

The Buddha's Teaching of Meditation

The Buddha's teaching of meditation aims at producing a state of perfect mental health, equilibrium, and tranquillity. In reality, the word 'meditation' is a poor substitute for the original term *bhavana*, which means 'culture' or 'development', that is, mental culture or mental development.

It aims at *cleansing* the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as lustful desires, hatred, ill-will, indolence, worries and restlessness, and sceptical doubts.

It aims at *cultivating* such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will, energy, the analytical faculty, confidence, joy, tranquillity – leading finally to the attainment of highest wisdom which sees the nature of things as they are, and realizes the Ultimate Truth, Nirvana (Rahula, 67-68).

Samatha (tranquility meditation)

Samatha or *samadhi* is the development of mental concentration, of one-pointedness of mind, by various methods prescribed in the texts (Rahula, 68).

Anapanasati (effective in the development of calm and concentration) –
Mindfulness of Breathing

- Count exhalations in cycles of 10.
 - Count inhalations in cycles of 10.
 - Focus on the breath without counting.
 - Focus only on the spot where the breath enters and leaves the nostrils (that is, the nostril and upper lip area).
- (Source: Loosely based on the *Visuddhimagga*)

Brahma-viharas (sublime abode practices)

Loving-kindness Meditation – extending unlimited, universal love and goodwill (*metta*) to all living beings, without discrimination (Rahula, 75).

Compassion Meditation – aware of the suffering of others and having compassion (*karuna*) for all living beings in trouble or affliction (Rahula, 75).

Appreciative Joy Meditation – having sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and rejoicing and sharing in others' success, welfare, and happiness (Rahula, 75).

Equanimity Meditation – recognizing our commonality with others and having equanimity (*upekkha*) in all vicissitudes of life (Rahula, 75).

Vipassana (insight meditation)

Vipassana – insight into the nature of things – leads to the complete liberation of the mind, to the realization of the ultimate truth, Nirvana. This is essentially Buddhist 'meditation'. It is an *analytical* method based on mindfulness, awareness, vigilance, and observation (Rahula, 68-69). It means developing a complete understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* (impermanence, suffering, not-self).

Satipatthāna-sutta ('The Setting-up of Mindfulness') – this is the most important discourse ever given by the Buddha on mental development ('meditation'). The ways of 'meditation' given in this discourse are not cut off from life, nor do they avoid life. They are all connected with our life, our daily activities, our sorrows and joys, our words and thoughts, our moral and intellectual occupations. There are *four main sections*: (1) our body (*kaya*); (2) our feelings and sensations (*vedana*); (3) the mind (*citta*); and (4) various moral and intellectual subjects (*dhamma*). In all of these, the essential thing is mindfulness or awareness (*sati*), attention or observation (*anupassana*) (Rahula, 68-69).

Kāyānupassanā (contemplation of the body) – **Mindfulness of Breathing** (*anapanasati*) This practice develops concentration – the power of concentration is essential for any kind of deep understanding, penetration, insight into the nature of things, including the realization of Nirvana (Rahula, 70-71).

Vedanānupassanā (physical sensations and feelings) – e.g. **Insight Meditation (U Ba Khin Method** – body scan head to toe). Try to examine sensations and feelings as if you are observing them from outside, without any subjective reaction, as a scientist observes some object. Avoid thinking 'my feeling' or 'my sensation' subjectively, but only look at it as 'a feeling' or 'a sensation' objectively. Forget the false idea of 'I'. When you see its nature – how it arises and disappears – your mind grows dispassionate towards the sensation, and becomes detached and free (Rahula, 73).

Cittānupassanā (mind) – be fully aware whenever your mind is passionate or detached; overpowered by hatred, ill-will, or jealousy; or is full of love and compassion; deluded or has a clear and right understanding, and so on. Look at your mind as you would your face in a mirror. However, here is no attitude of criticizing or judging, or discriminating between right and wrong, or good and bad. It is simply observing, watching, examining – not as a judge, but a scientist. When you observe your mind, and see its true nature clearly, you become dispassionate with regard to its emotions, sentiments, and states. Thus you become detached and free, so that you may see things as they are (Rahula, 73-74).

Dhammānupassanā (mind-objects) – a form of 'meditation' on ethical, spiritual, and intellectual subjects. For example, you can study, think, and deliberate on the Five Hindrances, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Five Aggregates, or the Four Noble Truths (Rahula, 75).

Insight Meditation (Choiceless Awareness or Bare Attention) Another important, practical, and useful form of 'meditation' (mental development) is to be aware and mindful of whatever you do, physically or verbally. Whether you walk, stand, sit, lie down, or sleep – in these and other activities, you should be fully aware and mindful of the act you perform at the moment; that is, you should live in the present moment, in the present action (Rahula, 71-72).

Source: Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. With a foreword by Paul Demiéville. Revised edition. New York: Grove Press, 1974. © 2014 Alexander Peck