



Meditation Centers : Developing a Model of Meditation Practice In Four places in the Northeastern Region

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษา 1) ประวัติความเป็นมาการปฏิบัติกรรมฐานสำนักปฏิบัติธรรมภาคอีสาน 2) สภาพปัจจุบัน และปัญหาของการปฏิบัติกรรมฐานสำนักปฏิบัติธรรมภาคอีสาน 3) กระบวนการพัฒนารูปแบบการปฏิบัติกรรมฐานสำนักปฏิบัติธรรมภาคอีสาน เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยผู้วิจัยทำการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลในเชิงลึก ด้วยการสำรวจ การสังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วม และการสังเกตแบบไม่มีส่วนร่วม การสัมภาษณ์แบบมีโครงสร้างและไม่มีโครงสร้าง การสนทนากลุ่ม และการเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนาม โดยเลือกพื้นที่ทำการวิจัยแบบเจาะจง ซึ่งเก็บข้อมูลจากสำนักปฏิบัติธรรมทั้ง 4 สำนัก 1) สำนักปฏิบัติธรรมศูนย์ปฏิบัติธรรมสวนเวชุวนัน จังหวัดขอนแก่น 2) สำนักปฏิบัติธรรมวัดเร่าวัณ (วัดป่าสุกุโต) จังหวัดชัยภูมิ 3) สำนักปฏิบัติธรรมวัดนาหลวง (วัดอภิญญาเทสิตธรรม) จังหวัดอุดรธานี 4) สำนักปฏิบัติธรรมวัดหนองป่าพง จังหวัดอุบลราชธานี

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) สำนักปฏิบัติธรรมปฏิบัติกรรมฐานในภาคอีสานสร้างขึ้นตามความประสงค์ของพระสงฆ์สายวิปัสสนากรรมฐาน เพื่อเป็นศูนย์ปฏิบัติธรรมและเป็นที่ฝึกปฏิบัติวิปัสสนากรรมฐานให้เป็นของส่วนรวม 2) สำนักปฏิบัติธรรม มีอาคารสถานที่ บรรยายการร่วมรื่น เงียบสงบ มีพระวิปัสสนาจารย์ที่มีความรู้ และเทคนิคในการสอนปฏิบัติธรรม รูปแบบในการปฏิบัติกรรมฐานคือ แบบยุบหนอพองหนอ แบบเคลื่อนไหว แบบภาวนาพุทธ และแบบอานาปานสติ สภาพโดยทั่วไป ในฤดูร้อนสำนักปฏิบัติธรรมมีอากาศร้อนและแห้งแล้ง ฤดูหนาว อากาศหนาวเย็น ฤดูฝนมีiyung และแมลงชักชุ่ม พระวิปัสสนาจารย์บางรูปมีประสบการณ์ในเทคนิคการสอนไม่หลากหลาย 3) รูปแบบ การพัฒนาการปฏิบัติกรรมฐานของสำนักปฏิบัติธรรมในภาคอีสานควรรับปัจจุบันสถานที่ให้อาภัยถ่ายเทส่วนตัว จัดโครงสร้างการอบรม แก่พระวิทยากร พระวิปัสสนา ฝึกอบรมการปฏิบัติกรรมฐานเป็นรายบุคคล และควรปรับปรุงระยะเวลาจัดกิจกรรมให้มีความเหมาะสม

คำสำคัญ : สำนักปฏิบัติธรรม / การปฏิบัติกรรมฐาน / รูปแบบ / วิปัสสนาจารย์

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to investigate: 1) the history of meditation practice of the Dhamma practice retreats in the Northeast, 2) the current state and problem of meditation practice of the Dhamma practice retreats in the Northeast, and 3) the process of developing a meditation practice model of the Dhamma practice retreats in the Northeast. The type of study was qualitative research. The researcher collected in-depth information by survey, participatory observation and non-participatory observation, structured interview and un-structured interview, focus group discussion and field data collection. The areas of study selected by purposive sampling from which the data were collected consisted of 4 Dhamma practice retreats: 1) the Dhamma practice retreat in the Garden Weluwan Dhamma Practice Center, Khon Kaen province, 2) the Dhamma practice retreat in the Erawan Temple (Wat Sukhato), Chaiyaphum province, 3) the Dhamma Practice Retreat, Wat Na Luang (Wat Apinyathesitdham), Udon Thani province, and 4) the Dhamma Preactice Retreat, Wat Nong Pa Phong, Ubon Ratchathani province.

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The findings of study disclosed as follows: 1. The Dhamma and meditation practice retreats in the Northeast were built by the will of insight meditation monks as centers for Dhamma practice and places of Vipassana insight meditation practice for the people at large. 2. The Dhamma practice retreats included buildings and facilities, calm and peaceful atmosphere, monk-teachers of Vipassana who had the knowledge and techniques of teaching Dhamma practice. The model for meditation practice was 'falling' and 'rising' following the out-breath and in-breath respectively, 'movement', mindfulness on breathing in and out with the praying words of 'Bud' and 'dho' repeatedly, and Anapanasati practice. The generality was found that the weather in the Dhamma practice retreats was hot and dry in summer. It was cold in the winter. In the rainy season, mosquitoes and insects abounded. Some monk-teachers had no diverse experience of teaching techniques. 3) The model of developing meditation practice of the Dhamma practice retreats in the Northeast should be as follows: buildings and facilities should be improved to be airy; monk-lecturers and meditation practicing monks should be provided with a project of training. The practice of meditation should be practiced individually and the duration of activity should be appropriately improved.

Keywords : Dhamma Practice in the Retreat / Meditation Practice / Model / Teacher of Meditation Practice

Introduction

Meditation center/Institute Meditation is the center disseminating Buddhism Dhamma principles to people. Sponsored by the monks under Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand, it was established in the temples which are fully equipped in terms of places, buildings, training monks and management. It was founded to support the Buddhists who are interested in studying Dhamma principles by practicing meditation. The center disseminates Buddhist principles by focusing on Trai Sikkha, which refers to precept, concentration and wisdom. These are the basic steps of studying and practicing Dhamma principles in the Buddhism. According to Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand, to meet the same standard, training people to practice meditation in the meditation centers should be conducted in accordance with Pali Tipitaka stating about 'The Discourse of Four Foundations of Mindfulness'. The training is to focus on Satipatthana 4 (4 contemplations of mind-objects of the foundation of mindfulness). It consists of Tranquil Meditation (Samatha) and Insight Meditation (Vipassana). The training monks can be specialized in teaching Tranquil Meditation or Insight Meditation. However,

each meditation center has different models and methods of teaching meditation practices leading one's mind to tranquil or insight. These models and methods were inherited from their teachers, which can be different in terms of ways of practice. There are many ways of practice including Samatha (focusing on tranquility to develop concentration on one object to help calm mind), Vipassana (focusing on insight to develop self-understanding through mindfulness training) and the way which combines Samatha with Vipassana. Therefore, in Thailand there are many ways of practicing meditation. Some focus on tranquility, while others focus on insight. However, we can conclude five major ways of practicing meditation including (1) Buddho Meditation, (2) Samma Arahang Meditation, (3) Rising and Falling Meditation (4) Anapanasati Meditation and (5) Body-Mind Meditation. Each Meditation center provides different Dhamma training courses for people. The courses can be short-term (3 days), mid-term (5 days) and long-term (more than 8 days and 7 nights). Some also offer courses for children focusing on developing morality through the Five Precepts and the Five Ennobling Virtues, Dhamma principles for daily use, basic Dhamma principles,asic meditation training and encouraging wisdom suitable



for the world's current situation (Concordia Welfare and Education, Buddhism Department, Thailand's National Office of Buddhism. 2011)

Most of the meditation centers are landscaped to encourage people to study and practice meditation. To illustrate, the places are landscaped to be clean, quiet, shady, close to nature and perfect for studying and practicing meditation. It can be educational garden consisting of exhibition boards to promote knowledge and wisdom. Based on safety and suitability, the buildings can be divided into meditation area and recreational area. The centers are fully equipped with clean restrooms, necessary facilities and personnel such as monks and novices who stay in the meditation centers. Those personnel have observance of precepts and practice their duties in according with the code of monastic disciplines which make them look venerable and respectable. They also have calm gesture, which makes them respectable among the surrounding people. Most of the training monks who are in charge of the meditation centers have techniques and ways of teaching to motivate practicing meditation. They also have approachable personality. They can solve mental problems and be a supporter of the meditators.

There are currently 1,510 meditation centers registered with the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand nationwide. 121 centers are located in the North. 106 centers are located in the South. There are 736 and 497 centers in the northeastern and central region respectively. The centers are located in all provinces as requested by the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand. (National Office of Buddhism. 2014). Problems are caused by insufficient collaboration among the meditation centers. Each meditation center is operated under its own framework, causing lack of unity, lack of follow-up and evaluation, lack of knowledge encouragement, lack of personnel, lack of management, lack of budget, inconsistency and unclear activities. These problems are resulted from the absence of organization which is directly responsible for the matter. Most of the meditation

centers do not have personnel which are knowledgeable and experienced enough for meditation. They are sometimes not skillful enough to be a trainer. There are also other obstacles, causing un conformity among the meditation centers in terms of their operation, role, duty and purpose.

Consequently, the researcher, as a monk who is experienced in training medication to the people, is therefore interested in importance and necessity of developing meditation practice along with management of meditation center in the northeastern region of Thailand to meet the same standard and be effective and updated with the modern society. This is to develop and refine people's mind to be aware of values of meditation. They can develop not only themselves but also the nation to remain sustainably in peace.

Objectives

1. To study history and background of meditation at meditation centers in the northeastern region of Thailand.
2. To study current situation and problems of meditation practice at the meditation centers in the northeastern region of Thailand.
3. To study model of meditation practice at the meditation centers in the northeastern region of Thailand.

Research Methodology

Population and Participants

1. The population in this study was Buddhist monks and the people joining meditation course in four meditation centers.
2. Sampling in this study, the researcher applied purposive sampling method to choose the population. they were the Buddhist monks and people joining meditation course. It can be divided into three groups: 1)specialist group 2)practical group and 3)general people. The total was 144.



Research Instruments

1. Survey-Basic survey was conducted in the context area of sample meditation centers in 4 places: 1)The Dharma Meditation Weluwan, Temple, Khon Kaen Province. 2)The Dharma Meditation Erawan Temple, Chaiyaphum Province 3)The Dharma Meditation Wat Na Luang, Udon Thani Provine 4)agency practice Wat Nong Pah Pong, Ubon Ratchathani Province in terms of physical environment, geography, society and well-being. To study history and background of meditation at meditation centers in the northeastern region of Thailand.

2. Observation - Observation includes participant observation and non-participant observation. General surroundings, mediators and people related to meditation centers were observed

3. Interview - Interview includes structured interview and no-structured interview. Key informant interview including mediators and people related to meditation centers were interviewed. To study current situation and problems of meditation practice at the meditation centers in the northeastern region of Thailand.

4. Focus Group Discussion-Focus group which consists of 7 people discussed to find conclusion for meditation centers in order to develop meditation practice model in the north - eastern region of Thailand. To study model of meditation practice at the meditation centers in the northeastern region of Thailand.

Data Collection

The researcher used the following methods to accumulate data: survey, observation, interview and focus group discussion. The fieldwork data collection was also used. Details are discussed as follow :

1. The researcher conducted a basic survey in the research area in terms of physical surroundings, geography, society and well-being. The data was written down and pictured.

2. Observation

2.1 Participant Observation - The researcher participated in the meditation training. The researcher

observed the people related with the meditation centers and meditation students.

2.2 Non-participant Observation - The researcher did not participate in the meditation training. The researcher distantly observed the people related with the meditation centers and meditation students.

3. Interview

Structured and Non-structured Interview were applied to interview people practicing Dhamma and related people in Dhamma retreat place. 144 people consisted of 40 key informants, 80 casual informants and 24 general informants.

4. Focus Group Discussion-Focus group which consists of 7 people discussed to find conclusion for meditation centers in order to develop meditation practice model in the northeastern region of Thailand.

Checking Quality of tools Survey, Observation and interview were given to 3 experts to consider suitability of content objectives and language. Rectified models according to experts were used to collect data from sample group.

Data Analysis

The researcher used information from papers, related researches and data collected from fieldwork throughout the research period. The information was later classified, categorized in accordance with the research's purpose, and verified whether it is credible and complete. Triangulation was used to analyze the information. If any parts of information were missing, the researcher would check and retrieve the missing information. All the information was lastly analyzed and concluded. It was arranged to meet the objectives of the research and presented by descriptive analysis along with illustrations.

The researcher analyzed the data in accordance with the objectives of the research by using concepts and theories as guidelines to data analysis. The results were explained to meet the objectives of the research. The data was later concluded and discussed by using descriptive analysis.



Results and Discussion

1. History and Background of Meditation Practice at the Meditation centers in the North-eastern Region

Meditation centers in the northeastern region of Thailand were founded by a founder to make Vipassana meditation accessible to the public. Contributing good deeds to the society, the founder also meant to show his/her appreciation to the benefactors and benefactresses. The purposes of the centers are to help people end sufferings, solve people's life problems, relieve politics situation, allow the participants to be among things favorable for mental development (Sappaya) and benefit from the surroundings including people, land, river, forest and air which is less polluted. The centers allow people, wildlife, forests, rivers and lands to share areas together peacefully. The meditation centers aim to train the monks to achieve the highest goal of Buddhism which is Nirvana. They also aim to train the laymen and laywomen to truly understand Dhamma principles, aspire to create world's peace, be in pursuit of ways to end sufferings, and share the insight to others to be beneficial to their living. This is corresponded with the research of Phramaha Pramote Phapan (2011) He conducted a research titled 'Meditation Centers: Management Model on Moral Promotion for Buddhists in Lower Northeastern Region of Thailand'. The research shows that meditation centers are the place to train and practice meditation for laymen and laywomen. They also provide training for disciples who preferred Austere practice.

2. Current Situation and Problems of Meditation Practice at the Meditation centers in the Northeastern Region

Nowadays the meditation centers are fully equipped with resourceful surroundings including trees and flowers. They are shady, quiet and suitable for practicing meditation. They also have food available for those participating in meditation practice, primary places or buildings such as Vihara, Ubosot, meditation pavilion, meditation garden, monk's residence, nun's

residence, almshouse, kitchen, cafeteria and accommodation building for meditators. This is corresponded with the research of Phrakhrusrisutakorn (Apichat Apiyano) (2011). He conducted a research titled The satisfaction of peoples to the Dhammapractice on the weekend : A case study of WatKlang Bang Phra Nakhonchaisri District, Nakhon Pathom Province. The research shows that the meditation centers were well prepared for arranging meditation practice to the meditators. The temple was serene, quiet and shady. The meditation place and accommodation were proportionally divided into zone. This is corresponded with the research of Phra Prasertsak Rattanayano(Tantichula)(2011) stating that good meditation centers were the place to perform religious routine, pray, meditate, meditating walk, perform religious rites, hold training, hold academic meeting, educate arts and culture, and exhibit Dhamma riddles, which featured Buddhist doctrine for moral teaching. They were very useful for disseminating Buddhism. Dhamma square or Bodhi tree square was neat, clean, beautiful and naturally shady. It was a perfect place for meditation practice.

The meditation centers consist of monks, Vipassana training monks and official monks who are knowledgeable and experienced in teaching Dhamma practices, providing information and guiding the meditator. This is corresponded with the research of Phra Prasertsak Rattanayano (Tantichula) (2011) titled 'Study on Buddhism Dissemination of the 1st Provincial Khonkaen Meditation Centers'. Vissapana training monks beautifully practiced their routines, making them venerable and respectable, especially the abbot, who was the good example. They were skillful in teaching, giving recommendation for practice, detail elaborating and providing various teaching techniques. They were also able to use modern teaching media to illustrate their teaching. They behaved appropriately. They were approachable and not arrogant, making the training atmosphere enjoyable.

The meditation practice are guided in line with Satipatthana 4 (4 contemplations of mind-objects of the foundation of mindfulness), including body, feelings,



mind and Dhamma. It can be performed in different postures including standing, walking, sitting and lying down. There are many ways of practicing meditation such as Walking Mediation in accordance with Threefold Learning (Traisikkha) or the Thirteen Austere Practices (Thudongka), Recitation of the Mantra “Buddho” Meditation, Rising and Falling Meditation, meditation in accordance with philosophy doctrine and meditation focusing on physical development, moral development, emotional development and wisdom development. (Dhammasavana Sappaya : Favorable Speech). This is corresponded with the research of Phra Samai Somyo (Buengsai) (2011). He conducted a research titled ‘Results of Developing Awareness Mindfulness to Improve Quality of Lives of Meditators at Wat Mokkavanaram Meditation Center, Muang District, Khonkaen Province’. The research shows that the method to develop awareness-mindfulness taught at the Wat Mokkavanaram Meditation Center was the same method of Luangpor Teean Jittasubho. The meditation practice was based on Satipatthana 4 (4 contemplations of mind-objects of the foundation of mindfulness), including body, feelings, mind and Dhamma. He emphasized on body – posture as a reference for mindfulness foundation. (Kayanupassana Satipatthana). The mindfulness relied on postures and movement including walking, standing, sitting and lying down. The method to develop awareness-mindfulness in accordance with Satipatthana 4 taught at the Wat Mokkavanaram Meditation Center, Baan Ped Sub-district, Muang District, Khonkaen Province showed positive results. The 4 movement of postures allowed the mediators to be continuously aware. This is corresponded with the research of Phra Prasertsak Rattanayano (Tantichula) (2011) titled ‘Study on Buddhism Dissemination of the 1st Provincial Khonkaen Meditation Center’. The research shows that the meditation center arranged Dhamma practice, which had theory related to meditation practicing. The teaching consisted of principles and primary steps to ‘meditating’ in accordance with Satipatthana 4. It also educated about relations between precepts, concentration

and wisdom and obstacles of Dhamma practice.

The most common problems at meditation centers are hot and dry weather in summer, cold weather in winter, crowded with insects and mosquitoes in rainy season. Neither the food provided nor drinking water, which comes from rain, is hygienic. Some of the meditation pavilions, accommodation buildings, monk’s residences, nun’s residences are in bad condition and deteriorating. There are not enough restrooms and cafeterias. This is corresponded with the research of Phra Prasertsak Rattanayano (Tantichula) (2011) titled ‘Study on Buddhism Dissemination of the 1st Provincial Khonkaen Meditation Center’. The research shows that the 1st Provincial Khonkaen Meditation Center had limited space, which was unable to accommodate a number of meditators. The temple was located in the heart of the city. It was easily disturbed by outside noise.

Moreover, the meditators usually do not follow the rules. They are lazy to practice meditation and lack of patience. Some of the Vipassana training monks are not knowledgeable enough. They are lack of teaching techniques. Even worse, there are a few criminals disguising themselves among the meditators, trying to steal belongings of meditators and meditation centers. The meditation centers do not have officials in charge of checking background of the participants. Some of the monks do not talk nicely to the meditators. Some of the monks come from poor family and are not well educated. They are not experienced in demonstrating Dhamma and lack of skills to explain Dhamma principles. Some of them do not truly understand the principles. Activities such as Dhamma talks are limited. There are complicated steps of meditation practice. This is corresponded with research of Phra Nachat Chaochamchuen (2013) titled ‘Developing Monks for Training and Buddhism Disseminating at Wat Payothaprasit Meditation Center, Muang District, Surin Province’. The research shows that training monks in charge of disseminating Buddhism were still lack of knowledge and understandings to hold activities to promote morality and Buddhism. This is also



corresponded with the research of Phra Prasertsak Rattanayano (Tantichula) (2011). It shows that the number of personnel responsible for disseminating Buddhism was limited. Consequently, the work performance was poor. They were unable to accommodate a number of meditators. Most personnel were lack of foreign language skills. They were unable to communicate with foreign meditators. This limited their ability to fully and effectively promote Buddhism.

3. Developing Model of Meditation Practice at the Meditation centers in the Northeastern Region

Meditation centers may adopt different ways of meditation practices. 1)The practice based on Satipatthana 4 by focusing on postures including standing, walking, sitting and lying down 2)The practice based on Satipatthana 4 by focusing on rhythm or movement, which makes mediator be aware of his/her current emotion 3)The practice based on different characters of meditators 4)The practice based on principles to observe one's mind.

Meditation practices of each meditation center are directed to the same goal which is Bodhipakkhiya Dhamma. It is used to refer to 7 sets of Enlightenment requisites. There are a total thirty-seven individual qualities, including 1)Satipatthana 4: the four foundations of mindfulness 2)Sammappadhana 4: the four right exertions 3)Iddhipada 4: the four roads to power 4)Indriya 5: the five controlling faculties 5)Bala 5: the five mental powers 6)Bojjhang 7: the seven factors of Enlightenment and 7)Magganga 8: the noble eightfold path. These are so called because they form part of Enlightenment or awakening, which leads to Nirvana. Each meditation center states its own regulations clearly. There are clear instructions for meditators to follow. This is corresponded with the research of Phramaha Pramote Phapan (2011). His research titled 'Meditation Centers: Management Model on Moral Promotion for Buddhists in Lower Northeastern Region of Thailand' shows that the following improvements are needed :

1) Abbots should have 3 prepared educations of Pariyati (study of the scriptures), Patipati (practice) and Pativet (insight). They should be able to make themselves respectable and venerable among the surrounding people. They also should be able to excellently teach Dhamma principles. 2)Budgeting - Budget should be managed in form of a committee. Account management is needed. There should be lay minister, who is in charge of the budget. Operation should be done with transparency and traceability. Budget annual report is also needed. 3)Personnel Action plans for human resources are needed. Training to promote their Sappurisa Dhamma 7 (the 7 qualities of a good man) including Srattha (faith), Hiri (moral shame), Otappa (moral fear), Bhahu Sutra (having great knowledge), Wiriya (endeavor), Sati (awareness) and Punya (wisdom) is essential. They should be always ready to practice Dhamma. 4)Safety - All centers should have safety in properties, health and meditation practice. 5)Hygiene - It should conform to principle of Sappaya 4 (4 suitable conditions) as Arwasa Sappaya (suitable place), Arhara Sappaya (suitable food), Pukala Sappaya (suitable person) and Dhamma Sappaya (suitable principle). 6)Activity - All activities should meet requirements of all ages and genders with good procedures, responsible persons, interestedness, diversity and flexibility; 7)Regulation - It should not be over strict and could be flexible for practicing. 8)Community coordination Communities should be invited in activities and given with correct information. 9)Public relations - It should be continually planned for promoting and creating good attitudes on practicing. Promoting good relations between the centers and society and community is also important. 10)Course - There should be three courses available including the course for monks and novices, which focuses on Threefold Learning (Traisikkha), the course for laymen and laywomen and the course for youths. The last two courses should focus on Threefold Learning (Traisikkha), life skills and solutions to life problems.



To promote awareness and concentration for meditators who practice meditation, the meditation centers built the meditation places to be closest to nature. The monks must be well educated in terms of Pariyati (study of the scriptures), Patipati (practice) and Pativet (insight). The blessed ones keep to the good way, united way, straight way, and true way. They are honest to Buddhism and other monks. They act to promote knowledge and the eight individuals (Magganga 8) The blessed ones are worthy of respects

(Four foundations of mindfulness) viz., the body (kaya), the feelings (vedana), states of consciousness (citta), and Dhamma in different gestures e.g., standing, walking, sitting, and sleeping. The one who practices meditation frequently has good consciousness and concentration. This results on recovery of some diseases and create immunity in body. It helps to build calm and peaceful moods, good health. It helps to create strength to face different situations with calm mind and live a happy life in society.

Conclusion

Dhamma retreat places in Isan region was built by the commitment of the founder in order to be place to practice Vippasana Meditation as a whole. It is to hand over the worthy things to the community, compensating gratitude and help people to be delivered from suffering. The environment around Dhamma retreat places is abounded by trees and flowers which create calm and peaceful environment. This environment is suitable for practicing Dhamma. The way of practicing meditation in this retreat places is the way of Satipatthana 4

Suggestions

National Office of Buddhism should apply the results of the research in supporting meditation in every temples and educational institutes. Results should be applied to promote students in practicing meditation to create concentration. As for using the Isan way of practicing meditation, one should consider context differences of place and environment. The way might be suitable for some place or region only but it can be used as a role model in practicing meditation

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