

Introduction to Meditation 3: a stillness Guide

by Piya Tan 2014

THE INSPIRATIONAL MEDITATIONS are a set of 6 recollections (*anussati*) comprising the recollections of the 3 jewels, of moral virtue, of charity, and of the gods. The term *anussati* comes from the prefix *anu-*, meaning a repeated and sustained action, and *sati*, meaning “mindfulness.” Put together, *anussati* mean a sustained mindfulness or remembering of the positive quality of the meditation object, and inculcating those qualities within ourselves.

Such positive qualities can be cultivated through the various inspirational meditations given here. They are also called “inspirational meditations” because they instill joy in us to free us from a mental hindrance or some difficulty in meditation.² As such, these recollections are conducive to preparing the mind of especially the faith-inclined, and those willing to suspend any judgement momentarily, for deeper meditation.³

It is possible that this list of 5 inspirational meditations (that is, excluding that on charity) is an ancient one, pre-dating the list of 6 recollections, with the addition of the recollection of charity. This is understandable if we consider that during the first period of the Buddha’s ministry (the first 10-20 years),⁴ when the monks were more itinerant, collecting almsfood in a proper resort, wherever they were.

However, when the monks were more settled in monasteries (during the second period and later), the laity regularly patronized them so that it was spiritually helpful for them to reflect on their own charity. The principle behind such meditations is to recall the good that we have done as foil against negative thoughts and habits, and to inspire us with happy thoughts. Meditation is best done with joy.

OVERVIEW OF THE MEDITATION METHODS. This volume centres around the 6 inspirational recollections, but includes some extra teachings and texts that are related to inspiring joy in us, and to help us properly cultivate a contemplative quality in our lives whether we are renunciants or lay practitioners. One of the first things we need to understand is that meditation is essentially that of spending truly quality time with ourselves.

To truly grow emotionally and spiritually, we need to get away from the crowd and a crowded life, at least occasionally. We need, as it were, to rest all our 5 physical senses, so that our minds and hearts can have a respite. Spending time with ourselves is an effective way of self-healing and tapping the creativity and spirituality within us (often enough the two are the same things). Hence, we open this volume with a study on solitude (*paṭisallāna*), **the Paṭisallāna Sutta** (It 45).

The Dhajagga Sutta (S 11.3) is a short well known discourse that contains a story behind the use of the recollections on the 3 jewels, that is, as an antidote against fear. Each of these 3 jewels is then separately examined. We first look at *Buddhānussati*, the recollection on the Buddha, including **the (Tathāgata) Loka Sutta** (A 4.23), which is a reflection on the word *tathāgata*.

Then follows *Dhammānussati*, the recollection on the true teaching, the Dharma as the true path to awakening. The virtues of the Dharma are listed and explained. The same approach is found in the next recollection, *Saṅghānussati*, that on the noble sangha, the community of saints,

² See eg (**Agata,phala**) **Mahanāma S** (A 6.10), SD 15.3.

³ See *Bhāvanā*, SD 135.1 (Fig 8.1) meditations 23-28.

⁴ On the 2 period of the Buddha’s ministry, see **Notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1 (1.3).

and their virtues. This chapter includes a study of **the Aṭṭha Puggala Suttas 1 and 2**, which examines the “8 kinds of individuals,” that is, the various kind of sainthood.

The next recollection is that on moral virtue, or *Sīlānussati*, where we recall inspiring moments of moral effort in keeping to the precepts. Such a recollection helps to clear our minds, at least temporarily, of any guilt or doubt, so that we can effectively progress in our practice. A related recollection follows, that is, that on charity, *Cāgānussati*. When we are charitable and generous to other, especially for a good cause, we invariably feel a sense of joyful fulfillment. Such joy empowers us to move smoothly with our meditation.

Devatā’nussati is a very special recollection, especially for those who are new to Buddhism, and have been raised to believe in God or gods, or some kind of supreme or powerful beings. We start off in familiar territory, as it were. However, this must be done in a positive way, where we recollect only the wholesome qualities of such beings, such as love and compassion, or the stories of their courage and goodness. As soon as pervasive joy arises in us, we gently let go of this tool to focus and cultivate the joy.

The last two chapters are helpful to meditation in general. **The Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58) is an interesting record of how the Buddha helps Moggallāna in the meditation that brings about his awakening, and these tips of the Buddha are very useful for us as practitioners. **The Vimutt’āyatana Sutta** (A 5.26) in an inspiring discourse which lists the occasions when spiritual insight, even awakening, may arise in us if we are mindful and live in the Dharma.

BRIGHTENING UP OUR MEDITATION. There are these 4 ways of shining the *nimitta* (here summarized): (1) focus on centre of the *nimitta*; (2) sharpen the attention in the present moment; (3) smile at the *nimitta*; (4) go back to the beautiful breath. The reflex sign (meditative image) may be dull also due to poor moral conduct or to low mental effort. In the case of poor moral conduct, one should “spend some effort purifying your conduct beyond the meditation cushion. Keep your precepts faultlessly. Check your speech. The Buddha said that without first purifying *sīla* [moral conduct], it is impossible to purify *samādhi* [mental concentration].” (2002:75). In the case of low mental energy, one should remedy it by switching to “**the inspirational meditations**” like a reflection (*anussati*) on any of the 3 jewels, on giving (*cāgānussati*) or *mettā, bhāvanā*. According to Bodhi, “gladdening the mind” is either the attainment of the first 2 dhyanas (containing joy) or as the penetration of those dhyanas by regarding them with insight as subject to destruction.

BUDDHIST MEDITATION FOR NON-BUDDHISTS. The Buddha’s meditation does not make us better Buddhists (we only need to go to a well known temple or society for that). These meditations, if properly pursued, neither editing or watering them down, will transform us into better individuals, whether we are religious or not.

If any of these meditations appear “religious,” it is because they are meant to work for those who are religious inclined. Buddhist meditation today touches the devout and desperate in all the world religions more than meets the eye. After all meditation is a personal practice. Whatever reason we have for doing these meditations, we must first of all accept them for what they really are: Buddhist meditation.

These meditations are meant to free our mind of views, even religious one, so that we enjoy the pristine bliss and clarity of our heart, which is the source of religion in the first place. We begin from where we are, and move on with moral courage and spiritual drive to free ourselves of the limitations of our worldly senses so that we directly look into our heart.

What we see there will liberate us from what have held us back from our own humanity and godliness. Suffice to say this is an amazingly blissful experience that makes our live meaningful and purposeful even here and now. All this empowers us to be truly able to touch the lives of others just through our own example, what more if we reach out to others with this peace and light.