

## **Lesson 25 - MEDITATION**

*Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.*

*Question to think about before the story:* Have you ever thought, meditation is difficult and is not very helpful to me?

### **Story: Sona Kolivisa**

In a village in the land of Magadha in India lived the Kolivisa clan. A millionaire in the Kolivisa clan had a son named Sona. From the time he was born, little Sona received lavish gifts and had every luxury. He had three mansions, and he even had 60 nurses to take care of him. He never had to do any kind of work at all. His skin was so soft and delicate that even his feet were completely soft. They were so soft that there was very soft hair growing on the bottom of his feet. That was very unusual, and people were amazed when they saw it. So, he never walked on the ground, to protect his feet from getting rough and losing the hair on them. If he became upset, he would often threaten to walk on the ground, so people just did whatever he wanted.

King Bimbisara, the King of Magadha, invited a person from each of the 80,000 villages in Magadha to visit him, and also invited Sona. To prepare Sona for the visit, his parents told him, “King Bimbisara wants to see your feet. But you cannot disrespect him by stretching your feet toward him. Instead, show him your feet by sitting cross-legged in front of him, with the bottoms of your feet turned up so he can see them.”

The Kolivisa family had servants carry Sona to the King’s palace on a palanquin (a little carriage held on their shoulders). Sona bowed to the king and sat in front of him as his parents told him to do, and the king saw the soft hair growing on Sona’s feet. The king was amazed. Then the king spoke to the big crowd of people, including Sona. He instructed them about what goals they should accomplish in their lives. At the end of his speech, he told them to see the Buddha, who will instruct them about goals they should accomplish for future lives.

So the 80,000 people from the villages went with Sona to see the Buddha. When they arrived there, the Buddha taught them that happiness comes from reducing desires, not running after desires. After the dharma talk, the people took refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and went back home. But Sona wanted to stay. He asked the Buddha to be ordained as a monk. The Buddha said he could if his parents agree. He got permission from his parents, and then got ordained.

Sona was very eager to experience the happiness that the Buddha was talking about. He had experienced every kind of pleasure and wealth that he could ask for, but he had not experienced real happiness. So he went to find a lonely place out in the forest to meditate. As he walked in the forest, he tried to be constantly

mindful. He sat down at a nice place and closed his eyes and tried to concentrate and calm his mind. He sat for a long time and tried and tried to concentrate his mind, but his mind just kept thinking about all sorts of things. So, he tried walking meditation. He walked slowly and mindfully until his tender feet got blisters and then began to bleed. Still, he could not calm his mind enough to experience real happiness.

Day after day, Sona went to the same beautiful place in the forest to meditate. He sat and tried to meditate, but his mind would not calm down much. He tried walking meditation, but his thoughts would not slow down. He just kept thinking and thinking, not meditating. He became frustrated, and thought, "This is no use. I tried so hard to meditate. But I didn't get the happiness I was hoping for. I should just return to life with my family. I can offer food and things to the monks to make merit. That will give me at least some happiness."

On the day he felt like giving up being a monk, the Buddha came to visit Sona in his meditation place. Sona offered him a seat and bowed to him. The Buddha said, "Sona, weren't you thinking that you tried very hard to meditate, but your heart was not at peace, and that you didn't get the happiness that you wished for? And that you wanted to return to your family and give food and necessities to the monks to make merit?" Sona replied, "Yes, Bhante." The Buddha said, "You used to play the lute [a stringed instrument], didn't you? Weren't you a good lute player?" Sona nodded. The Buddha said, "If the strings are too tight, does the lute sound nice?" Sona replied, "No, Bhante." The Buddha continued, "If the strings are too loose, does the lute sound nice?" Sona replied, "No, Bhante." The Buddha said, "If the strings are not too tight or too loose, does the lute sound nice?" "Yes, Bhante." The Buddha asked, "Sona, why didn't you experience happiness? You are straining too hard. Trying too hard leads to agitation. Not trying hard enough leads to laziness. Meditate in a relaxed way, but without laziness. Try again. You will get good results." The Buddha paused, and then asked, "will you stay as a monk and try again?"

Sona agreed, and the next day, he sat to meditate. This time, he did not force his mind to stay still. Instead, he watched his thoughts, and let them come and go. When his thoughts started going too fast, and he noticed that he wasn't watching them come and go anymore, he paid attention to his breathing. He noticed everything about his breathing. His mind became more and more calm, until he could watch each thought arising and going away. His mind became still. He felt not even the slightest worry, anxiety, displeasure, discomfort, expectation, or desire. He felt complete happiness. Now, finally, he could meditate.

*Questions after the story:*

1. What kind of lifestyle did Sona have growing up?
2. What did his parents tell him not to do when he meets the king? Why?
3. Who did the king tell the crowd of people to see?
4. Why did Sona want to be ordained?
5. What happened when he went out in the forest?

6. What happened to his feet when he did walking meditation?
7. What did the Buddha say was the reason Sona could not meditate well?
8. What leads to agitation when you are trying to meditate?
9. What leads to laziness when you are trying to meditate?

*Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:*

**“Suppabuddhaṃ pabujjhanti sadā Gotamasāvaka,  
yesaṃ divā ca ratto ca, bhāvanāya rato mano.”**

**“Those students of Gotama always awaken happily,  
whose minds delight in the practice of meditation by day and night.”**

Dhammapada 301 (21:12)

*Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:*

The Buddha talks about the delight in practicing meditation. “Bhāvana” is the Pali word for meditation. Are you delighted about meditation? Do you awaken happily? Maybe you are like Sona Kolivisa, that you haven’t discovered the happiness of meditation yet, because you are trying but it really isn’t working for you. Maybe you are a bit too lazy when you try to meditate, so you feel sleepy or you just daydream, maybe thinking about what you want to do later, or thinking about others around you. Or maybe you are trying too hard, trying to force your mind to focus, and getting annoyed when you get distracted with many thoughts, so you give up.

Meditation is like a sport or skill that takes a lot of practice to learn. If we want to learn to play a sport, just like if we want to learn to meditate, we need a teacher to guide us, and regular practice. The best way to have regular practice is to spend a few moments *each day* – maybe just a minute or two – for meditation, at the same time in your morning or evening routine. Choose the best time for you: when you get out of bed or just after you finish getting dressed in the morning, or just before bed in the evening. When it is such a short time, and at the same time every day, you cannot say that you don’t have enough time, or that you forgot. When you do this daily, then you will have a lifelong habit of meditation, which is sure to lead to success and happiness.

It is best to have a certain place for meditation, which is quiet, neat and clean. A shrine in your house is an ideal place. You can make a small shrine in your bedroom by putting a small Buddha or other religious statue or picture on a nightstand, bookcase or small table, and keeping that area clean and free of clutter and worldly things. You can sit cross-legged on the floor with your spine and upper buttocks supported by a small pillow or folded blanket.

The next thing we need is effort (virīya) and diligence (appamāda). Do you remember what appamāda means? We learned in a previous lesson that appamāda means dedication, diligence, and alertness; doing something carefully with great interest, attention, effort and energy. We should not just sit, close our eyes and get it overwith, or pretend to meditate but just daydream. We should sit

in proper meditation position, remember how our teacher taught us to meditate and do our best to follow those instructions.

What do we mean by effort (*viriya*)? It means perseverance, persistent effort, when you determine to do something good and keep trying, struggling, overcoming difficulties and failures, not giving up. We talked about this in the lesson about Siddhartha not getting enlightened even after six years practicing extreme self-torture as an ascetic in the forest, and still trying to become enlightened. We don't have to do that to practice meditation! We only need to practice a little bit of meditation regularly and not give up, even if it is not fun and not giving us happiness yet. We bathe and brush our teeth every day, and that is not particularly fun, but we do it to clean our body and mouth. You will be glad that you did, so you don't have rotting teeth and diseases when you grow up! Similarly, we need to clean our mind every day by meditation. That little bit of effort every day helps us control our mind and concentrate.

We don't get immediate success - we can't suddenly concentrate really well when we first start meditating. But we may notice over time that we can study better, that we don't get as agitated as we used to, that we have more patience and more understanding, that we can more calmly handle difficulties. Meditation helps us avoid stress, anger and anxiety, so we can think more calmly and clearly. When we are a little older, we will be so glad we did, so we can experience real happiness and wisdom. It is very important to remember that even if we stop meditation for awhile, we should get back to a regular practice of meditation, and not give up. Meditation is not easy, but it is well worth all the effort.

*Activity to reinforce the lesson:* Walking meditation: Students stand with their backs toward a wall, not too close to each other. Teacher demonstrates walking very slowly, naturally, but not so slow as to lose balance or feel silly, without exaggerating any movements or dragging the feet. Then the teacher instructs them in a very soothing voice to just stand with eyes closed, and pay close attention to breathing, noticing every sensation of breathing. Teacher then instructs them to notice the feeling of the feet on the floor, to notice the feeling of the toes on the floor, then the ball of the foot, then the heels on the floor. Teacher instructs them to notice how their body is balanced on their feet, and then to notice how it feels to lean forward just a tiny bit, and then to again stand straight up again. Teacher then instructs them to open their eyes, and slowly raise one foot slightly, and notice how that feels in the leg to raise the foot, then smoothly move the foot forward in a normal small step and place the foot down on the floor, noticing how it feels for the foot to touch the floor again. Teacher instructs them the same way for the next step. Students are instructed to continue walking at their own pace, not looking at other students or looking around, just keep focused on how it feels to walk very slowly. Keeping the voice very soothing, teacher coaches them to feel sensations in their foot, as each part of the foot touches the floor, moves forward and touches the floor, feel sensations in their leg, their upper leg, lower leg, ankle, how their body balances with each new step, notice the arms and hands and fingers, notice when they are breathing in, and

when they are breathing out. Then let students do walking meditation in silence for a little while.

*Closing chant:* Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā      May all beings have happy minds!