MATERIAL 2B

MEDITATION IN MAHAYANA (THE GREAT WAY)

Among the other teachings the Buddha gave, he also taught a lot about meditation: meditation means bringing the mind into a balanced state so that one can effortlessly dwell in what is. Happy moments in one's life usually appear when the mind is not distracted and one is in the here and now.

Basically, Buddhism distinguishes between two types of meditation: the "calm-abiding meditation" and the "insight meditation". Calm-abiding meditation is included as a basic principle in all Buddhist meditations and enables deep insight (insight meditation).

As an example, imagine a glass of clay water: Only when the glass is left standing do all the clay particles come to rest and eventually sink to the bottom. Here, one learns to observe the mind attentively and to hold it in one place (meditation of stillness of mind). When all the clay particles have sunk to the bottom (the mind has come to rest), the water appears unclouded and clear and there are no more obstacles to deep insight (insight meditation). In the long run, the goal of calm-abiding meditation is the liberation from everything that disturbs (the clay parts in the water): Fears, emotional outbursts and confusion decrease more and more and eventually disappear.

Through the application of insight meditation, the mind reveals more and more its timeless nature (one recognizes the quality of clear water), for which no intellectual understanding is necessary. All the skills of the mind come out and one experiences unshakable fearlessness in every situation, boundless joy that is not dependent on anything, and compassion for all beings. This state is called "enlightenment" and is the goal of insight meditation.

Insight can only happen on the basis of a calm mind. Meditation does not have to be complicated and you do not have to leave your usual life behind or sit in a cave to meditate. Just a few minutes of meditation a day can bring powerful results. According to Buddhist teachers and scientific studies, meditation increases the ability to concentrate and to concentrate on something without being distracted. At the same time, one also becomes mindful of what is happening around one. One becomes more aware and relaxed in everyday life. Finally, one becomes aware of one's own thoughts, feelings, and reaction patterns, gets more distance from mood swings and disturbing feelings, and experiences more freedom of mind.

The sitting posture one chooses for meditation allows one to sit quietly, stably and comfortably for as long as possible. The traditional sitting posture for meditation is full lotus. Many prefer half lotus sitting, with the right leg in front of or on top of the left leg. However, one can also meditate sitting on a chair. It is important that the back is straight, but not stiff. This helps concentration. The eyes are either closed or slightly open.

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Buddha gave many different teachings because people are different. This resulted in three major Buddhist schools/paths (Theravada, Great Way, Diamond Way), in which different meditations are used.

In the Great Way (sanskr.: Mahayana), insight meditation is used in addition to calm abiding. Here the aim is not only to free oneself from difficulties, but also to do something for others. Therefore, meditation aims at both calming the mind and the development of deep insight. In meditation, love and compassion are developed on the one hand, and wisdom on the other.

The wisdom developed in meditation leads to the certainty that suffering is ultimately not real. Through the compassion developed, one wishes that all living beings may be happy and free from suffering, and therefore one behaves compassionately and lovingly towards others. Thus, one develops both love and compassion as well as wisdom. One experiences these two principles as inseparable from one's own mind and thus attains deep insight, which leads to enlightenment.

An important exercise in the Great Way is the "meditation of giving and receiving" (Tibetan: tonglen). In this, one first makes a strong wish to free all the people one likes from all difficulties. Gradually, one expands this wish and finally wishes all beings, including people one does not like or know and finally all sentient beings, well. With each inhalation, one takes away all problems - presented as black clouds - from all beings and, while exhaling, sends all happiness and any kind of joy to them in the form of clear light.

At the end of the meditation, one imagines that the beings are joyful and freed from all constrictions.

"Everything we do for ourselves, we do for others, and everything we do for others, we do for ourselves." (Thich Nhat Hanh)