

Buddhist Meditation

An Overview

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Foreword

I have collected in this little booklet a selection of articles on Buddhist meditation written by various authors. The idea is to provide an overview of the various types of meditative practice in the Buddhist traditions, which I hope would serve as a useful introduction for those who are new to Buddhist meditation.

In addition, for the benefits of established and practicing meditators, I have also included the various related topics essential for a deeper understanding of their meditative practice, such as the three characteristics of life, the five aggregates, the five hindrances (panca nivaranani), the ten fetters and other enlightenment-related dhamma, including the five faculties (indriya), the five powers (bala), the seven factors of enlightenment and the jhanas.

Articles

1. An Overview of Buddhist Meditation, by Kusala Bhikshu
2. Buddhist Meditation, from Wikipedia
3. Seeing Things As They Are: The Three Characteristics of Life
4. The Five Aggregates of Self
5. The Five Hindrances
6. The Ten Fetters
7. The Five Faculties and Powers
8. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment
9. The Jhanas

Related Suttas

1. [Maha Satipatthana Sutta](#)
2. [Anapanasati Sutta](#)
3. [Samatha Sutta](#)
4. [Kimsuka Sutta](#)
5. [Yuganaddah Sutta](#): Four Ways to Arahantship

An Overview of Buddhist Meditation

by Kusala Bhikshu

from a talk given at Benedict's Dharma 2

Meditation is the second category of the Eight-Fold Path. The three category's are; Personal Discipline, Mental Perfection, and Wisdom.

Mental purification... There are three path factors in the second category of meditation: Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Right effort in meditation doesn't have anything to do with the body. It's not about going to 24-hour fitness or Gold's gym. Right effort is to sit quietly and observe your thoughts as skillful or unskillful.

Skillful thoughts are thoughts of self limitation, generosity, compassion, and wisdom.

Unskillful thoughts are thoughts of lust, greed, hatred, and delusion.

There are four things you can do with these thoughts. You can abandon them, prevent them, develop them, or maintain them. You prevent or abandon the unskillful thoughts, and develop or maintain the skillful ones.

To share a personal example of how all this might work... I'm sitting in meditation, and in my mind... I find myself in a supermarket, but not standing in line this time.

I'm on the bakery aisle, and there in front of me is a stack of Entenmann's chocolate cakes. I say to myself, "I'd like to take two of those cakes with me, one for tonight and one for tomorrow." I see greed has arisen, because if it were generosity, I would take one for me and one for you.

I simply note whether the thought is skillful or unskillful, without any kind story attached to my discernment. I then let the thought go and move on. That in a nutshell, is right effort in Buddhist meditation.

The Buddha practiced two forms of meditation. One was taught to him. One he rediscovered.

The reason I use the word rediscovered is because, according to the early Buddhist tradition of Theravada, there were many Buddhas before Siddhartha Gautama. He was one in a line of Buddhas, and we already know who the next Buddha will be. His name is Maitreya Buddha.

The Buddha was taught Samatha (tranquility) meditation, and rediscovered Vipassana (insight) meditation. These are the two forms of Buddhist meditation, Samatha and vipassana -- tranquility and insight.

Tranquility meditation was taught to the Buddha by the yogis of India. Tranquility meditation is what I consider to be the meditation of enlightenment. Insight meditation is the meditation of Nirvana.

I make a distinction between enlightenment and nirvana. This is a distinction that came to me after much personal reflection and meditation. It helps me understand Buddhist meditation with more clarity. It's not something I found in a book, it came out of my practice.

I define enlightenment as the wisdom of emptiness, and Nirvana as the end of suffering.

I think, the Mahayana tradition focuses more on enlightenment and the wisdom of emptiness, in fact postponing Nirvana until all other sentient beings have achieved it.

The early school of Buddhism known as the Theravada seems to focus more on Nirvana, and uses insight meditation as its primary technology.

What is this Samatha meditation, and what are the characteristics?

There is something in tranquility (Samatha) meditation called the four jhanas, the four stages of tranquility.

The first jhana has five characteristics: Applied thought, sustained thought, happiness, bliss, and equanimity.

The second jhana has three characteristics: Bliss, happiness, and equanimity.

The third jhana has two characteristics: Happiness and equanimity.

The fourth jhana has one characteristic: Equanimity.

If you are doing Buddhist meditation and gaining anything, you're doing it wrong. The Buddhist path, is a path of renunciation. We are not doing it to gain generosity. We are doing it to get rid of greed. We are not doing it to gain compassion. We are doing it to get rid of anger and hatred. We are not doing it to gain wisdom. We are doing it to get rid of delusion and ignorance.

We already have as much generosity, compassion, and wisdom as we will ever need. The things that prevents us from attaining and realizing our innate perfection are greed, hatred, and delusion, the three poisons. Meditation is designed to get rid of the three poisons and wake us up.

What a positive message this is. We are already okay; we just haven't realized yet.

The first jhana has applied thought, sustained thought, happiness, bliss, and equanimity.

The mediator would sit on the floor quietly. He or she brings their attention to the tip of the nose and holds it there, applied thought, sustained thought. Applying attention and holding it at the tip of the nose. Just feeling breath go in and out. As the focus deepens, bliss and rapture rise in the body, happiness in the mind, and the first trace of equanimity.

This happens in any concentrated state to some extent. You can get the same thing in a theater, watching an exciting movie. I must admit, though, meditation on breath is not as exciting as a good movie. It takes a lot more intention to stay with the breath.

With more effort and understanding, the mediator goes from the first jhana into the second jhana, having left applied thought and sustained thought behind. The mind simply rests on the object of meditation. There is a greater sense of bliss and rapture, a greater sense of happiness and equanimity.

But there is a problem with this bliss and rapture of the body. Bliss and rapture distort the way we perceive the world. The meditator might say, "Gosh, if I could get rid of this rapture and bliss, I could perceive the world in a much more realistic way."

Imagine a pond in a forest, and it's a moonlit night, you throw a rock in the pond and create waves. The waves distort the reflection of the moon. In the same way bliss and rapture distort the way we perceive the world.

With a deeper understanding and even more effort, the mediator slips into the third jhana, with its two characteristics: Happiness and equanimity. There is no longer bliss and rapture in the body.

After coming out of the third jhana, the mediator reflects on happiness, the subtle happiness of mind. It now becomes apparent, that even happiness can distort the world.

The mediator thinks, if I could rid myself of happiness, I could see the world exactly the way it is; not through the colored glasses of judgment and preference, attachment and repulsion. So, with greater understanding and a renewed effort, the mediator goes into the third jhana and then slips into the fourth jhana. Now the only characteristic left is equanimity: Perfect balance in mind.

There is no joy. There is no sorrow, no bliss or rapture, and no pain. The mediator is centered, focused, and

clear. Mediators will not suffer or feel pain as long as they are in the fourth jhana. They have reached a profound level of acceptance with the way things are.

But, once the meditator gets off the cushion, leaves the zendo, gets into his or her car and goes on the freeway... Anger, hatred, and delusion will rise again. It's the same old story. If only there was a way to permanently get rid of greed, hatred and delusion? To realize perfect balance of mind, and have equanimity all the time.

That was the dilemma the Buddha faced Twenty-five hundred years ago. The answer for him was to rediscover insight meditation, which solved the puzzle and ended his suffering forever.

There are four kinds of insight meditation: Mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind, and mindfulness of mental objects.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the mindfulness of sensations or feelings.

The mediator is sitting on the floor again, cross- legged. But rather than going into deeper and deeper states of tranquility, he goes to a place called access concentration, which is a kind of momentary concentration. The mediator scanning his body from the tip of his toes to the top of his head, begins looking for sensations.

The Buddha said there are three kinds of sensations. Pleasant sensations, unpleasant sensations, and neutral sensations, they occur in both body and mind.

The mediator might start at the toes and work his way up, with the goal of being aware of any sensation. When one is found, he might think to himself pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. Then he would note what kind of sensation it was and let it go -- pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. Let go, and find the next one.

He might do this for 20 minutes, up and down, looking for sensations, noting, naming, and letting go -- pleasant, unpleasant, neutral.

After all this awareness of sensations, he would then go into deep state of reflection on the three aspects of Buddhist wisdom.

Which are: Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

The first thing he might think is, "Are all sensations impermanent? Did any of them last the length of my meditation? Did any of them change in intensity, or were they always the same?"

Upon reflection, he would find all sensations whether in mind or body were impermanent. They would arise because of conditions, exist, and in some cases pass away, only to trouble him again later. Arising and passing away, with no permanence to be found.

He might think to himself, is everything in the world impermanent? Does anything exist forever? Is everything created out of conditions? When conditions change do all things grow or decay.

Impermanence is the first aspect of Buddhist wisdom.

The second aspect of Buddhist wisdom is unsatisfactoriness. Are all sensations unsatisfactory?

Now you might think, well, they weren't all unsatisfactory because some of them turned out to be pretty nice. I had these little blissful feelings, little energy flows. But then, when they ended, I was disappointed. Because of impermanence, every pleasant sensations became imperfect or unsatisfactory. The world is ultimately unsatisfactory, because all things change.

Now we come to the third aspect, 'Not Self.' Does any sensation have an essence or quality that exists independently? Does any sensation have an original unconditional substance?

Sensations seem to be conditional rather than unconditional. Sensations seem to be process, rather than

an event.

There was a wonderful book published in the late '70s called "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance." One of the dilemmas in the book, was to find quality. Where does the quality live in a object?

The main character in the book rode a Honda Super Hawk 400, and his buddy a BMW. His buddy always felt his BMW had more quality than the Honda.

I'm thinking, what would happen if both these guys went to a giant parking lot, and took their bikes apart into their 10,000 pieces.

Over here we have the Honda, over there we have the BMW. Now I'm thinking, we give each bike owner a magnifying glass, and we tell them, "Please, find the quality on your motorcycle. In what part does it reside?"

They would go to each part and look carefully for the essence of quality. Their conclusion might be, when all the pieces are put together to form an illusion of oneness, quality appears. When you take the one and make it many, the illusion of quality is lost in the parts.

If I were to look in my mind and body, where would I find my original essence? My soul.

The meditator seeing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not self to be true, one day will be liberated from suffering... Because there is no 'One' to suffer, and no 'One' to cause suffering. The wisdom of Buddhism cuts through lust, greed, hatred, and delusion like a great sword, leaving behind, self limitation, generosity, compassion, and wisdom. The end of suffering, nirvana.

After the Buddha achieved nirvana through insight meditation, he never practiced it again. He had reached the end of the holy life, the perfection of the heart. There was no need for more insight. But, he continued to practice tranquility meditation until the end of his life.

Insight meditation ended his suffering. Tranquility meditation ended his pain. When he was sick or feeling discomfort from a bad back or just being old -- he died at the age of 80, you know-- he would simply go into deep states of jhana and neutralize the pain. When the Buddha passed away he was in the fourth jhana.

The two forms of Buddhist meditation are tranquility and insight. Some schools of Buddhism emphasize one, some the other, the Buddha did both.

Buddhist Meditation

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Buddhist meditation refers to the meditative practices associated with the religion and philosophy of Buddhism.

Core meditation techniques have been preserved in ancient [Buddhist texts](#) and have proliferated and diversified through teacher-student transmissions. [Buddhists](#) pursue meditation as part of the path toward [Enlightenment](#) and [Nirvana](#).^[1] The closest words for meditation in the classical languages of Buddhism are *bhāvanā*^[2] and *jhāna/dhyāna*.^[3] Buddhist meditation techniques have become increasingly popular in the wider world, with many non-Buddhists taking them up for a variety of reasons.

Given the large number and diversity of traditional Buddhist meditation practices, this article primarily identifies authoritative contextual frameworks – both contemporary and canonical – for the variety of practices. For those seeking [school-specific](#) meditation information, it may be more appropriate to simply view the articles listed in the "See also" section below.

Meditation in Buddhist traditions

While there are some similar meditative practices — such as [breath meditation](#) and various recollections (*anussati*) — that are used across [Buddhist schools](#), there is also significant diversity. In the [Theravāda](#) tradition alone, there are over fifty methods for developing mindfulness and forty for developing concentration, while in the [Tibetan](#) tradition there are thousands of visualization meditations.^[4] Most classical and contemporary Buddhist meditation guides are school specific.^[5] Only a few teachers attempt to synthesize, crystallize and categorize practices from multiple Buddhist traditions.

In early tradition

The earliest tradition of Buddhist practice is preserved in the [nikāya/āgamas](#), and is adhered to by the Theravāda lineage. It was also the focus of the other now-extinct [early Buddhist schools](#), and has been incorporated to greater and lesser degrees into the [Tibetan Buddhist](#) tradition and many East Asian Mahāyāna traditions.

Types of meditation

In terms of early traditions as found in the vast [Pali canon](#) and the [Āgamas](#), meditation can be contextualized as part of the [Noble Eightfold Path](#), explicitly in regard to:

- **Right Mindfulness** (*samma sati*) – exemplified by the Buddha's Four Foundations of Mindfulness (see [Satipatthana Sutta](#)).
- **Right Concentration** (*samma samadhi*) – culminating in [jhānic](#) absorptions through the meditative development of *samatha*.^[8]

And implicitly in regard to:

- **Right View** (*samma ditthi*) – embodying wisdom traditionally attained through the meditative development of *vipassana* founded on *samatha*.^[9]

Classic texts in the [Pali literature](#) enumerating meditative subjects include the Satipatthana Sutta ([MN](#) 10) and the [Visuddhimagga](#)'s Part II, "Concentration" (*Samadhi*).

Four foundations for mindfulness

Main article: [Satipatthana Sutta](#)

In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha identifies four foundations for mindfulness: the body, feelings, mind states and mental objects. He further enumerates the following objects as bases for the meditative development of mindfulness:

- Body (*kāyā*): Breathing (see [Anapanasati Sutta](#)), Postures, [Clear Comprehending](#), [Reflections on Repulsiveness of the Body](#), Reflections on [Material Elements](#), Cemetery Contemplations
- Feelings (*vedanā*), whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral
- Mind (*cittā*)
- Mental Contents (*dhammā*): [Hindrances](#), [Aggregates](#), [Sense-Bases](#), [Factors of Enlightenment](#), and the [Four Noble Truths](#).

Meditation on these subjects develops insight.^[10]

Serenity and insight

The Buddha is said to have identified two paramount mental qualities that arise from wholesome meditative practice:

- "serenity" or "tranquillity" (Pali: *samatha*) which steadies, composes, unifies and concentrates the mind;
- "insight" (Pali: *vipassana*) which enables one to see, explore and discern "formations" (conditioned phenomena based on the five [aggregates](#)).^[11]

Through the meditative development of serenity, one is able to suppress obscuring [hindrances](#); and, with the suppression of the hindrances, it is through the meditative development of insight that one gains liberating [wisdom](#).^[12] Moreover, the Buddha is said to have extolled serenity and insight as conduits for attaining [Nibbana](#) (Pali; Skt.: *Nirvana*), the unconditioned state as in the "Kimsuka Tree Sutta" (SN 35.245), where the Buddha provides an elaborate metaphor in which serenity and insight are "the swift pair of messengers" who deliver the message of Nibbana via the [Noble Eightfold Path](#).^[13]

In the "Four Ways to Arahantship Sutta" (AN 4.170), Ven. [Ananda](#) reports that people attain [arahantship](#) using serenity and insight in one of three ways:

1. they develop serenity and then insight (Pali: *samatha-pubbangamam vipassanam*)
2. they develop insight and then serenity (Pali: *vipassana-pubbangamam samatham*)^[14]
3. they develop serenity and insight in tandem (Pali: *samatha-vipassanam yuganaddham*) as in, for instance, obtaining the first [jhana](#), and then seeing in the associated aggregates the [three marks of existence](#), before proceeding to the second jhana.^[15]

In the Pali canon, the Buddha never mentions independent samatha and vipassana meditation practices; instead, samatha and vipassana are two *qualities of mind* to be developed through meditation.^[16] Nonetheless, some meditation practices (such as contemplation of a [kasina](#) object) favor the development of samatha, others are conducive to the development of vipassana (such as contemplation of the [aggregates](#)), while others (such as [mindfulness of breathing](#)) are classically used for developing both mental qualities.^[17]

From the Pali Commentaries

Main article: [Kammattana](#)

[Buddhaghosa](#)'s forty meditation subjects are described in the Visuddhimagga. Almost all of these are described in the early texts.^[18] Buddhaghosa advises that, for the purpose of developing concentration and "consciousness," a person should "apprehend from among the forty meditation subjects one that suits his own temperament" with the

advice of a "good friend" (*kalyana mitra*) who is knowledgeable in the different meditation subjects (Ch. III, § 28). [19] Buddhaghosa subsequently elaborates on the forty meditation subjects as follows (Ch. III, §104; Chs. IV - XI): [20]

- ten *kasinas*: earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, light, and "limited-space".
- ten kinds of foulness: "the bloated, the livid, the festering, the cut-up, the gnawed, the scattered, the hacked and scattered, the bleeding, the worm-infested, and a skeleton".
- Ten *recollections*: the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, virtue, generosity, the virtues of deities, death (see *Upajjhathana Sutta*), the body, the breath (see *anapanasati*), and peace (see *Nibbana*).
- four divine abodes: *metta*, *karuṇā*, *mudita*, and *upekkha*.
- Four *immaterial states*: boundless space, boundless perception, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception.
- one perception (of "repulsiveness in nutriment")
- one "defining" (that is, the *four elements*)

When one overlays Buddhaghosa's 40 meditative subjects for the development of concentration with the Buddha's foundations of mindfulness, three practices are found to be in common: breath meditation, foulness meditation (which is similar to the *Sattipatthana Sutta*'s cemetery contemplations, and to contemplation of bodily repulsiveness), and contemplation of the four elements. According to *Pali commentaries*, breath meditation can lead one to the equanimous fourth jhanic absorption. Contemplation of foulness can lead to the attainment of the first jhana, and contemplation of the four elements culminates in pre-jhana access concentration.[21]

In Contemporary Theravāda

Particularly influential from the twentieth century onward has been the "New Burmese Method" or "Vipassana School" approach to *samatha* and *vipassana* developed by Mingun Jetavana Sayādaw U Nārada and popularized by *Mahasi Sayadaw*. Here *samatha* is considered an optional but not necessary component of the practice—*vipassana* is possible without it. Another Burmese method, derived from *Ledi Sayadaw* via U *Ba Khin* and *S. N. Goenka*, takes a similar approach. Other Burmese traditions popularized in the west, notably that of *Pa Auk Sayadaw*, uphold the emphasis on *samatha* explicit in the commentarial tradition of the *Visuddhimagga*.

Also influential is the *Thai Forest tradition* deriving from *Ajahn Mun* and popularized by *Ajahn Chah*, which, in contrast, stresses the inseparability of the two practices, and the essential necessity of both practices. Other noted practitioners in this tradition include *Ajahn Thate* and *Ajahn Maha Bua*, among others.[22]

In Mahāyāna Buddhism

Mahāyāna Buddhism includes numerous schools of practice, which each draw upon various Buddhist sūtras, philosophical treatises, and commentaries. Accordingly, each school has its own meditation methods for the purpose of developing *samādhi* and *prajñā*, with the goal of ultimately attaining enlightenment. Nevertheless, each has its own emphasis, mode of expression, and philosophical outlook. In his classic book on meditation of the various *Chinese Buddhist* traditions, Charles Luk writes, "The Buddha Dharma is useless if it is not put into actual practice, because if we do not have personal experience of it, it will be alien to us and we will never awaken to it in spite of our book learning." [23] Venerable *Nan Huaijin* echoes similar sentiments about the importance of meditation by remarking, "Intellectual reasoning is just another spinning of the *sixth consciousness*, whereas the practice of meditation is the true entry into the Dharma." [24]

Meditation in the Pure Land school

Mindfulness of Amitābha Buddha

In the [Pure Land](#) tradition of Buddhism, repeating the name of Amitābha Buddha is traditionally a form of Mindfulness of the Buddha (Skt. *buddhānusmṛti*). This term was translated into Chinese as [nianfo](#) (念佛), by which it is popularly known in English. The practice is described as calling the buddha to mind by repeating his name, to enable the practitioner to bring all his or her attention upon that buddha (*samādhi*).^[25] This may be done vocally or mentally, and with or without the use of [Buddhist prayer beads](#). Those who practice this method often commit to a fixed set of repetitions per day, often from 50,000 to over 500,000.^[26] According to tradition, the second patriarch of the Pure Land school, Shandao, is said to have practiced this day and night without interruption, each time emitting light from his mouth. Therefore he was bestowed with the title "Great Master of Light" (大師光明) by the [Tang Dynasty](#) emperor [Gao Zong](#) (高宗).^[27]

In addition, in Chinese Buddhism there is a related practice called the "dual path of [Chán](#) and Pure Land cultivation", which is also called the "dual path of emptiness and existence."^[28] As taught by Venerable Nan Huaijin, the name of Amitābha Buddha is recited slowly, and the mind is emptied out after each repetition. When idle thoughts arise, the phrase is repeated again to clear them. With constant practice, the mind is able to remain peacefully in emptiness, culminating in the attainment of *samādhi*.^[29]

Pure Land Rebirth Dhāraṇī

Repeating the Pure Land Rebirth [Dhāraṇī](#) is another method in Pure Land Buddhism. Similar to the mindfulness practice of repeating the name of Amitābha Buddha, this dhāraṇī is another method of meditation and recitation in Pure Land Buddhism. The repetition of this dhāraṇī is said to be very popular among traditional Chinese Buddhists.^[30] It is traditionally preserved in [Sanskrit](#), and it is said that when a devotee succeeds in realizing singleness of mind by repeating a mantra, its true and profound meaning will be clearly revealed.^[31]

namo amitābhāya tathāgatāya tadyathā
amṛtabhave amṛtasambhave
amṛtavikrānte amṛtavikrāntagāmini
gagana kīrtichare svāhā

Visualization methods

Another practise found in Pure Land Buddhism is meditative contemplation and visualization of [Amitābha](#) Buddha, his attendant bodhisattvas, and the Pure Land. The basis of this is found in the [Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra](#) ("Amitābha Meditation Sūtra"), in which the [Buddha](#) describes to Queen Vaidehi the practices of thirteen progressive visualization methods, corresponding to the attainment of various levels of rebirth in the Pure Land.^[32] Visualization practises for [Amitābha](#) are popular among esoteric Buddhist sects, such as Japanese [Shingon](#) Buddhism.

Meditation in the Chán/Zen school

Pointing to the nature of the mind

In the earliest traditions of [Chán/Zen](#) Buddhism, it is said that there was no formal method of meditation. Instead, the teacher would use various didactic methods to point to the true nature of the mind, also known as [Buddha-](#)

nature. This method is referred to as the "Mind Dharma", and exemplified in the story of Śākyamuni Buddha holding up a flower silently, and [Mahākāśyapa](#) smiling as he understood.^[33] A traditional formula of this is, "Chán points directly to the human mind, to enable people to see their true nature and become buddhas."^[34] In the early era of the Chán school, there was no fixed method or simple formula for teaching meditation, and all instructions were simply heuristic methods; therefore the Chán school was called the "Gateless Gate."^[35]

Contemplating meditation cases

It is said traditionally that when the minds of people in society became more complicated and when they could not make progress so easily, the masters of the Chán school were forced to change their methods.^[36] These involved particular words and phrases, shouts, roars of laughter, sighs, gestures, or blows from a staff. These were all meant to awaken the student to the essential truth of the mind, and were later called *gōng'àn* (公案), or *kōan* in Japanese.^[37] These didactic phrases and methods were to be contemplated, and example of such a device is a phrase that turns around the practice of mindfulness: "Who is being mindful of the Buddha?"^[38] The teachers all instructed their students to give rise to a gentle feeling of doubt at all times while practicing, so as to strip the mind of seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing, and ensure its constant rest and undisturbed condition.^[39] Charles Luk explains the essential function of contemplating such a meditation case with doubt:^[40]

Since the student cannot stop all his thoughts at one stroke, he is taught to use this poison-against-poison device to realize singleness of thought, which is fundamentally wrong but will disappear when it falls into disuse, and gives way to singleness of mind, which is a precondition of the realization of the self-mind for the perception of self-nature and attainment of Bodhi.

Meditation in the Tiantai school

Tiantai śamatha-vipaśyanā

In China it has been traditionally held that the meditation methods used by the [Tiantai](#) school are the most systematic and comprehensive of all.^[41] In addition to its doctrinal basis in Indian Buddhist texts, the Tiantai school also emphasizes use of its own meditation texts which emphasize the principles of śamatha and vipaśyanā. Of these texts, Zhiyi's *Concise Śamatha-vipaśyanā* (小止觀), *Mahā-śamatha-vipaśyanā* (摩訶止觀), and *Six Subtle Dharma Gates* (六妙法門) are the most widely read in China.^[42] Rujun Wu (1993: p.1) identifies the work *Mahā-śamatha-vipaśyanā* of Zhiyi as the seminal meditation text of the Tiantai school.^[43] Regarding the functions of śamatha and vipaśyanā in meditation, Zhiyi writes in his work *Concise Śamatha-vipaśyanā*:^[44]

The attainment of Nirvāṇa is realizable by many methods whose essentials do not go beyond the practice of śamatha and vipaśyanā. Śamatha is the first step to untie all bonds and vipaśyanā is essential to root out delusion. Śamatha provides nourishment for the preservation of the knowing mind, and vipaśyanā is the skillful art of promoting spiritual understanding. Śamatha is the unsurpassed cause of samādhi, while vipaśyanā begets wisdom.

The Tiantai school also places a great emphasis on [ānāpānasmṛti](#), or mindfulness of breathing, in accordance with the principles of śamatha and vipaśyanā. Zhiyi classifies breathing into four main categories: panting (喘), unhurried breathing (風), deep and quiet breathing (氣), and stillness or rest (息). Zhiyi holds that the first three kinds of breathing are incorrect, while the fourth is correct, and that the breathing should reach stillness and rest.^[45]

Esoteric practices in Japan

One of the adaptations by the Japanese [Tendai](#) (Ch. Tiantai) school was the introduction of esoteric practices ([Mikkyo](#)) into Tendai Buddhism, which was later named *Taimitsu* by [Ennin](#). Eventually, according to Tendai Taimitsu doctrine, the esoteric rituals came to be considered of equal importance with the exoteric teachings of the Lotus

Sutra. Therefore, by chanting [mantras](#), maintaining [mudras](#), or performing certain meditations, one is able to see that the sense experiences are the teachings of Buddha, have faith that one is inherently an enlightened being, and one can attain enlightenment within this very body. The origins of Taimitsu are found in China, similar to the lineage that [Kukai](#) encountered in his visit to China during the [Tang Dynasty](#), and [Saicho](#)'s disciples were encouraged to study under Kukai.[\[46\]](#)

Adoption by non-Buddhists

Main article: [Mindfulness \(psychology\)](#)

For a long time people have practiced meditation, based on Buddhist meditation principles, in order to effect mundane and worldly benefit.[\[47\]](#) Buddhist meditation techniques are increasingly being employed by psychologists and psychiatrists to help alleviate a variety of health conditions such as anxiety and depression.[\[48\]](#) As such, [mindfulness](#) and other Buddhist meditation techniques are being advocated in the West by innovative psychologists and expert Buddhist meditation teachers such as [Clive Sherlock](#), [Mother Sayamagyi](#), [S.N. Goenka](#), [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#), [Jack Kornfield](#), [Joseph Goldstein](#), [Tara Brach](#), [Alan Clements](#), and [Sharon Salzberg](#), who have been widely attributed with playing a significant role in integrating the healing aspects of Buddhist meditation practices with the concept of psychological awareness and healing.

The accounts of meditative states in the Buddhist texts are in some regards free of dogma, so much so that the Buddhist scheme has been adopted by Western psychologists attempting to describe the phenomenon of meditation in general.[\[49\]](#) Nevertheless, it is exceedingly common to encounter the Buddha describing meditative states involving the attainment of such magical powers (P. *iddhi*) as the ability to multiply one's body into many and into one again, appear and vanish at will, pass through solid objects as if space, rise and sink in the ground as if in water, walking on water as if land, fly through the skies, touching anything at any distance (even the moon or sun), and travel to other worlds (like the world of Brahma) with or without the body, among other things.[\[50\]](#)[\[51\]](#)[\[52\]](#)

See also

[Theravada](#) Buddhist meditation practices:

- [Anapanasati](#) - focusing on the breath
- [Metta](#) - cultivation of compassion and loving-kindness
- [Kammaṭṭhāna](#)
- [Samatha](#) - calm abiding
- [Vipassana](#) - insight
- [Mahasati Meditation](#)

[Zen](#) Buddhist meditation practices:

- [Shikantaza](#) - just sitting
- [Zazen](#)
- [Koan](#)

[Vajrayana](#) and [Tibetan Buddhism](#) meditation practices:

- [Tantra techniques](#)
- [Ngondro](#) - preliminary practices
- [Tonglen](#) - giving and receiving
- [Phowa](#) - transference of consciousness at the time of death

- [Chöd](#) - cutting through fear by confronting it
- [Mahamudra](#) - the Kagyu version of 'entering the all-pervading Dharmadatu', the 'nondual state', or the 'absorption state'
- [Dzogchen](#)- the natural state, the Nyingma version of [Mahamudra](#)
- [The Four Immeasurables](#), [Metta](#)
- [Tantra](#)

Related Buddhist practices:

- [Mindfulness](#) - awareness in the present moment
- [Mindfulness \(psychology\)](#) - Western applications of Buddhist ideas
- [Satipatthana](#)
- [chanting](#) and [mantra](#)

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_meditation

Seeing Things as They Are

by

Nyanaponika Thera

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If we contemplate even a minute sector of life's vast range, we are faced with a variety of living forms so tremendous that it defies all description. Yet three basic features can be discerned as common to everything that has animate existence, from the microbe to man, from the simplest sensations to the thoughts of a creative genius:

impermanence or change (*anicca*);

suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*);

non-self or insubstantiality (*anatta*).

These three basic facts were first found and formulated over 2,500 years ago by the Buddha, who was rightly called "the Knower of the World" (*loka-vidu*). They are designated, in Buddhist terminology, the three characteristics (*ti-lakkhana*) — the invariable marks or signs of everything that springs into being, the "signata" stamped upon the very face of life itself.

Of the three, the first and third apply directly to inanimate existence as well as to the animate, for every concrete entity by its very nature undergoes change and is devoid of substance. The second feature, suffering, is of course only an experience of the animate. But the Buddha applies the characteristic of suffering to all conditioned things, in the sense that, for living beings, everything conditioned is a potential cause of experienced suffering and is at any rate incapable of giving lasting satisfaction. Thus the three are truly universal marks pertaining even to what is below or beyond our normal range of perception.

The Buddha teaches that life can be correctly understood only if these basic facts are understood. And this understanding must take place, not only logically, but in confrontation with one's own experience. Insight-wisdom, which is the ultimate liberating factor in Buddhism, consists in just this experiential understanding of the three characteristics as applied to one's own bodily and mental processes, and deepened and matured in meditation.

To see things as they really are means to see them consistently in the light of the three characteristics. Not to see them in this way, or to deceive oneself about their reality and range of application, is the defining mark of ignorance, and ignorance is by itself a potent cause of suffering, knitting the net in which man is caught — the net of false hopes, of unrealistic and harmful desires, of delusive ideologies and of perverted values and aims.

Ignoring or distorting the three basic facts ultimately leads only to frustration, disappointment and despair. But if we learn to see through deceptive appearances, and discern the three characteristics, this will yield immense benefits, both in our daily life and in our spiritual striving. On the mundane level, the clear comprehension of impermanence, suffering and non-self will bring us a saner outlook on life. It will free us from unrealistic expectations, bestow a courageous acceptance of suffering and failure, and protect us against the lure of deluded assumptions and beliefs. In our quest for the supramundane, comprehension of the three characteristics will be indispensable. The meditative experience of all phenomena as inseparable from the three marks will loosen, and finally cut, the bonds binding us to an existence falsely imagined to be lasting, pleasurable and substantive. With growing clarity, all things internal and external will be seen in their true nature: as constantly changing, as bound up with suffering and as unsubstantial, without an eternal soul or abiding essence. By seeing thus, detachment will grow, bringing greater freedom from egoistic clinging and culminating in Nibbana, mind's final liberation from suffering.

The Five Aggregates of Self

The five aggregates of self (skandhas) – the elements whose aggregate continuity creates the illusion of a permanent and substantial self-existence:

A. Form (Rupa) - Materiality; physical form, the body. The body itself has no consciousness. The materiality of a dead body is the same as that of a living body. It does not possess any faculty of knowing. In fact, materiality does not possess the faculty of knowing an object in either a dead or a living body. It is only when the body is invested with life that there is consciousness, yet this consciousness is inseparable from the physical body.

B. Consciousness (Vijnana) - Mentality; awareness, the mind, the inner vision. The element of the mind is what has, holds and knows an object, while that of materiality does not. This defines consciousness - beholding an object. Mentality is that which knows an object and which comes into being depending on materiality. It is called Nama in Sanskrit because it inclines (namati) towards an object. It does so through the lens of the senses, but it should not be mistaken as just being the senses. It uses the senses as a sort of window to perceive objects.

C. Sensory Feelings (Vedana) - The lenses, windows or filters through which consciousness perceives objects of consciousness. There are two basic components: the six sense faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, & thinking mind) and the six sensations (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, & dharmas or elements of reality). In contacting each other, there are six kinds of consciousness produced. Thus there are a total of eighteen realms of the mind.

D. Acts of Will, Volition (Samskara) - Acts of consciousness (or sub-consciousness if unawakened), acts of intent, the doing of things through the body, the mouth and the thinking mind, which initiate karmas (deeds that help create the retribution that is our destiny). Whereas sensory feelings are 'incoming' perceptions (coming from the object of consciousness), acts of will are 'out-going' actions (coming from within the consciousness or sub-consciousness). Sensory feelings are the medium through which we perceive whereas acts of will (volition) are the initiatives by which we act.

E. Conceptualization (Samjna) - The rationalizing faculty of the mind. This is the faculty that interprets, categorizes and 'makes sense' of what we perceive and do. In doing so it creates concepts, which codify realities (dharmas) into sensory data; thoughts, views, words, images, etc. Sensory perceptions are invested with meaning. It is here that the idea of a self is established as a basis for reasoning and discernment. Realities (dharmas) are endowed with a 'self' (a name) in order to distinguish and identify them. When perceptions and acts of are differentiated into concepts, these differentiations create aspects of duality and limitless aspects of multiplicity which are used to categorize and associate sensory perceptions.

Source: <http://www.tientai.net/glossary/5aggregates.htm>

The Five Hindrances (Nivarana)

By Ajahn Brahmavamso

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

The major obstacles to successful meditation and liberating insight take the form of one or more of the Five Hindrances. The whole practice leading to Enlightenment can be well expressed as the effort to overcome the Five Hindrances, at first suppressing them temporarily in order to experience Jhana and Insight, and then overcoming them permanently through the full development of the Noble Eightfold Path. So, what are these Five Hindrances? They are:

KAMACCHANDA : Sensory Desire

VYAPADA: Ill Will

THINA-MIDDHA: Sloth and Torpor

UDDHACCA-KUKKUCA: Restlessness and Remorse

VICIKICCHA: Doubt

1. Sensory desire refers to that particular type of wanting that seeks for happiness through the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and physical feeling. It specifically excludes any aspiration for happiness through the sixth sense of mind alone.

In its extreme form, sensory desire is an obsession to find pleasure in such things as sexual intimacy, good food or fine music. But it also includes the desire to replace irritating or even painful five-sense experiences with pleasant ones, i.e. the desire for sensory comfort.

The Lord Buddha compared sensory desire to taking out a loan. Any pleasure one experiences through these five senses must be repaid through the unpleasantness of separation, loss or hungry emptiness which follow relentlessly when the pleasure is used up. As with any loan, there is also the matter of interest and thus, as the Lord Buddha said, the pleasure is small compared to the suffering repaid.

In meditation, one transcends sensory desire for the period by letting go of concern for this body and its five sense activity. Some imagine that the five senses are there to serve and protect the body, but the truth is that the body is there to serve the five senses as they play in the world ever seeking delight. Indeed, the Lord Buddha once said, "The five senses ARE the world" and to leave the world, to enjoy the other worldly bliss of Jhana, one must give up for a time ALL concern for the body and its five senses.

When sensory desire is transcended, the mind of the meditator has no interest in the promise of pleasure or even comfort with this body. The body disappears and the five senses all switch off. The mind becomes calm and free to look within. The difference between the five sense activity and its transcendence is like the difference between looking out of a window and looking in a mirror. The mind that is free from five sense activity can truly look within and see its real nature. Only from that can wisdom arise as to what we are, from where and why?!

2. Ill will refers to the desire to punish, hurt or destroy. It includes sheer hatred of a person, or even a situation, and it can generate so much energy that it is both seductive and addictive. At the time, it always appears justified for such is its power that it easily corrupts our ability to judge fairly. It also includes ill will towards oneself, otherwise known as guilt, which denies oneself any possibility of happiness. In meditation, ill will can appear as dislike towards the meditation object itself, rejecting it so that one's attention is forced to wander elsewhere.

The Lord Buddha likened ill will to being sick. Just as sickness denies one the freedom and happiness of health, so ill will denies one the freedom and happiness of peace.

Ill will is overcome by applying Metta, loving kindness. When it is ill will towards a person, Metta teaches one to see more in that person than all that which hurts you, to understand why that person hurt you (often because they were hurting intensely themselves), and encourages one to put aside one's own pain to look with compassion on the other. But if this is more than one can do, Metta to oneself leads one to refuse to dwell in ill will to that person, so as to stop them from hurting you further with the memory of those deeds. Similarly, if it is ill will towards oneself, Metta sees more than one's own faults, can understand one's own faults, and finds the courage to forgive them, learn from their lesson and let them go. Then, if it is ill will towards the meditation object (often the reason why a meditator cannot find peace) Metta embraces the meditation object with care and delight. For example, just as a mother has a natural Metta towards her child, so a meditator can look on their breath, say, with the very same quality of caring attention. Then it will be just as unlikely to lose the breath through forgetfulness as it is unlikely for a mother to forget her baby in the shopping mall, and it would be just as improbable to drop the breath for some distracting thought as it is for a distracted mother to drop her baby! When ill will is overcome, it allows lasting relationships with other people, with oneself and, in meditation, a lasting, enjoyable relationship with the meditation object, one that can mature into the full embrace of absorption.

3. Sloth and torpor refers to that heaviness of body and dullness of mind which drag one down into disabling inertia and thick depression. The Lord Buddha compared it to being imprisoned in a cramped, dark cell, unable to move freely in the bright sunshine outside. In meditation, it causes weak and intermittent mindfulness which can even lead to falling asleep in meditation without even realising it!

Sloth and torpor is overcome by rousing energy. Energy is always available but few know how to turn on the switch, as it were. Setting a goal, a reasonable goal, is a wise and effective way to generate energy, as is deliberately developing interest in the task at hand. A young child has a natural interest, and consequent energy, because its world is so new. Thus, if one can learn to look at one's life, or one's meditation, with a 'beginner's mind' one can see ever new angles and fresh possibilities which keep one distant from sloth and torpor, alive and energetic. Similarly, one can develop delight in whatever one is doing by training one's perception to see the beautiful in the ordinary, thereby generating the interest which avoids the half-death that is sloth and torpor.

The mind has two main functions, 'doing' and 'knowing'. The way of meditation is to calm the 'doing' to complete tranquillity while maintaining the 'knowing'. Sloth and torpor occur when one carelessly calms both the 'doing' and the 'knowing', unable to distinguish between them.

Sloth and torpor is a common problem which can creep up and smother one slowly. A skilful meditator keeps a sharp look-out for the first signs of sloth and torpor and is thus able to spot its approach and take evasive action before it's too late. Like coming to a fork in a road, one can take that mental path leading away from sloth and torpor. Sloth and torpor is an unpleasant state of body and mind, too stiff to leap into the bliss of Jhana and too blinded to spot any insights. In short, it is a complete waste of precious time.

4. Restlessness refers to a mind which is like a monkey, always swinging on to the next branch, never able to stay long with anything. It is caused by the fault-finding state of mind which cannot be satisfied with things as they are, and so has to move on to the promise of something better, forever just beyond.

The Lord Buddha compared restlessness to being a slave, continually having to jump to the orders of a tyrannical boss who always demands perfection and so never lets one stop.

Restlessness is overcome by developing contentment, which is the opposite of fault-finding. One learns the simple joy of being satisfied with little, rather than always wanting more. One is grateful for this moment, rather than picking out its deficiencies. For instance, in meditation restlessness is often the impatience to move quickly on to the next stage. The fastest progress, though is achieved by those who are content with the stage they are on now.

It is the deepening of that contentment that ripens into the next stage. So be careful of 'wanting to get on with it' and instead learn how to rest in appreciative contentment. That way, the 'doing' disappears and the meditation blossoms.

Remorse refers to a specific type of restlessness which is the kammic effect of one's misdeeds. The only way to overcome remorse, the restlessness of a bad conscience, is to purify one's virtue and become kind, wise and gentle. It is virtually impossible for the immoral or the self indulgent to make deep progress in meditation.

5. Doubt refers to the disturbing inner questions at a time when one should be silently moving deeper. Doubt can question one's own ability "Can I do This?", or question the method "Is this the right way?", or even question the meaning "What is this?". It should be remembered that such questions are obstacles to meditation because they are asked at the wrong time and thus become an intrusion, obscuring one's clarity.

The Lord Buddha likened doubt to being lost in a desert, not recognising any landmarks.

Such doubt is overcome by gathering clear instructions, having a good map, so that one can recognise the subtle landmarks in the unfamiliar territory of deep meditation and so know which way to go. Doubt in one's ability is overcome by nurturing self confidence with a good teacher. A meditation teacher is like a coach who convinces the sports team that they can succeed. The Lord Buddha stated that one can, one will, reach Jhana and Enlightenment if one carefully and patiently follows the instructions. The only uncertainty is 'when!' Experience also overcomes doubt about one's ability and also doubt whether this is the right path. As one realised for oneself the beautiful stages of the path, one discovers that one is indeed capable of the very highest, and that this is the path that leads one there.

The doubt that takes the form of constant assessing "Is this Jhana?" "How am I going?", is overcome by realising that such questions are best left to the end, to the final couple of minutes of the meditation. A jury only makes its judgement at the end of the trial, when all the evidence has been presented. Similarly, a skilful meditator pursues a silent gathering of evidence, reviewing it only at the end to uncover its meaning.

The end of doubt, in meditation, is described by a mind which has full trust in the silence, and so doesn't interfere with any inner speech. Like having a good chauffeur, one sits silently on the journey out of trust in the driver.

Any problem which arises in meditation will be one of these Five Hindrances, or a combination. So, if one experiences any difficulty, use the scheme of the Five Hindrances as a 'check list' to identify the main problem. Then you will know the appropriate remedy, apply it carefully, and go beyond the obstacle into deeper meditation.

When the Five Hindrances are fully overcome, there is no barrier between the meditator and the bliss of Jhana. Therefore, the certain test that these Five Hindrances are really overcome is the ability to access Jhana.

Ajahn Brahmavamso

Buddhist Society of Western Australia

Newsletter April 1999

The 10 Fetters

Guest Author - Jeanette Stingley

Fetter usually refers to something that binds the body such as handcuffs or ropes. This is one way to think about the fetters of Buddhism. Fetters are things that bind us to the cycle of samsara (the cycle of endless suffering). Being aware of these fetters can help you overcome them and find enlightenment. Some teachers may refer to these also as the 10 Hindrances to Enlightenment.

The ten fetters according to the Pali cannon are:

1. Belief in permanent self
2. Doubt of the teachings or Dharma of the Buddha
3. Attachment to rites and rituals – Religious rites and rituals should not be taken as a guarantee to spiritual progress. In other words, just because you go through the actions of a purification ritual doesn't mean it helped along your path.
4. Sensual desire
5. Ill will or hatred
6. Craving for the world of archetypal forms
7. Lust for immaterial existence
8. Pride in self, conceit, arrogance
9. Restlessness, distraction
10. Ignorance

It is said that if one can break the first three fetters achieves a state of Stream Entry. This person enters a stream, which is to carry him to Nirvana. A person who is able to break all 10 achieves enlightenment.

The Pali canon traditionally describes cutting through the fetters in four stages:

- one cuts the first three fetters to be a "stream enterer";
- one cuts the first three fetters and significantly weakens the next two fetters to be a "once returner";
- one cuts the first five fetters to be a "non-returner";
- one cuts all ten fetters to be an arahant.

Cutting through the fetters can take a short time of days, months or a few years. It can also take decades possibly a few lifetimes to achieve this and reach the stage of Nirvana.

Source: <http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art37690.asp>

Five Faculties

Insight Meditation South Bay

www.imsb.org

Five Faculties (*indriyas*)

Key ideas

- The Five Faculties (*indriya*) exert a controlling influence on the mind in two ways:
 1. Keeping it balanced. Faith and Wisdom balance each other; Energy and Concentration balance each other; the strength of Mindfulness determines the refinement of the balance.
 2. Keeping it from falling prey to the opposites of the faculties: faithlessness, indolence, heedlessness, agitation, and ignorance.
- When developed to the point of becoming “unshakeable” in light of their opposites, these same qualities are called *The Five Powers (bala)*.
- Heedfulness underlies the development of the Five Faculties.
- These Five Faculties are sometimes called Controlling Faculties or Spiritual Faculties.
- The Five Faculties are developed at every stage of the practice and lead to enlightenment.

The Five Faculties	Balancing View	Developmental View	Function on the Path
Faith (<i>saddhā</i>) Also translated as conviction, trust, or confidence	Excessive faith leads to credulity; it is balanced by wisdom	Conviction in the efficacy of the practice and teachings of the Buddha, confidence in the worthiness of the goal. Trust in the lawful unfolding of cause and effect. <i>This leads to...</i>	
Energy (<i>virīya</i>) Also translated as effort, strength	Excessive energy leads to restlessness; it is balanced by concentration	Putting effort into practice. Skillful effort is neither too lax nor too rigid. <i>This leads to...</i>	
Mindfulness (<i>saṭi</i>)	Mindfulness balances the development of all the faculties and harmonizes their integration	Clear awareness. The capacity to be aware of what is present without distorting interpretations. <i>This leads to...</i>	
Concentration (<i>samādhi</i>)	Excessive concentration leads to dullness; it is balanced by energy	Undistracted focus and unification of mind. <i>This leads to...</i>	
Wisdom (<i>paññā</i>) Also translated as discrimination, discernment	Excessive wisdom makes the mind cunning and skeptical; it is balanced by faith	Direct discernment of things as they are actually occurring; attainment of the goal	
			Initial impetus to practice (Right View)
			Factors of the training (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration) that support meditative development
			Insight that confirms the initial Faith, transforming it into Knowledge (Right View).

What are the Seven Factors of Enlightenment in Buddhism?

Attaining enlightenment, awakening or Nirvana is the Buddhist goal and Buddhists strive to attain this goal by leading a life filled with compassion, loving-kindness, meditation and by daily Buddhist practice. The factors of enlightenment, according to Daniel M. Ingram, "might be regarded as a pyramid with mindfulness at the base and each factor supporting and helping the other."

Here is an explanation of the seven factors of Buddhist enlightenment and how the factors combine to enable a Buddhist to experience enlightenment or nirvana.

What Does Enlightenment Mean in Buddhism

Buddhism teaches [enlightenment](#), nirvana or awakening. It aims to awaken the human soul and inspire it to take charge, to be responsible for life and to live a moral and humane existence.

Simply put, enlightenment in Buddhism means awakening to the Four Noble Truths and living a life filled with compassion and loving-kindness, free of negativity and hatred and based on the Dharma.

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Piyadassi Thera in the Seven Factors of Enlightenment explains how the Buddha stressed the importance of the seven factors or Bojjhanga (Bodh-enlightenment and anga- limbs or factors) in achieving nirvana in a discourse to monks. Thera writes, "Further says the Buddha, '... the monk who cultivates and makes much of the seven factors of wisdom, slopes to Nibbana, inclines to Nibbana, tends to Nibbana.'"

The seven factors are mindfulness, investigation of the dharma, energy or effort, happiness, calm, concentration and equanimity. In Pali, the factors will be sati, dhammavicaya, viriya, piti, passaddhi, samadhi and upekkha. Each factor helps the other while playing an independent, important role of its own as well in the attainment of Nirvana or enlightenment. According to Piyadassi Thera, references to the Buddhist factors of enlightenment fill the Tripitaka or Tipitaka.

Understanding the Factors of Enlightenment

Mindfulness or **sati** is the first factor of enlightenment. Mindfulness is not a passive practice; rather it is an active tool of self-mastery. Being aware and mindful of one's actions, words and thoughts is central to Buddhist practice. The distinction between good and evil or bad can be made only when a Buddhist practices such mindfulness at every waking moment.

Dhammavicaya or **keen investigation** of the Dharma or Truth is the second factor of enlightenment. Understanding the true nature of everything or seeing things as they are is the essence the second factor. The [Buddha](#) constantly encouraged his followers to question and investigate rather than accept submissive and in blind faith. In fact, Piyadassi Thera writes, "Buddhism is free from compulsion and coercion and does not demand of the follower blind faith. At the very outset, the skeptic will be pleased to hear of its call for investigation."

Energy or **viriya** is the third factor, which essentially means a constant zeal and enthusiasm for life. It means not being morally or spiritually exhausted. [Buddhism](#) emphasizes an active, energetic approach to life and living. In other words, Buddhism encourages its followers to take action to bring about change in their lives and not rely on external factors or unseen forces to make a difference.

Rapture or **piti** is the fourth factor, which like energy, is a mental factor and emphasizes a content and happy personality. When one is mindful, has understood the dharma, is energetic and taking action, happiness is bound to follow.

Calm or **passaddhi** is the fifth factor and signifies a calm body and mind. Ingram writes, "Joy, bliss and rapture can produce tranquility."

Concentration or **samadhi** is the sixth factor of enlightenment and emphasizes a unified mind. Tranquil minds are, therefore, minds fit to concentrate. Thera writes, "One who is intent on Samadhi should develop a love or virtue or sila, for it is virtue that nourishes mental life, and makes it coherent and calm, equable and full of rich content." There are according to Buddhism five hindrances that block concentration: sensual desires, ill-will, anxiety, obduracy and doubt.

Equanimity or **upekkha** is the seventh factor. It means a neutral or balanced attitude. Equanimity is not akin to indifference or passivity. Rather it is the ability to stay poised and calm in the midst of changing conditions, ups and downs, and peace and turmoil. It is easy to be so calm when one has already established the other six factors in one's life.

Leading a life based on these seven factors of enlightenment is essential to Buddhism. Balance is important since all the seven factors are equally important. As Ingram writes, "To balance and perfect the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, you guessed it, is sufficient cause for awakening." Therefore, Buddhists can experience enlightenment or Nirvana by consciously and constantly cultivating the seven factors.

Source: <http://www.suite101.com/content/what-are-the-seven-factors-of-enlightenment-in-buddhism-a239460>

The Jhanas

For a detailed article on the Jhanas, go to:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/gunaratana/wheel351.html>