does not matter in the least—what matters is that you unlock the tensions.

Just as happened with the anger, so in this case the tension itself reveals to us what lies beneath it. When we touch, or rather when we are touched by the Eternal, then we know that a refuge exists that is beyond any image. It is a true refuge that nothing can destroy. The beauty of it is that we find the refuge by means of what, at first sight, is the very obstacle that keeps us from it! Whatever arises within meditation, be it the sense of great compassion or boiling hate, by simply being still and not indulging it, we are led by it directly to the Eternal. There are no real obstacles provided we keep meditating. There is no substitute for practice where meditation is concerned; you come to understand what it is and how it works by doing it, and by doing it regularly.

The result of doing meditation is that you become aware of many things in your life that need to be changed. If you wish to go deeper with your practice, then those changes will need to be made. There is no limit to how far the practice goes and in the end we have to give up everything. I do not mean we must rush out and give away all we possess—it is actually much harder than that. You have, in the end, to come to a place where you go beyond all you

have known in the past. Some people experience this in meditation as approaching a cliff edge which you know you need to step over, but you cannot see if there is anything there to hold you. Most of us turn tail at this point and hide. It is important then not to condemn ourselves, but accept the fear within the same loving acceptance. We then find ourselves returning to that cliff edge and maybe we turn and run again, but in time we approach it, and, almost before we realise what has happened, we step off; we let go of all that we believe ourselves to be and trust the Eternal absolutely. We then find we are within the hand of the Eternal Buddha and always were. What we have had to give up is the clinging to the idea that we are separate. Once we know we are in the hand of the Eternal, there is an end to fear. If life comes, there is life; if death comes, there is death: we are free to live fully and freely without the tyranny of fear. I have yet to meet someone who was able to take this leap without having a few 'trial runs' at the first. We all have within us what it takes to train, we lack for nothing, but it takes time to grow the necessary faith in ourselves and the Eternal. All we need for the great work is at hand; meditation is the means we have of discovering it.

Some people worry that meditation is a way of hiding from the world, but, on the contrary, through coming to understand one's true relationship with the Eternal Buddha and all beings, you begin to see more clearly where your responsibilities lie. Meditation is not an antisocial activity, quite the reverse; it is the still point of certainty, the source of strength that enables one to act with compassion and wisdom, which are unfettered by fear. However, one's practice should not become obsessive; a sense of humour should be maintained whilst still understanding the great seriousness of the work. Most people have so many commitments that there is little chance of their practice becoming obsessive, but in these days of unemployment some may find themselves with a great deal of time on their hands.

Meditation is a very valuable use of this time, but remember that meditation is for oneself and for all beings as well. One needs to give in practical forms expression to the compassion that arises in meditation. It is not a good idea to spend hours and hours doing one's own practice in isolation from the rest of the world. This can lead one to lose perspective on reality. Remember to maintain a balance between formal meditation and practical meditation (meditation in action). Even monks living in a monastery do not spend their whole day doing formal meditation, and much time is spent in practical activities that benefit others.

* * *