

## The 8 supports (*paccaya*) of meditation

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### 5.7.2 The 8 supports (*paccaya*) of meditation

**5.7.2.1** In early Buddhist teachings, the 4 supports of life (*paccaya*) are said to be *food, clothing, shelter and health* (medical care).<sup>1</sup> Buddhadasa says that besides these 4 supports as physical conditions, the 5<sup>th</sup> support should be a mental support conducive to meditation, that is, *mental concentration, inner peace and insight wisdom*. Altogether, we have the 8 basic supports for practice, that is, meditation, that is: (1) *food*, (2) *clothing*, (3) *shelter*, (4) *health*, (5) *time*, (6) *guidance*, (7) *posture* and (8) *method*.<sup>2</sup>

(1) The physical supports for good meditation are food, clothing, shelter and health. We should eat healthily and moderately. This means we should see **food** as contributing to physical health so that we are able to meditate in natural physical comfort. Unhealthy eating means that we have fallen for food as “**bait**,” like fish being hooked and caught by bait on a fishing line.

(2) **Clothing** should be comfortable, loose-fitting and decent. We should not dress to present a negative or animal nature, or that violate cultural norms and human decency.

(3) **Shelter** means the proper place for meditation: as a rule, a quiet spot away from the crowd or any distractions. If we follow the Buddha, then, nature (the outdoors), especially shady trees and safe scenic spots are good places for meditation.

(4) Physical **health** is vital for mental cultivation. We have already mentioned healthy eating; we also need to have healthy habits. We should not wait until we face the urgency of health problems to follow a simple routine of exercises, recreation and rest—and, of course, healthy social interaction. Too much reading, especially writings on worldly matters, in print, social media and the Internet, will surely disrupt us from our practice.

Worldly people often regard **sex** as a necessity. A healthy human relationship involves both the body and the mind/heart (thinking and feeling). Meditation is a practice in true renunciation, beginning with letting go of the body (the physical senses), and to even the mind (thoughts). As a rule, celibacy (especially during retreats) applies so that we can fully focus on mental cultivation and growth.

These are the physical supports for meditation. We shall now look at the non-physical supports for meditation: time, guidance, posture and method.

**5.7.2.2** (5) The best **time** for meditation is right now! There is the meditative mind and the meditative practice. We need to be **mindful**, ideally (something to do with the mind), every waking moment, so that our experiences can properly inform, guide, protect and nurture us as an individual and a social being. This is the meaning of living in the present. This is the right attitude of a true meditator.

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<sup>1</sup> **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2,13-16), SD 30.3; **Santutṭhi S** (A 4.27), SD 104.8.

<sup>2</sup> Buddhadasa 1997:40-49.

**Meditation practice** is ideally done at the best time available. For the laity (this includes most monastics today!), right living starts with pursuing the right priorities based on keeping at least the 5 precepts. Moral virtue is the basis for proper meditation. Following a right livelihood helps significantly, and also the avoidance of an unwholesome lifestyle (that goes against the precepts). Our first preparation is to set our personal and social life as right as possible so that we are “physically cultivated” (*bhāvita,kāya*) to fully benefit and support for being **mentally cultivated** (*bhāvita,citta*).<sup>3</sup>

**5.7.2.3** (6) There are numerous information and informers of meditation today: it has become such a lucrative commodity: this is commercial meditation, McMindfulness. When we meditate, we work as an Artist with our own mind—it is like a musician who wants to master his instrument—in both cases, it is mastering our mind and heart. Surely, we should seek an experienced teacher who has mastered meditation and *loves* doing it, as someone who can be our **spiritual friend** (*kalyāṇa,mitta*). Ideally, a meditator relationship with others should be that of spiritual friendship.<sup>4</sup>

**5.7.2.4** (7) To start with, **posture** is important especially for long sittings and the health of our physical body. Doing some simple Yoga practice helps keep our limbs (especially the legs) supple. Traditionally, we sit on a cushion (zafu) on a soft mat. Adjustments should be made if your limbs are a bit tight. Sitting on an upright chair which comfortably fits the length of your lower legs. Keep the body upright, balanced and relaxed (the centre of gravity should always be within the body).

Most teachers let their students close their eyes during sitting. Buddhadasa, however, advocates keeping our eyes open, which keeps them cool and comfortable, and us awake. We should not look around, especially not at other people, but keep our eye focused on the nose-tip (like in most meditating Buddha images). This will also naturally help us mentally focus. As we gain samadhi, our eye will naturally close.<sup>5</sup>

**5.7.2.5** (8) The most detailed and complex of the 8 supports of practice [5.7.2.1] is that of **method**. This is not only finding the right meditation for ourselves, but also doing it rightly. Basically, we should have at least tried the breath meditation [5.8] and the cultivation of lovingkindness [SD 60.1c]. **Breath meditation** is well known in all Buddhist systems of meditation, but it is differently taught by different teachers. It is vital that we master, become familiar with, at least *one* form or style of breath meditation.

Based on this basic method, we can then try other versions of breath meditation, to see how they work, or which parts work, for us. Our familiarity with the root breath meditation will help us incorporate what is needed and is helpful for our practice. Or, we may adopt the new method wholesale, if necessary.

**Lovingkindness meditation** is a good alternative when we have difficulties with breath meditation. In fact, even when we have mastered breath meditation, and have good samadhi with it, having emerged from that calmness, and having cultivated insight (or when we feel the need for lovingkindness), we should cultivate lovingkindness.

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<sup>3</sup> On *bhāvita,kāya* and *bhāvita,citta*, see **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 35.127,7), SD 27.6a.

<sup>4</sup> See esp **Meghiya S** (A 9.3 ~ U 4.1 (SD 34.2); **Spiritual friendship: A textual study** (SD 34.1); **Spiritual friendship: Stories of kindness** (8.1).

<sup>5</sup> Buddhadasa 1997:46 f.

In a way, *breath* is good for vipassana; *lovingkindness* is good for samatha. In the long run, they actually benefit one another, and our practice as a harmonious whole.

Then, there is the strategy of **doing these practices *rightly***. Here we go into the details: we cannot do this fully here (it's best done with an experienced teacher). In what follows, we will only examine Buddhadasa's teachings on breath. To appreciate this, we should have at least been very familiar with breath meditation as our root practice. The same goes for the cultivation of lovingkindness, which we will examine later [SD 60.1c].

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