

## **Effectiveness of Buddhist Counselling Techniques for Stress Reduction**

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Presently, counselling can be seen as a broad field, into which ideas and practices from different sources can be incorporated as necessary. The problems and predicaments that are brought by the persons vary from time to time. It becomes necessary for counsellors to turn to a diversity of sources in search of the right concepts and techniques within a given situation. Particularly Buddhism has been used extensively in this way. Presently Buddhist techniques and ideas have been very effective in terms of their applicability in the area of counselling psychology.

Buddhism has specific techniques that cannot be seen in any other psychological theories. Therefore it is

not fair to give a label in comparison with other psychological schools. But we can see that some of the so called modern counselling techniques had been used in Buddhist practice over two thousand six hundred years ago. A well-known instance was that of *Kisāgotamī* who was bereaved of her only son. Here the Buddha used a 'performance-based technique' to enlighten her about the reality of life. Having lost her son she was severely distressed and was wandering along the streets for days with the carcass of her son in her arms asking everyone for a medicine to save her child. The Buddha having seen her status told her that he knows of a medicine to help her but first she had to collect a handful of mustard seeds, each one from a house that had not seen death. She was willing to do that thinking that it would be an easy task and she went from door to door and was unable to collect the seeds. She realized that death, in general and the death of her child in particular, was a reality of life. Finally she became aware of the situation and gave up her irrational behaviour. Padmasiri De Silva compared this technique to Ellis's rational-emotive therapy.<sup>1</sup>

Another technique mostly used by Buddhist counselling is mindfulness or *Satipaṭṭhāna*. It is the eventual internal resolutions that will heal external manifestations and behaviours. Through this technique, a person is used to keep awareness in the present. However if one investigates the dynamics of this therapeutic-practice, one may begin to see how most aspects of modern psychotherapy and counselling incorporate aspects of mindfulness meditation.<sup>2</sup> The '*satipaṭṭhāna*' technique is a person-centred approach and so gives the bereaved freedom and dignity to work by themselves without being overly influenced by counsellor expectations or preordained pattern of what should happen. Rogerian techniques incorporate 'empathetic listening and non-judgemental reflection.'<sup>3</sup> Thus the acceptance, recognition and clarification of mind-body conditions have a healing effect. Gestalt therapy encourages being concerned with the present rather than the past or future, dealing with what appears rather than what is absent, experiencing things rather than imagining them, feeling rather than thinking, expressing feelings rather than justifying or explaining

them, being aware of pain as well as pleasure and giving away to the kind of person one is.

Free-association was used as a technique by psychoanalysis to bring unconscious thoughts to the conscious level. There are many instances in the canon, where the Buddha used these techniques with many people with problems who sought the help of *Dhamma*. Having discussed with them the Buddha understood their inner state of mind and gave due solutions in accordance with their problems. The cognitive behavioural approach pays attention to the client's cognition. The *Madhupindika sutta* pointed out how a person's thinking patterns is distorted due to wrong perceptions.

### Chronic Stress

According to modern psychology, chronic Stress plays a major role in the psychological diseases as well as physical diseases. Many psychological and physical disorders such as depression, anxiety, heart diseases, sleeping problems, digestive problems, memory problems and skin conditions are caused by stress.

As soon as someone gets stress his brain sends out a signal through the nervous system to all parts of the body telling them to 'get ready' and respond by releasing stress hormones including adrenaline and cortisol. As a result of these hormones the body gets ready for emergency actions to save one's lives. Our heart beats faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens and senses become sharper.<sup>4</sup> The aim of these physical changes are to increase strength and stamina to quicken one's reaction time, and enhance one's focus and preparing him to either fight or escape from the danger at hand.

The Buddhist perspective regarding this matter is very important. Buddhism has discussed in depth why people become stressful emotionally and cognitively. According to Buddhism ordinary people mostly suffer from mental disturbances. In the *Roga sutta* of *Anguttaranikāya*, the Buddha has mentioned

*"illnesses are of two kinds; illness of body and illness of mind. There are those who live for one year, two years, three years, four years, five years,*

*ten- twenty years, thirty, forty years, fifty years and even hundred years without being afflicted by physical illness. But it is difficult to find those who are free from mental illness, even for one moment, with the exception of the Arahants”<sup>5</sup>*

People define everything in their experience of the world in relation to the self. This habitual pattern usually leads to the distortion of a person's view on the nature of the real world. In terms of one's own perception one might make erroneous conclusions regarding ourselves and others, because one's thoughts are coloured by deep rooted psychological tendencies such as *āsava*, *anusaya*, *nīvaraṇa* and so on. Then a person becomes utterly disappointed about his existence in the past, present and future and ponders over what he could gain and could not and he becomes disappointed about himself as well as others. Thus egocentric thoughts and the self-view lead us to stress, depression, anxiety and other psychological disorders.

Frequently in the teaching of the Buddha, these factors are vividly analyzed and explained to point

out the importance of eradicating these factors for the attainment of the spiritual goal. Human beings completely lose sanity when they are overwhelmed by these factors. According to Buddhism emotions play a very important role in the inner life of man. Human beings suffer from mental illness when they could not manage emotions correctly. Buddhism recognizes the mental status of human beings either as wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*). When human beings are overwhelmed by unwholesome emotions they are mentally stressed or confused. According to Robert H. Thouless who was a Cambridge psychologist, the term '*āsava*' in early Buddhism is directly connected to what is called psychological stress. He has said:

*“āsava’ is rich in psychological content and it covers a wide range of stress-related disorders such as depression, aversion and perversion. He further pointed out that the best English rendering for ‘āsava’ found in early Buddhism is mental stress.”<sup>6</sup>*

In Buddhism, Sensual desire is compared to water mixed with red, yellow or orange dye. Ill-will is like boiling water. Sloth and Torpor are like water covered with moss and ripples of water. Sceptical doubt is compared to water stirred up and muddy. A person who wants to see his shadow of face on the water would not be able to see when the water is not clear.<sup>7</sup> In the same manner, when a person is obsessed by these factors, his mind would be confused and then he would not be able to make the distinction between good and bad.

### **Stress Reduction Techniques as Described in the Pāli Canon**

There are many things in life that are beyond our control. However, it is possible to take responsibility for and to change one's state of mind and get rid of stressors. According to Buddhism this is the most important thing we can do, and Buddhism teaches that it is the only real antidote for anxiety, hatred and confusion that beset the human condition. But this is not easy as much as we think. It is left for man to realise his position in nature and understand the true meaning of his life. To

know the purpose of life, one should first study oneself through one's experience and insight. Then, the person will attain the realization of himself and the true meaning of life. Guidelines can be given. But he must create the necessary conditions for the arising of realisation for himself. This is a process which no one can help but one should take the necessary precautions and steps to meet his or her own expectations. That is why the Buddha preached;

*"This Dhamma is for one who wants little; this Dhamma is not for one who wants much. This Dhamma is for the contented not for the discontented. This Dhamma is for the secluded not for one fond of society. This Dhamma is for the energetic not for the lazy. This Dhamma is for one who has set up mindfulness, not for the laggard in mindfulness. This Dhamma is for the composed, not for the flustered. This Dhamma is for the wise, not for the unwise."*<sup>8</sup>

### **Removal of Stressors by Wise Reflection**

One who wants to lead a peaceful life, should eliminate overall stressful situations in life. At the same

time his vision should be very sharp at every situation that he experiences in his lifetime. One of the *sutta* discourses called *Sabbāsava sutta*, the second *sutta* of *Majjhimanikāya* is very informative regarding this matter. Here, the Buddha has pointed out, how to deal with one's own emotions without getting stressed out. In this *sutta*, the Buddha has proposed a number of practical ways that one should cultivate to be freed from stresses. Here, use of the word 'yonisomanasikāra' means 'wise attention' and it is a mode of reflection to be practised by one who wants to get rid of mental distractions, and who wants to leads a life of calmness and tranquillity. The Buddha has preached;

*"Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints (āsava) is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see."*<sup>9</sup>

Here, the word *āsava* refers to distorted thoughts or thinking patterns experienced by worldly individuals. The individual, who is overwhelmed by these patterns of thinking, is incapable of seeing the reality the world. Development of wise reflection is the key to liberation from mental stress. The Buddha says;

*"When one attends unwisely, unarisen taints arise and arisen taints increase. When one attends wisely, unarisen taints do not arise and arisen taints are abandoned"*<sup>10</sup>

The first way of eliminating taints is by having proper vision into life (*āsavā dassanā pahātabbā*). If one does not have proper insight, regarding what one should think and what one should not think, his emotions go astray. When the mind is confused, that person tends to behave unethically. The *Sabbāsava Sutta* mentions three kinds of taints called, taints of sense desire (*kāmāsava*), taints of becoming (*bhavāsava*) and taints of ignorance (*avijjāsava*) that arise in a person's mind, when wise reflection is not there. He squanders his time imagining about present, past and future thus;

*"Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having become what, what shall I be in the future? 'Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: 'Am I? Am I not? What am*

*I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?*<sup>11</sup>

When one holds dogmatic beliefs such as determinism or fatalism or materialism, about the nature of one's being, he will not engage in ethical behaviour and may develop carnal attitudes toward life. Buddhism points out that this occurs due to deep rooted egocentric thoughts that a person cultivates. The *Sabbāsava Sutta* asserts that when someone develops wise attention into one's own thought processes, it is possible to understand harmful emotions and eliminate them from the mind.

The second way of eliminating cankers is by means of restraint (*āsavā saṃvarā pahātabbā*). There are six sense faculties which are called internal (*ajjattika*) eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind and corresponding external (*bāhira*) faculties called visible object, sound, odour, taste, tangible and mind-object. When these sense faculties come into contact with suitable stimuli consciousnesses such as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness and so forth arise.<sup>12</sup> This is a natural causal process. No one can stop this by force. But a person has a natural tendency to be attached

to one's own emotions according to his passions. In the social context we cannot express our emotions freely. Many incidents in the outer world stimulate our senses. Most people get used to be attached to pleasant things and resist undesirable things. But mostly we can see that it creates stressful situations in both individual and society. That is why Buddhism instructs to cultivate self-restraint for the benefit of both individual and society.

The third method proposed by the Buddha, deals with taints that can be abandoned by using (*āsavāpatisevanā pahātabbā*). This means being satisfied with one's basic needs. Clothes, food, shelter, and medicine are considered fundamental needs of human beings. If someone can understand what their primary needs are and how to satisfy them, his life becomes a contented one. But what we can see in society is that people cannot realise even what their real needs are. How much money do they lavish on garments designed to promote various fashions? Food consumption is very high. Fast food; undercooked meals with artificial flavours are harmful substances to the

body. According to new medical experiments, the main reason for getting ill is wrong food patterns. Most people suffer from insolvency due to housing loans. But finally, when they are not successful they pine and suffer and envy others who are successful in doing so. However, even if they are successful in getting these things, they suffer because they now fear losing what they have gained, or their desires have now increased for more gains. Their desires can never seem to be completely satisfied. The only consequence of such attitudes is living with totally stressful situations perhaps up to death. According to Buddhism if someone cultivates a simple lifestyle one can lead a tension free life.

Fourthly, the Buddha speaks of *āsava* that can be eliminated by means of enduring (*āsavā adhvāsānā pāhātabbā*). This fact is very important to practice in day-to-day life. We see, what cankers are proposed by the Buddha as ones to be eliminated with endurance.

*“ Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, bears cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun and creeping things; he endures ill-spoken, unwelcome words and arisen bodily*

*feelings that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing and menacing to life. While taints, vexation, and fever might arise in one who does not endure such things, there are no taints, vexation, or fever in one who endures them. These are called the taints that should be abandoned by enduring”.*<sup>13</sup>

We are living a life that does not always proceed as smoothly as we would like it to. Very often, we face problems and difficulties. Unexpected circumstances may arise; sometimes it may be due to natural disasters or social resistances. Whatever the situation is we have to be prepared to accept those difficulties both mentally and physically too. We should not be afraid of them because the penetration into the very nature of these problems and difficulties can provide us with a deeper insight into life. Therefore, getting used to endurance is a better way to survive without getting stress.

Fifthly, the Buddha considers taints that can be abandoned by avoiding (*āsavā parivajjnāpāhātabbā*). This is one way to keep the mind without being stressed.



Here, the Buddha explains instances in which stressors could be avoided;

*“Here, a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, avoids a wild elephant, a wild horse, a wild bull, a wild dog, a snake, a stump, a bramble patch, a chasm, a cliff, a cesspit, a sewer. Reflecting wisely, he avoids sitting on unsuitable seats, wandering to unsuitable resorts, and associating with bad friends, since if he were to do so wise companions in the holy life might suspect him of evil conduct. While taints, vexation, and fever might arise in one who does not avoid these things, there are no taints, vexation, and fever in one who avoids them. These are called the taints that should be abandoned by avoiding”<sup>14</sup>*

If someone feels associating with certain persons or under certain backgrounds he will be a victim to the unwholesome circumstances, then it is better to avoid consciously the association with such a person or situations.

The sixth method of eliminating taints proposed by the Buddha is removing them (*āsavā vinodanā*

*pahātabbā*). When the person's mind is covered by defiling thoughts such as ill-will, sensual desire and so forth, his mind is stressed and would not be allow to see things in their proper perspective. Their perception will be biased and thus they would not see the reality. Therefore, one should make effort to understand one's own thought, analyse them and should eliminate the unnecessary things.

Eventually, the Buddha advises on eliminating taints by developing (*āsavā bhāvanā pahātabbā*). Everyone has a hidden potential of mind that could be developed. Having realized this one can cultivate the positive qualities of mind through development of mindfulness. Here, the Buddha has proposed certain qualities of mind that can be cultivated such as the seven factors of enlightenment.

In terms of this *sutta*, valuable guidance is provided regarding the overcoming of stress in different situation in life. Life is a pack of stressors and no one can avoid these conditions. People live with stress from dawn to dusk by facing a host of problems. Favourable foods, clothes, shelter, and medicine are fundamental

needs that should be available to each person in the society. But in the competitive social back ground, consumption has gone up. People seek things according to their social status. They could not be satisfied with what they have and as a result lives have become unsatisfactory. The *Sabbāsava Sutta*, mentions these stressors in terms of *āsava*. According to these instructions one has to maintain mindfulness under every life condition with equanimity and if one becomes incapable of doing this, it is impossible to survive. There are many situations in life with which one should come to terms with and adjust accordingly. If people give priority only to basic needs of life their body mechanism remains balanced without severe stress and they can lead a healthful life.

It is said that 'prevention is better than cure'. Following this Buddhism always instructs people to be aware of core factors in happening in terms of the dependant arising principle. This theory is very useful to comprehend some effects that are harmful to life. This is a hallmark of Buddhism, as well as western counselling theories. Most probably in the Western context, people

seek counselling after becoming victims of problems. But Buddhism cautions people in advance and advises them to take adequate precautions. The *Sabbāsava Sutta* is a typical instance where such counselling is provided.

### Getting rid of Unwholesome Emotions through Understanding

In the *Vitakkasñhāna sutta* of *Majjhimanikāya* the Buddha has paid attention to other techniques to be practiced when dealing with obstructive emotions. When a person contemplates on a certain object, it is natural to direct emotional responses to the situation either with partiality or opposition. In this *sutta* the Buddha instructs how to deal with unwholesome emotions (*pāpakā akusalā vitakkā*) that flow to the mind when contemplating an object (*nimitta*). Those evil thoughts are lust, hatred, and delusion, which produce stresses in the person as well as others. If we want to reduce mental stress, we have to get used to manage our destructive thoughts that flow to the mind using certain techniques given by the Buddha.

The first way of dealing with unwholesome thoughts is by understanding the nature of the object of thought. Having careful observation about the thought object that arises whether it arises as an unwholesome thought connected with desire, with hate, or with delusion he should focus on a different object connected with wholesome thoughts (*taṃhā nimittā aññaṃ nimittaṃ manasikātabbaṃ kusalūpasamhitaṃ*); then arisen unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, or with delusion are abandoned and the mind becomes steadied and concentrated. This is similar to a carpenter removing a coarse peg by means of a fine one.<sup>15</sup>

Even by doing so, if one is unable to remove unwholesome thoughts, one should reflect on the harmful consequences of those thoughts thus: "*these thoughts are unwholesome, they are reprehensible, they result in suffering*"<sup>16</sup> so, when he examines the bad effect of those thoughts in this nature, his mind becomes steady and concentrated by removing unwholesome thoughts just as, a youthful woman or man gives up suddenly the carcass of a snake or a dog or

a human being hung around his or her neck then his mind would turn to wholesome thoughts.

If with this second method too, someone fails to curb the arising of unwholesome emotions, then he should try to forget those thoughts and should not give attention to them. When someone forgets or doesn't pay attention to those unwholesome thoughts, those are abandoned and the mind becomes sharp and concentrated as in, shutting one's eye or looking away one prevents terrible sights coming within one's sphere of vision.

If this also fails to deal effectively with these unwholesome emotions, the Buddha instructs that one should observe the native place of the unwholesome emotions and understand how they operate, as a result of this method one might get rid of these unwholesome thoughts and the mind might become steady and calm just as,

*"A man walking fast might consider why I am walking fast? What if I walk slowly? He would walk slowly; then*

he might consider; why am I walking slowly? What if I stand? And he would stand; then he might consider, why am I standing? What if I sit? And he would sit; the he might consider why am I sitting? What if I lie down and he would lie down. By doing so he would substitute for each grosser posture one that was subtler."<sup>17</sup>

This is how, changing one's posture, someone relaxes and reflects wisely on one's thoughts that produce stress.

If all those methods fail, the Buddha finally proposes, that one should, subdue these disturbing thoughts, then, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth and he should beat down constrain, and crush unwholesome mind with wholesome mind. As a result one can wipe out restrictive thoughts and gain concentration. Throughout this discourse, the Buddha has proposed certain techniques to deal with disturbed thoughts and reduce mental distress.

*Vitakkasanthāṇa Sutta* mainly deals with emotions and has introduced a practical way to put disturbing thoughts back on track. Emotions play a major role in

psychological disorders. Cognitive psychology gives priority to a person's emotional experiences. Aaron T. Beck was the pioneer who gave scientific meaning to the emotions. He says that only the person who actually experiences the emotion, idea, and image can make and report his introspective observations.<sup>18</sup> Specific external events evoke different meanings to different persons. Even for the same experiences, their responses are different as one will feel glad, and sad, and yet others scared, or angry or may have no emotional reaction anymore. In this way, if one experiences excessive anxiety at a stretch one could develop anxiety neurosis.<sup>19</sup> The *Vitakkasanthāṇa Sutta* instructs people regarding ways and means by which one can get rid of these impulsive emotions through close observation of their nature.

### Remove Stress by Repeated Reflection

In the *Ambalatthikārāhulovāda Sutta* the Buddha introduces a method called 'repeated reflection'. Before doing actions physically, verbally, and mentally one should reflect about those actions which one intends, in

terms of their consequences to oneself and others. This is quite important as, many persons become stressful and utterly disappointed with their actions after having done them. But if someone gets used to reflect before doing some actions, he could understand the consequences of his intended action. So this method helps a person to keep away from stress that follows from unwholesome action.

In the *Ambalatthikārāhulovāda Sutta* the Buddha instructs to venerable Rāhula thus:

*“Rāhula, when you wish to do an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action thus: would this action that I wish to do with the body lead to my own affliction or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences with painful result? When you reflect if you know this action that I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results, then you definitely should not do such an action with the body. But when*

*you reflect if you know: this action that I wish to do with the body would not lead to my own affliction or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences with pleasant results, then you may do such an action with the body.”<sup>20</sup>*

The Buddha gives advice to reflect on verbal and mental actions in the same manner. Reflecting on one's own actions is more important to the peaceful life. In the social context, we often observe that people behave in certain ways to satisfy one - self. One may think I am the only person who survives on earth. By cultivating such a egocentric thought he could not extend care and affection for others. The Buddhist perspective understands the nature of our mind that is the foundation upon which we can develop amazing qualities such as boundless love and compassion for all living beings and wisdom that gives insight into realities pertaining to all existence. But firstly we have to train our mind to look at life from a different perspective. Through this training

our hidden mental potentials wake up and then naturally, positive emotions arise. Through this process, one might understand others as equal in wanting happiness and wishing to avoid suffering as oneself does. The *Ambalatthikārāhulovāda Sutta* gives instruction to develop this kind of thought, patterns and that is an essential requirement for healthy living in contemporary society.

### Remove Stress by Changing one's Attitude

The *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta* of *Majjhimanikāya* introduces certain methods to increase mental tolerance by changing one's attitude. It is natural for the ordinary persons that their thinking is governed by the concept of 'I', 'my', 'mine', and deep rooted egocentric thoughts. In this *sutta* the Buddha shows ven. Rāhula, that there is nothing other than the elements such as earth, water, fire, wind, and space in the human body.

*"Rāhula, whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified and clung-to, that is head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-*

*marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, faces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified and clung-to: this is called the internal earth element. Now both the internal earth element and external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it has really come to be with proper wisdom thus: this is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself. When one sees it thus as it really has come to be with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element and make the mind dispassionate towards the earth element.*"<sup>21</sup>

Having cultivated such a concept one might release mental stress that comes through the egocentric thoughts. Though this *sutta* is specially aimed at the *Bhikkhus*, it can be applied even in the context of the layperson's life.

The Buddha says;

*"Rāhula develops meditation that is like unto the earth; for when you develop meditation like unto the earth, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not*

*invade your mind and remain. Just as people throw clean things and dirty things, excrements, urine, spittle, pus, and blood on the earth, and the earth is not horrified, humiliated, and disgusted because of that, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like into the earth, for when you develop meditation like into the earth, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.”<sup>22</sup>*

In the same way, Buddha further instructs to develop meditation just like water because, people wash and clean and dirty things, excrement, urine, and spittle and so on but water does not care, get angry or become disgusted. Likewise when a person cultivates mind, it would remain unruffled. And when a person develops meditation in the same fashion just like, fire, wind, and space elements, his mind becomes steady and his mental capacity would not deteriorate under any circumstance.

The Buddha further advises:

*“Rāhula, develop meditation on loving-kindness; for when you develop meditation on loving-kindness, any ill-will will be abandoned.*

*Rāhula, develop meditation on compassion; for when you develop meditation on compassion, any cruelty will be abandoned.*

*Rāhula, develop meditation on appreciative joy; for when you develop meditation on appreciative joy, any discontent will be abandoned.*

*Rāhula, develop meditation on equanimity; for when you develop meditation on equanimity, any aversion will be abandoned.*

*Rāhula, develop meditation on foulness; for when you develop meditation on foulness, any lust will be abandoned.*

*Rāhula, develop meditation on the perception of impermanence; for when you develop meditation on the perception of impermanence, the conceit ‘I am’ will be abandoned. Rāhula, develop meditation on mindfulness of breathing; when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit”.<sup>23</sup>*

This teaching is very effective and instrumental in cultivating one’s life and in relaxing when exposed to stressful plights.

We all should have the ability to adjust ourselves under any circumstance. There are many stresses around us in various guises. If we can develop our mind to bear

up any condition, we can survive. Naturally ordinary persons' thinking patterns are self-centred. When this 'self' is tarnished, they suffer and get stressful. By understanding vicissitudes of life one can get rid of stresses. The *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta* proposes certain methods to strengthen mental capacity.

Mindfulness is the essence of Buddhist counselling and meditation techniques in practice. It has embraced all Buddhist teachings extensively. The next chapter will discuss it in depth. Here, a brief account on the importance of *ānāpānāsati* as a technique is given. In the *Ānāpānāsati sutta* the Buddha says addressing the community:

*" Bhikkhus, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfil is the four foundation of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated they fulfil the seven enlightenment factors. When the seven enlightenment factors are developed and cultivated, They fulfil true knowledge and deliverance."*<sup>24</sup>

This *sutta* mentions the posture that should be adopted when meditating thus: Having gone to a peaceful place, one should sit cross-legged the body erect, and establish mindfulness in front. Then one mindfully breathes in and breathes out. He has to be aware of his short breath and long breath as respiration proceeds. The respiratory system works automatically, it is a natural phenomenon. The *sutta* instructs people to observe the way it functions. Gradually by considering every aspect of mind, rapture, pleasure, mental formation, and so on, one can observe mind while breathing in and out. Then one understands the nature of mental formations, one realizes the impermanence, fading away, and cessation of these mental conditions. One who has this understanding of mind, will never be subject to stress.

This *sutta* further says that one can develop the four foundations of mindfulness (*cattarosatipaṭṭhāna*) while contemplating on breath. One can cultivate the seven factors of enlightenment (*sattabojjhanga*) and



finally attain deliverance from all mental disturbances (*nibbāna*).

### Remove Stress by Mindfulness of Body

The next *sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* called *Kāyagatāsati sutta* deals with mindfulness of body. It introduces the method by which one can remove physical pains and mental stresses that come due to the body, being mindful of physical postures and by considering its formations. Following the same instructions given in the *Ānāpānasati sutta*, meditation should start with mindfulness of breathing. Then he needs to proceed to mindfulness of bodily postures thus: "Again, *bhikkhus*, when walking, a *bhikkhu* understands; 'I am walking' when standing, he understands; 'I am standing: when sitting, he understands: 'I am sitting' when lying down, he understands; 'I am laying down' or he understands according to whatever way his body is disposed. As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned...that too is how a *bhikkhu* develops mindfulness of the body" <sup>25</sup>

In the next stage, he has to be aware of all his bodily activities such as going forward and returning, and looking here and there, flexing and extending his limbs; and wearing robes, eating, drinking and others. Again, he has to scan his body including external and internal physical parts from the top of the head hair, and down to the soles of the feet. And again he has to reflect on the initial substances of the body such as elements. Then, he has to reflect on decomposition of a corpse in gradual stages. Finally he has to develop *Jhānas* by withdrawing himself from sensual pleasure.

By contemplating on body, in this manner, one has to be aware of bodily behaviour and the true nature of the impermanent body. By having this kind of understanding one can remove physical and mental pains.

### Remove Stress by Awareness:

The *Indriyabhāvanā Sutta*, teaches, another technique to perceive external objects through the sense faculties without being stressful. Here it is clearly mentioned, that this does not happen merely by not

seeing forms with the eye or not hearing sounds with the ear and so on. If it is so, blind or deaf men may be most restrained persons. Being aware of the nature of one's thought patterns one can understand arising and cessation of thoughts of mind.

The Buddha says;

*"When a bhikkhu sees a form with the eye, there arises in him what is agreeable, there arises what is disagreeable, there arises both agreeable and disagreeable. He understands thus: there has arisen in me what is agreeable, there has arisen what is disagreeable, and there has arisen what is both agreeable and disagreeable. But that is conditioned, gross, dependently arisen; this is peaceful, this is sublime, that is equanimity. the agreeable feeling that arose, the disagreeable feeling that arose, and both agreeable and disagreeable feeling that arose cease in him and equanimity is established. Just as a man with good sight, having opened his eyes might shut them or having shut his eyes might open them, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable that arose, the disagreeable that arose and both agreeable and*

*disagreeable that arose cease just as quickly, just as rapidly, just as easily, and equanimity is established."*<sup>26</sup>

Through this manner, one can develop restraint within one's own eye and eye-consciousness being fully aware of its function. In the same way one has to restrain other faculties such as ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

In terms of these methods it can recognize, Buddhism has used diverse techniques to reduce stress and develop healthy personality of the person. Buddhism recognizes each individual as a psycho-physical entity. Mental health is as important as physical health. Although Buddhism views the mind and body as interdependent, its teaching gives special attention to the mind and its power. The source of one's life and hence of one's happiness or unhappiness lies within one's power. No one can harm one except oneself. It is the kind of thought one entertains that improves one's physical well-being or weakens it, and also ennobles or degrades. This is the reason why Buddhism designates thought as the cause of both physical and verbal actions having karmic results.

Buddhism considers mental health as of utmost importance and the training of the mind to attain the highest stage of health as its sole concern. This preoccupation with mental health is also regarded as the true vocation of Buddhist monks.

### End Notes

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