

# Buddhism and the Menopause

Claire O'Brien

---

MUD  
PIE

---

## Prologue

### Awakening

**M**Y MORNING FACE is one of my better looks. I have a window of about an hour before those unrelenting twins, Gravity and Multi-tasking, take hold of my day and my features. During this reprieve, my lips are plump and red, my skin has an even tone and my hair is tousled. By the time I have finished my muesli, exchanged bulletin points of the coming day with my husband, emptied the dishwasher, filled it again, carried the laundry downstairs and fed it to the washing machine, then made coffee, made phone calls, made the house a little tidier and moved upstairs to start work, I am middle-aged. I dab concealer under my eyes just in case someone comes to the door and I can't possibly face my computer without a lick of mascara. By midday I need a power nap.

Just like most people in their fifties, I am older and slower, more easily tired and less sexy than the younger me. That was the woman who ran or cycled

*Claire O'Brien*

from A to B to Z all day and crammed real life into short weekends. These days, I am stopped in my tracks at unpredictable moments by shadowy waves of nausea, followed by inconvenient and copious sweating. I am often suddenly bewildered, unable to remember why I came into the room. 'What did I come in here for?' is my new middle name. I have lumpy knuckles and a creaking hip and last year my gall bladder had to be removed; for five long months I was housebound with pain, then with lost confidence. Oh, and did I mention the bout of shingles?

After the gall-bladder operation there were mornings when I couldn't venture out even if I found the courage because I didn't dare stray far from a bathroom. More than once, I wondered if I was sliding into my grave and would be found, propped against the kitchen sink, still clutching a mug of cold tea. At the funeral my husband would say, 'She died staring out at the overgrown garden, unable to reach it.'

All these effects, including the gall bladder problems, shingles and morbid thoughts about premature death, are the tangible result of decreasing hormone levels. The chemical tides that once turned on a monthly basis, lashing me to woman's most primitive biological purpose, have ebbed. They slipped out silently and without warning, wreaking mental and biological havoc on their way.

## *Buddhism and the Menopause*

I have other issues as well as the symptoms of menopause. Who doesn't? My budget has always been tight. I have burned out of two careers and, after nearly thirty years of writing and ten books published, I still don't make a living from my pen. Looking in from the outside, the world might conclude that my life is a wash-up. So how come, underneath all this turbulence and disappointment, I am filled with joy and gratitude every day? How come I am completely, profoundly happy? Even when I'm depressed I'm a happy depressive. That may sound like an oxymoron but this book will explain how we can occupy many seemingly contradictory states whilst maintaining a positive outlook as our default setting. My aim is to encourage every woman to believe that deep-rooted happiness can be hers, no matter what is going on in her menopausal life.

Buddhist practice may not rid women of all the physical effects of the menopause but it can help us to regard our symptoms in a different light and ensure that they do not prevent us from moving forward spiritually.

Most books and blogs written to help us deal with life's ups and downs divide the business of being human into neat and easily marketable subject areas. We can find guides to birth and parenting, for example, to work and career, sex, money,

physical fitness, emotional well-being, retirement and bereavement. If life is a fabric then these guides are the vertical threads, the warp, of that fabric. Instead of vertically separating this book into topics I have woven it from the horizontal strands, the weft of life, which connects and binds all those 'subject areas'. Menopause is not an 'aspect' of life but a phase of profound change that has implications for the whole of our physical, mental and spiritual self.

When we hit this phase, the way we view ourselves and our place and purpose in the world changes. To endure the tough days and come through them happier and stronger we need an approach that treats us as an interconnected whole. A strong Buddhist practice will find its way to any area that needs 'repair'. It is a toolkit for happiness in every part and phase of life. There is no corner of our physical or emotional self that it cannot reach. If Buddhist practice were a household cleaning product or an engine oil it would be a bestseller.