

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Meditation is a technique which helps the practitioners to focus their mind better. The origin of meditation could date back to a time before recorded history. Archaeologists revealed that the practice may have existed since the first Indian civilizations.

From its beginning, meditation has developed in various traditions, many of them have been known and practiced for thousands of years. Because of its great benefits, these meditation techniques have been passed from generation to generation and have never gone out of fashion. Yoga, Kundalini, and Transcendental from Hinduism; Sufi from Islam; Zen, Samatha, Vipassana, and Satipatthana from Buddhism are some good examples. In other beliefs such as Judaism, Christianity, and Jainism, even not so widely practiced, we could also find other forms of meditation. Some of them are common to several religions, and some occur outside religious contexts. This shows that meditation is not the practice limited to only a few religions, yet it is a practice that can benefit millions of people of different nationalities and religious beliefs worldwide.

An article in Time magazine (The Science of Meditation, 2003) stated that millions of people in the United States of America are meditating regularly, double the number of ten years ago. Many places in America have become a meditation house. Students meditate every morning before class starts. People from various occupations practice it. Many doctors recommend their patients to meditate and many scientists study about meditation. These people believe that meditation brings them endless benefits. It is obvious that more and more people meditate for relief of stress or health reasons. Research shows that meditation is the only activity that could reduce blood lactate, a mark of stress and anxiety. Meditation also helps reduce the stress hormone Cortisol while increases the calming hormones melatonin and serotonin. Moreover, it

has been proven scientifically that meditating people recover from illnesses faster despite lower medication.

There are also endless benefits that attract people to meditate. For some, meditation means a sanctuary. Most meditate in order to improve their spiritual quality and personality as well as potential for study, sporting performance, and decision taking. Over this, there are some who meditate with a deeper level to discover themselves spiritually.

With regards to the researcher's personal interest and eleven years of meditation practice, the researcher has found that meditation has benefited her in many ways. Not only does meditation help relieve stress, it also helps her to stay calm and focused when dealing with difficult situations. Moreover, meditation has improved professional life as well as personal life, such as the relationship with family members.

There are numerous meditation practices with different traditions throughout the world; some are religion-related, and some are not. As Thailand is the center of Buddhism and meditation, a number of meditation monasteries can be found in Thailand. More and more people from around the world travel to Thailand to study about this self-discovery technique. One of the reputable meditation retreat centers in Thailand is 'The Middle Way', an English-spoken meditation retreat program. The Middle Way provides meditation courses using a tradition which it claims not against any religion beliefs. The results of this study could help reveal the reasons for its success, as well as the keys to attract more foreigners to come practice meditation in Thailand.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.2.1 Main Problem

- What are the factors influencing foreigners' decisions to join the English-spoken meditation course at The Middle Way?

1.2.1 Sub Problems

- What personal factors are related to their decision?
- What are the expectations of the foreigners who join the course?
- What degree of satisfaction do they have after joining the course?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1.3.1 Main objective

- To identify the factors which attract foreigners to join an English-spoken meditation course at The Middle Way.

1.3.2 Sub objectives

- To find out the personal factors which are related to their decision.
- To measure their satisfaction with the course.
- To gather their opinions and suggestions to help improve the program.

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Foreigner means non-Thai nationality people, either residing in Thailand or in other countries.

Meditation course means a short period retreat class that is organized at a proper place. The activities will focus on mind training practice according to the course tradition.

Atmosphere of the site refers to the physical surroundings of the place such as scenery and weather.

Costs & Fees include admission fee and transportation cost to join the course at the site of The Middle Way.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to identify the factors which attract foreigners to join the meditation courses at The Middle Way. The subjects who participated in this research were 50 foreigners who had joined the course voluntarily, not forced by other people or an employer.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are numbers of international meditation courses worldwide and in Thailand. This study would help state the reasons why foreigners choose to join The Middle Way. Moreover, it could find out about foreigners' expectations, satisfaction, opinions, and suggestions, which could be very helpful for the program.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction including general background of the study, statement of problem, objectives of the study, definitions of terms, scope of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter two is a review of related literature. Chapter three consists of the methodology, subjects, materials, procedures, and data analysis. In chapter four, the results are analyzed and interpreted. Finally, the last chapter will provide a summary of the study, a summary of the findings, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.