

# Meditation and Psychological Freedom

Psychologically we suffer. The way we think and perceive things can cause us to create unhealthy lifestyles. Our psychological reality can affect our physical and mental health. Your perceptions of your experiences can change more than just your attitudes. When we identify with any situation and continue to identify with it, it continues to affect us even though it's not happening any more.

For example, you get mad at someone at work, you feel the anger and experience it in your body, your mind knows this anger, and records it as it's happening (present moment). Your adrenaline kicks in, your respiration increases, your heart rate is elevated, your nerve sensitivity is heightened, your body tenses up and you're ready for battle (fight or flight). If an hour goes by and the event that caused the anger is over, does your mind put the issue to rest or does it still identify with the problem? The mind can only think. Until you either come to terms with the situation or forget about it, some of the symptoms that manifest because of the original situation continue to happen. If you never deal with or come to terms with the situation, then you will continue to have your reactionary symptoms and that leads to chronic or long-term imbalances.

If someone hurts your feelings (says you're ugly), you'll most likely feel hurt and depressed. This is because you are human and you feel and react to your experiences. For as long as you hold on to the hurt, you'll react. During meditation you focus on an activity like the breath, or on a mantra like the word *one*, or you passively observe the thoughts without attachment. Whatever technique you use, you become present. You forget the situation, conflict or problem and you become only aware of the technique, at least for the moment. And in that moment, for however long it last, you are free from your afflictions, sufferings, anxieties, bodily manifestation or whatever. In the present moment there is only now.

There are so many possible focuses that can be used for practicing meditation that you can change your practice to suit your needs on any given day. Even though they all pretty much do the same thing and have the same benefits, you can use different ones depending on whatever it is that you want to achieve from your meditation practice. The focuses vary just like you do. One day you may want to reduce stress, another day you may feel anxious and need to quiet your mind or maybe you are dealing with grief, sorrow or the loss of someone dear to you. Understanding your situation on a particular day may help you to get a little more of what you're looking for in your meditation practice. However, you can't get anything from your practice that wasn't there in the first place. To feel peace, you have to go back to feeling peaceful. To reduce stress you have to create a situation in which you have no stress. In meditation you don't get anything, you give up everything. No attachment.

In order to not have a klesha (an affliction, things like pain, distress, anger, desire, stress, anxiety, wanting, avoiding, etc.) you need to become present, or be in the present moment. A state of non-attachment means not clinging to anything, not to your thoughts, actions, or to the progression of events that caused the current situation. Let go and become fully present. You can only be truly alive in the present moment. Anything that has already happened is over. Anything that hasn't happened yet, isn't. There is only now, and now is where you are. So, depending on

whatever your current situation is at the time you begin to meditate, that will be what you bring to the meditation, and that is what you let go of. What if you want to meditate on how wonderful your life is, or how good you are to others? This is still a klesha because you're identifying with your mind (ego) and your mind only knows the past and longs for the future. The mind cannot stay present because it has to process input and compare it to know what it knows. This isn't easy to understand but you can only be mindful in the present moment because you're still identifying with your mind. To truly be in the present moment you have to experience it without comparison, through conscious observation. Here is an example. If you look at, or think of me, who I am to you is what you see me as. You judge me for my actions, my appearance, or whatever it is that I may be doing or have done. To experience anything as it is, in the present moment there can be no judgment, no thinking, only experiencing. So how do you become the observer? Practice, a lot of practice. When you can be both the experience and the one experiencing at the same time, you will know this freedom from the kleshas. This freedom is why we meditate. We meditate to be free from our afflictions, to not identify with our anxieties, our insecurities, our sufferings and mindful mental dilemmas. It is our minds that create our human conditions, and it is because of our minds that we suffer. How we perceive and or react to our experiences is the cause of our suffering. Some people have minds that are never quiet. Some people have bodies that never relax. Some people are physically sick (dis-ease). Some people never feel content because they are always judging themselves and others. The more we're affected by our experiences the more susceptible we are to having problems, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Meditation is a safe haven where the only experience is the present one. By not identifying with your mind you can be free from whatever your condition is, at least for the duration of your meditation. All the things that affect you are shunted, and the present moment is all there is. This is freedom. Once you get the hang of meditation you'll come to know what being content really feels like, and what knowing that "it's okay to be you" feels like. This is psychological freedom. You will experience the present moment and will not be identifying with your mind's reality. You can choose how to react to what comes your way by knowing that you don't have to react. You'll know this because you've experienced it in meditation. In meditation thoughts will come up and with practice you'll learn how to not identify with them. You'll recognize them as thoughts and label them as thinking. You'll know that you have thoughts but you are not your thoughts; they are just there. When you can observe thoughts as they are, the thoughts have no power. They can't affect you, they can only exist as information and this information can only affect you if you choose to let it. In time you will recognize when this is happening outside of your meditation practice and you'll be able to choose whether or not to react to the thoughts, and if you do, how to react to them. When something is stressful, you're overwhelmed, lonely, depressed or whatever, you'll be able to recognize that this perceived reality or interpretation exists only in your mind and has only as much power over you, your body, and your environment as you allow.

Meditation eventually becomes part of your daily life. You will know how to be in control even when you're not meditating. You'll recognize when you're not in the present moment and be able to become present. You'll be more mindful, and more present.

You can only be truly alive in the present moment.

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