

Meditation and Pain

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October 20, 2012

This short paper will describe what my practice has discovered with respect to persistent, serious physical pain and the suffering that results. It is my experience that these techniques can also be used with emotional suffering. However, there are some exceptions: bipolar conditions should not pursue vipassana meditation without the explicit advice of a psychologist or psychiatrist who is familiar with meditation and its relationship to mental suffering. Seriously psychotic conditions should also be reluctant to use meditation without a therapeutic evaluation from a serious therapeutic practitioner. For clarification on my reservations in this regard, please contact me at wzerocmf@earthlink.net .

Phase One

Find a comfortable position in which to meditate. If possible keep the spine straight. Be able to breathe without catches caused by the stress of a compressed or slanted physical posture. If necessary it is possible to meditate lying down on one's back, but this position invites sleepiness and takes a while to be used as an acceptable meditation position. However, once one is accustomed to it, it works just fine.

Begin to breathe. Focus either on the sense of the breath on the upper lip the expansion or contraction of the chest. Follow the in and out movement of the diaphragm. Continue to focus on the breath until one feels one's attention firmly on the breath.

Note the pain. Where is it occurring? Be specific. Is it in a bone, a joint, connective tissue, an organ, muscle layers? What is the quality of the pain? Is it an ache, a throbbing, a stabbing or a pounding pain? Can you speak to its intensity on a scale from one to ten, where one is almost no pain, and ten is seriously disruptive pain. Does the pain travel? Is it layered? Is it continuous? Does it change as the awareness notes it?

If the pain becomes too intense to watch, come back to the breathe and use the exhale to release the tension of the pain's intensity. When you can return to noting the pain. Try alternating the attention back and forth to the painful area. Gradually you will be able to be with it for longer periods of time. Finally, you can simply be present to it and not react to it.

What this Phase One does is to teach the awareness not to identify with the pain and personalize it so it becomes suffering. I call this not being owned by the pain.

Phase Two

If the pain is too intense for Phase One to work, try this: First think of a color, which you think and feel is to be calming and healing. It may be different because of upbringing, culture, or other experience.

Image your body being surrounded by a spherical egg of this color, so that every part of you is enfolded by the color. (For me it is green.) Breathe the color into your diaphragm (In Japan, this is called the Hara point and it is considered to be one's centre, the locus of the vital principle which constitutes the self or personhood.) Exhale the color into the locus of pain. Soak every aspect of the pain with the healing color. Do this exercise over and over until the color begins to ameliorate the pain. From time to time, check the spherical egg to verify that the healing color is maintaining its protective potency.

Phase Three

If the pain is still beyond the capacity of Phase One and Phase Two to ameliorate, go on to use this phase. Choose a person/figure who has healing potency for you: a saint, a bodhisattva, a healer, a Deity, a teacher, etc. If no such person exists for you, then simply choose Life itself.

Addressing that figure/person:

Tara, this pain is beyond my capacity to deal with. I need help. I ask you now to come and help me with this pain. Tara, I open my self to you and to your healing energy. I trust you. I love you. Please come and help me with this pain. If it be your will remove it altogether. But at the very least, Tara, please take this pain down to the level where I can work with it. I ask this by the love and for the love which abides in all Life, and which the secret name of the relationship between all living creatures. This I ask, O Tara, in your name.

This last Phase Three has always worked for me. It is a question of radical trust. I truly believe we are connected to the Buddhanature, relational awareness of all existent phenomena and that this Buddhanature is characterized by unconditional Love or Deep Compassion.

Finished October 20, 2012