

Intro to Buddhism in the US

Week 6: Methods of meditation

The Center at Belvedere
Charlottesville, VA

Link to extended readings and slides:<https://parusanalytics.com/introbud2023/week-six.html>

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Table 2. Types of meditation practices reported.

Type of practice	Dominant (% of sample)	Lifetime (% of sample)	At onset (% of sample)
concentration (<i>śamatha</i> , mindfulness of breathing, breath counting)	30 (50%)	57 (95%)	20 (33%)
insight (<i>vipassanā</i> , noting, open monitoring)	27 (45%)	48 (80%)	20 (33%)
body scan (including Goenka <i>vipassanā</i>)	4 (7%)	33 (55%)	5 (8%)
other insight practice (analytical meditation)	2 (3%)	25 (42%)	1 (2%)
<i>zazen</i> : breath counting	9 (15%)	28 (47%)	9 (15%)
<i>zazen</i> : "just sitting" (<i>shikantaza</i>)	12 (20%)	30 (50%)	8 (13%)
<i>kōan</i>	6 (10%)	15 (25%)	3 (5%)
loving kindness (<i>mettā</i>) or compassion	6 (10%)	49 (82%)	2 (3%)
<i>tonglen</i>	1 (2%)	28 (47%)	0 (0%)
nature of mind practice (<i>dzogchen</i> , <i>mahāmudrā</i>)	6 (10%)	28 (47%)	4 (7%)
Vajrayāna preliminary practices (<i>ngondro</i>)	5 (8%)	19 (32%)	8 (13%)
visualization practices	5 (8%)	20 (33%)	7 (12%)
mantra recitation	1 (2%)	25 (42%)	1 (2%)
other	3 (5%)	9 (15%)	8 (13%)

"Dominant" refers to the top two most frequently practiced types of meditation in the practitioner's lifetime. "Lifetime" refers to the types of meditation reported as being practiced during the practitioner's lifetime. Because most practitioners engaged in multiple types of meditation during the lifetime, the total percentage exceeds 100%. "At onset" refers to the top two most frequently practiced types of meditation around the onset of meditation-related challenges or difficulties. See [S3 File](#) for dataset.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0176239.t002>



B. Alan Wallace. *The Attention Revolution* (2006)

Two Christian reflections

“This magnificent refuge is inside you. Enter. Shatter the darkness that shrouds the doorway. Be bold. Be humble. Put away the incense and forget the incantations they taught you. Ask no permission from the authorities. Close your eyes and follow your breath to the still place that leads to the invisible path that leads you home.”

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), *The Interior Castle*

Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou will feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord.

George Fox

(1624-1691)

A couple more interesting quotes

So long as one does not become simple like a child, one does not get divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge you have acquired, and become as a child, and then you will get the divine wisdom.

Ramakrishna (1836-1886)

Ramakrishna was originally from a Vedic (Hindu) tradition but developed interests in Sufi and Christian mysticism. He is best known as the guru to Swami Vivekananda (1869-1902) who would become hugely important/influential thanks to the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, for many in the West the first introduction to South Asian approaches, and in 1894 founding the Vedanta Society in NYC which then spread more generally in the US

As British scholar Peter Harvey puts it in *An Introduction to Buddhism*:

"Learning meditation is a skill akin to learning to play a musical instrument: it is learning how to "tune" and "play" the mind, and regular, patient practice is the means to this. Progress will not occur if one is lax, but it cannot be forced. For this reason, meditation practice is also like gardening: one cannot force plants to grow, but one can assiduously provide them with the right conditions, so that they develop naturally. For meditation, the "right conditions" are the appropriate application of mind and of the specific technique being used."

<https://www.lionsroar.com/10-steps-to-tame-the-elephant/>

Altered states of consciousness

- Sleep
- Dreams
 - Freud, Jung
 - lucid dreaming
- Flow: [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) (muh·hay·lee chik·sent·mee·hai·ee)
- Peak experience: Maslow
 - "...a highly valued experience which is characterized by such intensity of perception, depth of feeling, or sense of profound significance as to cause it to stand out, in the subject's mind, in more or less permanent contrast to the experiences that surround it in time and space."⁴
- Psychedelics, shaministic states

Hypothesis: Post-preparatory exoteric Buddhism generally follows a single path—monkey-elephant/vipassana-samatha—and three minor ones (metta, jhana and lucid dreaming)

Mind altering substances

Michael Pollan. *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (2018)

Socially normative: caffeine, nicotine (in the past), alcohol, cannabis (now), [coca, qat, opium]

Modern narcotics: heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, long list of painkillers

Natural psychedelics: peyote/mescaline, magic mushrooms/psilocybin, ayahuasca/DMT

Modern psychedelics: LSD, DMT, MDMA/ecstasy, ketamine (maybe: opinions differ...)

Setting: sensory deprivation, sensory overload, dance, assorted clever stimuli

Vocabulary list

Theravadan

vipassana

samatha

metta

MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction
Jon Kabat-Zinn

jhana

sunyata (emptiness)

Nagarjuna

Zen

shikantaza

koan

Tibetan

ngondro (preliminary meditations)

dzogchen/ rigpa

tonglen

A couple more links

<https://wisdomexperience.org/wisdom-podcast/126-jetsunma-tenzin-palmo/> [podcast: assorted reflections on contemporary practice]

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/emptiness-most-misunderstood-word-in-buddhism_b_2769189 [article: just what it says]