

Dhyana (Meditation)

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This article deals with Bauddha Dhyanasiddhiprakarana (The Procedure for Achieving Success in Buddhist Meditation). In this article, I am striving to present the essence of Dharma (Dharma-Dhatu) in my own way. Although my family has its ancestral roots in Chittagong (Chattagram – in Bengali), Bangladesh and, naturally, follows Theravada Buddhism, I am trying to be as comprehensive as possible in my exposition of the Dharma. Sanskrit has been used as the default classical language of this article. Pali has also been extensively used and Chinese, Japanese and Korean have been used, where appropriate. Diacritical marks have been omitted as some knowledge of Sanskrit and Pali on the part of the reader is assumed.

Buddhism, a major world faith, was founded by Lord Buddha in India over two thousand five hundred years ago. It has spread peacefully over much of Asia and also to Kalmykia in eastern Europe and has millions of adherents in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, China (including Tibet), Taiwan, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and also in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia and Russia (Buryatia and Tuva in Siberia and Kalmykia in eastern Europe). The northern extremity of Buddhism in Asia is the Ivolga Monastery in Siberia, Russia. This article is an exposition of Buddhism and in it, the word “faith” is used as a synonym of the word “religion”. Buddhism is also called Saddharma (the true faith) or Dharma.

The Sanskrit word “Dharma” literally means “Property”. For example, one says that the Dharma of fire is to burn. This means that the property of fire is to burn. The fire cannot be separated from its capacity to burn. Similarly, the literal meaning of Dharma (Dhamma – in Pali, Fa – in Chinese, Ho – in Japanese) of man is the basic property of man from which he cannot be separated. This means the spirituality inherent in man.

The objective of Buddhism is Nirvana (liberation, Nibbana – in Pali, Gedatsu – in Japanese) and Bodhi (Enlightenment, P'u-ti – in Chinese, Bodai – in Japanese). The word Buddhi means intellect and the word Bodha means to understand; it is from these words that the word Bodhi is derived. Who is it that seeks Nirvana, Bodhi, and to understand? It is “I” (Aham), who is writing right now. Understanding sharpens me, refines me, contextualises me, and keeps me on the path to Bodhi and Nirvana. I shall have an opportunity to delve deeply into the issue of “I” in Buddhism later. Deep understanding (Anubodha) is the context of Bodhi, and Nirvana. Rephrasing Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism, Shunyata (emptiness, Sunnata – in Pali, K'ung – in Chinese, Ku – in Japanese) is the absence of ignorance. Avidya Paramam Malam (Avijja Paramam Malam – in Pali, Ignorance is the greatest impurity) is what Lord Buddha said. Nagarjuna can be further re-interpreted to give to me the understanding that Nirvana is not only available for a man in Samsara (empirical and phenomenal world) but, as I am immersed in Samsara, it is only possible within it, subject to the condition that the Arya Ashtanga Marga (Noble Eightfold Path) is rigorously followed. The conclusion Nagarjuna reached, in his seminal work Mula Madhyamaka Karika, is that all things lack a fixed essence (Swabhava, Sabhava – in Pali, Zi-xing – in Chinese) or a fixed individual character (Swalakshana) and that is why they are amenable to change. In other words, change is possible only if entities are devoid or empty (Shunya) of Swabhava. The Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism split into the Prasangika Madhyamika (as represented by Chandrakirti) and the Swatantrika Madhyamika (as represented by Bhavaviveka). The adherents of Prasangika Madhyamika believed that adherents of the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism need not have any independent thesis of their own while the adherents of the Swatantrika Madhyamika believed that adherents of the Madhyamika school of school of Mahayana Buddhism need to have an independent thesis of their own - hence the word Swatantrika, from the word Swatantra meaning independent. Buddhism has two main branches, Theravada and Mahayana, the difference between the two will be explained in due course.

Man's quest for an end to his suffering (Duhkha, Dukkha – in Pali) has led him into an exploration of his inner self (Wo – in Chinese), its working and its dysfunctional behaviour under certain circumstances. Under such conditions, a radical shift in consciousness, perception and attitude is the only succour for a tormented mind (Chitta, Manas, Hsin or Xin – in Chinese, Kokoro – in Japanese). This process, involving the destruction of suffering, is based on the Four Noble Truths (Chaturaryasatya, Chattari Ariyasachchani – in Pali) enunciated by Lord Buddha which are as follows:

1. Life contains suffering. (Duhkha-Aryasatya, Dukkha-Ariyasachcha – in Pali)
2. Suffering has a cause, and the cause can be known. (Duhkha Samudaya-Aryasatya, Dukkha Samudaya-Ariyasachcha – in Pali)
3. Suffering can be brought to an end. (Duhkha Nirodha-Aryasatya, Dukkha Nirodha-Ariyasachcha – in Pali)
4. The path to end suffering has eight parts. (Marga-Aryasatya, Magga-Ariyasachcha – in Pali)

Lord Buddha also laid out the Noble Eightfold Path (Arya Ashtanga Marga, Ariya Atthangika Magga – in Pali). The Noble Eightfold Path is given below:

- Right view (Samyak Dristi, Samma Ditthi – in Pali)
- Right intention (Samyak Sankalpa, Samma Sankappa – in Pali)
- Right speech (Samyak Vakya, Samma Vacha – in Pali)
- Right action (Samyak Karma, Samma Kammanta – in Pali)
- Right livelihood (Samyak Jivika, Samma Ajiva – in Pali)
- Right effort (Samyak Vyayama, Samma Vayama – in Pali)

- Right mindfulness (Samyak Smriti, Samma Sati – in Pali)
- Right concentration (Samyak Samadhi, Samma Samadhi – in Pali)

This Path is also known as The Middle Path (Madhyama Pratipada, Majjhima Patipada – in Pali) because it is neither too easy nor too difficult. The first five parts of the Path involve maintaining a lifestyle full of virtue (Shila, Sila – in Pali) while the last three pertain to the practice (Patipatti – in Pali) of meditation. The Path is called The Way (Tao – in Chinese, Do, Michi – in Japanese) in the Far East. The practice of meditation lies at the heart of the spiritual practice of Dharmic (spiritual) people. To be a Buddhist means to distinguish between Buddhist and non-Buddhist acts, between ignorance and Enlightenment, between Samsara and Nirvana. Pancha Shila is for householders; Ashta Shila is for householders practising Brahmacharya, that is celibacy; and Dasha Shila is for monks.

According to Lord Buddha, man is his own master. “Atta hi attano natho” are the exact words of Lord Buddha. He also said “Atmadvipa viharatha, atmasharana ananyasharana” meaning “Dwell making yourself your island (that is refuge), and not anyone else as your refuge”. Man is however unaware of this fact and abdicates his responsibility of controlling his future, even death. This is so because man is, in a deep philosophical sense, deluded (Mohagrasta), asleep and unaware of his true nature. He normally identifies himself with his body, which was born and hence will die, some day. This gives rise to vices, insecurity and belief in that what is not. Man lives in illusions (Moha); the illusion that he will never fall sick, the illusion that no harm will ever befall him. He also believes that he has relatives and friends and, if he clings onto them tightly enough, he will one day, after death, go to the nebulous place called heaven. But it is not true. The lacuna in man's thinking becomes disturbingly clear to him when he finds that he is suffering. When a man suffers, the world seems to collapse around him. Man needs to be awakened and when this awakening process is complete, man will rise from the ashes of the world of the senses that he has just burnt to the world of pure consciousness. Buddhism is a journey where a man starts asleep and ends up awake. In doing so, he sheds aside nothingness to awaken to a single state of Being. The process by which this takes place is meditation.

Lord Buddha's title means one who is awake. He is the messiah who showed the path to eternity. Lord Buddha gave His teaching “for the good of many, for the happiness of many, for showing compassion to the world” (Bahujanahitaya, Bahujanasukhaya, Lokanukampaya). He told man that though he is asleep, the capacity to be awakened is in him and also taught man the path to awakening. But man must walk that path himself, alone. Man must realise that he is always alone, whether it be high atop the mountains, in the company of his relatives or in the morning crowd in the downtown of a metropolitan city. A positive attitude to aloneness can develop in man when he can take a mental sword and cleave a distinction between aloneness and loneliness. Loneliness has a negative connotation in the sense that it implies a craving for company of other human beings, the exact opposite of the self-sufficiency implied by aloneness. The capacity to tread the path to Nirvana is already in man, he just has to use it. In the Dharmachakrapravartana Sutra (Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta - in Pali), Lord Buddha said that Nirvana is not subject to grief, defilement (Klesha, Kilesa – in Pali, Bonno - in Japanese), disease (Vyadhi), decay (Jara), and death (Mrityu, Marana). In other words, Nirvana is beyond cause and effect, that is, it transcends conditioned phenomena. Lord Buddha also said “Nirvanam Paramam Sukham”. Nirvana is Apratitya-samutpanna and Asamskrita (unconditioned, Apatichcha-samuppanna and Asankhata – in Pali, Wu-yin – in Chinese) and, according to Vasubandhu of the Yogachara (the practice of Yoga) school of Mahayana Buddhism, is the Parinishpanna Swabhava (true self-nature of Being, Zhen-shi-xing – in Chinese). It is interesting to note that in the Lankavatara Sutra, a Mahayana Sutra associated with the Yogachara school, Nirvana is described as the seeing of everything as it is. Nirvana is a positive Absolute and is Nitya (without beginning and end, Nicca – in Pali). Nirvana means a state of Mukti (Mutti – in Pali) which means freedom or Vimukti (Vimutti – in Pali) which

means absolute freedom. Nirvana also denotes Satya (Sacca – in Pali) which means Truth and Shanti (Santi – in Pali) which means Peace. A synonym for Nirvana is Moksha (liberation, Mokkha – in Pali). Nirvana is a state of absolute perfection. Shariputra, the famous historical disciple of Lord Buddha, described Nirvana as the extinction of desire, hatred and illusion. In mystical language, Nirvana is the experience of standing face-to-face with Reality (Shi – in Chinese). Nirvana is equated with Bodhi and is the Paramartha-Satya. The Heart Mantra of Bodhi according to the Mahavairochana Sutra (Dainichi-kyo - in Japanese) is A and in the same text the Heart Mantra of Nirvana is given is AH. In this Mahayana text, therefore a difference between Bodhi and Nirvana is indicated. Nirvana is sometimes expressed as negative of negative such as the cessation of suffering, of craving, of aversion, etc. This need not result in any confusion. In Sanskrit, sometimes positive things are expressed as negatives of negatives as the word “Arogya” which means recuperation from illness and the word “Amrita” which means immortal. Further, as mathematics proves, negative of negative is always positive. Nirvana is a freeing from the chains of a false sense of individuality. Nirvana is a state of non-duality (Advaita or Advaya); a state where the illusion of a false sense of “I” (Parikalpita Swabhava, Fen-bie-xing – in Chinese) does not exist. Expressed differently, liberation from the illusion of separateness of the individual Self from the Whole is Nirvana. Freedom is, Nirvana is, Truth is.

According to Buddhism, everything is relative and impermanent (Anitya, Anicca – in Pali) in the empirical, conditioned world. Lord Buddha told Rashtapala “The world is in continuous flux and is impermanent”. In this context, I can correctly say that one cannot step twice into the same river because although I may continue to see the same river externally from a gross point of view, the water molecules I am seeing at a particular location at any moment are different from the water molecules the moment before and the moment after. One thing disappears, conditioning the appearance of the next in a series of cause and effect. Everything is in a state of becoming something else the next moment. A wheel cannot be separated from its movement. There is no static wheel “behind” the wheel in motion. Things change over time. Everything originates dependent on other factors. That is, all things come into existence as the result (Phala) of an interaction of various causes (Hetu) and conditions (Pratyaya) Sometimes, the conditions are called "co-operating conditions" (Sahakari-pratyaya). Each entity is Pratitya-samutpanna (conditioned, Patichcha-samuppanna – in Pali) as well as Pratitya-samutpada (conditioning, Patichcha-samuppada – in Pali). The Law of Dependent Origination is central to Buddhism. For example, anger cannot arise by itself without a cause. The five aggregates, Rupa, Vedana, Sangya, Samskara and Vigyana (Rupa, Vedana, Sanna, Sankhara and Vinnana - in Pali), all of which are identified as Anatma (non-Soul) by Lord Buddha in the Anatmalakshana Sutra, are called the Pancha Skandha (the five aggregates, Pancha Khandha – in Pali). Sensations (Vedana) of the physical world of forms (Rupa) are received by the five physical sense organs (Indriya) such as the nose. The mind feels the mental world. The five physical sense organs and the mind are called the six sensory bases. Sensations lead to perceptions (Sangya), which in turn lead through predispositions (Samskara), to consciousness (Vigyana). In Theravada Buddhism, the concept of Bhavanga (stream of thought) is introduced while in the Yogachara school of Mahayana Buddhism, the concept of Alaya-Vigyana (literally, the abode of consciousness, but commonly translated as store-consciousness) is introduced. The Mahasanghika school adhered to the concept of Mula-Vigyana (Fundamental Consciousness). The Alaya-Vigyana (Ariyashiki – in Japanese), which maintains the continuum of consciousness, is the mind; hence this school is also called the Chittamatratavada school. Other names of the same school are Agamanuyayi Vigyanavada and Vigyaptimatratavada. The Vigyanavada school is further divided into the Nirakaravadi Vigyanavada (as represented by Asanga) and the Sakaravadi Vigyanavada (as represented by Gyanashri Mitra). The fundamental concept of the Yogachara (Wei Shi – in Chinese, Yuishiki – in Japanese) school may be expressed by the proposition that the Parinishpanna Swabhava is realised when man pierces (Patibheda) through his Parikalpita Swabhava and Paratantra Swabhava (conditioned self-nature, Yi-ta-xing – in Chinese). The Alaya-

Vigyana, as conceived in Mahayana Buddhism, is a permanent entity. The Alaya-Vigyana contains all impressions of past actions and all future potentialities. It is also the Tathagatagarbha (Buddha-Matrix, Ru-lai-zang – in Chinese, Nyoraizo – in Japanese), the basis on which a man can become a Buddha. So, latent in every man is a Buddha-like faculty called Buddha-Dhatu (Buddha-Nature, Fo-hsing or Fo-xing – in Chinese). Right meditation leads to spiritual Enlightenment, which is nothing but the full manifestation of the Buddha-Dhatu (or Tathagata-Dhatu) in man. Thus, any man can develop himself through appropriate practice, that is meditation, and become a Buddha. Anyway, for an average man, the summation of all physical and mental processes, processes in constant flux, is perceived empirically as “I”. The empirical “I” is ephemeral and impermanent, and is Samvriti-Satya (conventional truth). Conscious of something, one reacts mentally. The mental reactions are of two types : craving and aversion. Craving (Trishna, Tanha – in Pali, Raga, Lobha – in Pali) and aversion (Dvesha, Dosa – in Pali) both lead to suffering; it is self-evident that aversion results in suffering and craving results in suffering because if the object of craving remains out of reach, there is suffering. Thus, ultimately, whatever is impermanent is Duhkha or suffering. Trishna Nirodha, Upadana (clinging) Nirodha (With the extinction of craving comes the extinction of clinging). The renowned sage Buddhaghosa, the writer of the Visuddhimagga (Vishuddhi Marga, The Path of Purification), has dwelt elaborately on suffering. Taking the lead from Nagarjuna, I posit that Duhkha is transient; it arises dependent on something else and also decays into extinction. Duhkha is not self-determining; its existence and character are attributable to factors that condition its origin and subsequent transformation. Coming into existence and dying out of existence, Duhkha lacks any trace of permanence. Thus, it may be said that Duhkha lacks a Swabhava or Swalakshana and is characterised by Nihswabhava (absence of Self-Nature). Thus Duhkha is empty (Shunya). I am, therefore, led to formulate the proposition: Duhkhameva Shunyam. Because Duhkha is ephemeral, I can expand the Sanskrit sentence to this: Duhkhameva Anityam evam Shunyam The perception of the emptiness of Duhkha allows one to let go of Duhkha and thus be released of the hold that Duhkha has on him. This is, of course, intended as a Mahayana Buddhist theoretical complement to Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation and is in no way a substitute for Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation. I also hold that the notion of Buddha-Dhatu is a very productive concept. Any meditator's meditation is bound to become better if he remembers during meditating that he has Buddha-Dhatu in him.

It may be mentioned, at this stage, that practitioners who are extremely advanced spiritually are called by the name Arhat (Arahant – in Pali, A-han – in Chinese, Arakan, Rakan – in Japanese) in Theravada Buddhism and Bodhisattva (Bodhisatta – in Pali, Bosatsu – in Japanese), or aspirants to Buddhahood (Buddhatva, or as is rather more commonly termed Buddhata) in Mahayana Buddhism. A Bodhisattva is any man who has taken a vow to follow the path to Buddhatva taking all other sentient beings with him. A monk (Bhikshu, Bhikkhu – in Pali) and a lay disciple (Upasaka) are both Bodhisattvas. Sattva means a sentient being.

In response to questioning by devotees in the kingdom of Kosala as to the importance or unimportance of belief, Lord Buddha pointed out the distinction between knowing and believing. Believing always connotes a second-hand approach to Truth; knowing about something through the experience of someone else. Knowing means a first-hand direct knowledge of Truth and the result of this distinction is that the modicum of doubt that always accompanies belief is absent in knowledge (Gyana). Freedom of thought is permitted by Lord Buddha to His devotees so that they can discriminate and find Truth. Nirvana cannot be had via someone else's knowledge. A contemporary scholar Kazuaki Tanahashi describes an incident in Japan where a Buddhist monk illustrated to his disciples the power of what might be called “positive emptiness” in the mind. A void in the mind can be filled with spirituality by virtue of positive thinking. A Korean monk, Kyong Ho, echoed this feeling when he advised one to accept the anxieties and difficulties of this life. He also advised people to use their will

to bring peace between peoples. This is particularly relevant in the modern world where democracy and egalitarianism are taken for granted. The great Japanese Zen Buddhist monk Dogen said that Samadhi (which is a transcendental state of mind) led to Enlightenment of those who found Enlightenment in India and China. Buddhism also strongly believes in the theory (Pariyapti, Pariyatti – in Pali) of Karma (as you sow, so shall you reap) and in the concept of rebirth. Lord Buddha said “Monks, I say that volition is action. Having thought, one acts through body, speech and mind.” (Chetana 'ham bhikkhave kammam vadami. Chetayitva kammam karoti kayena vachaya manasa. – in Pali). Body (Kaya Vajra), Speech (Vak Vajra)and Mind (Chitta Vajra) are called Tri Vajra in a certain school of Mahayana Buddhism (Vajra can mean both thunderbolt and diamond). There are two types of Karma, Kushala Karma (Kusala Kamma – in Pali) or good actions and Akushala Karma or bad actions. Kushala Karma is Dharmic while Akushala Karma is Adharmic. The result of both types of Karma are called Karma Phala, which correspond to the type of Karma performed.

He searched, He meditated, He found: this aptly summarises the awakening of Lord Buddha. When a man suffers, it is useless for him to talk of God, or to fast and otherwise to torture his body if his suffering is not reduced by any or all of these. Lord Buddha realised this fact and after His awakening taught the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Meditation is one form of mental culture (Bhavana). In meditation, what is required of man is to effect a radical shift in consciousness from the finite to the infinite using right concentration. Concentration is called Chittaikagrata in Sanskrit (Chittekaggata – in Pali). The concentrated focus is always on the elimination of suffering. The law of cause and effect is at work here too. If one is deluded, one suffers. If one studies the Four Noble Truths, one sees that man should identify the cause of suffering and systematically go about destroying it using the Noble Eightfold Path. The result of meditation is tremendous. One transcends the boundaries of his body; he senses that the entire universe has become his body. He senses that he has exchanged a weak mind for a strong one. He senses that though he may continue to reside in his mortal body, his consciousness has become irreversibly altered. He feels himself being pervaded by peace. He becomes awakened; Prabuddha. Lord Buddha did not give the Dharma for strong wills only; His statements are just as applicable to weaker minds provided they have the determination to follow Him. He asked for nothing more than courage and promised eternity.

An explanation as to the types of meditation in vogue is in order here. Shamatha (Samatha – in Pali) and Vipashyana (Vipassana – in Pali, Kuan or Guan – in Chinese, Kan – in Japanese) or Vidarshana (Pashyana or Darshana means to see in an ordinary way; Vipashyana or Vidarshana means to see in a special way, that is, with Insight) meditation are practised in south Asia and other countries which practice Theravada (meaning, the way of the Elders) Buddhism. Lord Buddha presented the technique of Vipashyana meditation in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta (Mahasmritipratishthana Sutra) / Satipatthana Sutta (Smritipratishthana Sutra). Lord Buddha delivered this Sutra in Kammassadhammam near Delhi. The Mahasatipatthana Sutta is found in the Digha (Dirgha) Nikaya and the Satipatthana Sutta is found in the Majjhima (Madhyama) Nikaya. Zen Buddhist practice is performed in East Asia, that is, in China, North and South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, which are among the countries that practice Mahayana (meaning, the great vehicle) Buddhism. In fact, Zen is one of the eight schools of Mahayana Buddhism. Meditation is something that cannot be fully explained in words, it has to be experienced to be understood completely. Knowing about meditation is one thing; knowing meditation is quite another. A man can sit alone, cross-legged, in a quiet room in the full lotus posture (Padmasana or Dhyanasana or Vajraparyankasana) or, failing that, in the half-lotus posture (Bhadrasana, Ardhavajraparyankasana) and try to enter into Vipashyana meditation (the third posture of sitting is called Sukhasana, literally meaning “the posture that gives happiness”). If one is unable to start doing meditation oneself, one should take the help of a Guru (literally, one who dispels darkness) who will guide him in the initial stages. One must sit, preferably, in the lotus posture with one's spine erect.

There must be no slumping of the back, the head should be straight as if suspended by means of a string. Another analogy adopted is that the head should be straight as if bearing the sky on its top. The hands may be placed in the Bhumisparsha Mudra (Bhumisparsha gesture), a Mudra (Inzo – in Japanese) in which I find so many statues of Lord Buddha. Bhumisparsha literally means “ touching the ground”. This gesture is also called Sakshi (Sanskrit for witness) Mudra or Bhusparsha Mudra (the gesture of touching the earth). Alternatively, a man's hands may be in the cosmic Mudra with the left hand on top of the right, middle joints of middle fingers together and the thumbs touching each other. The hands should be held against the body, with the thumbs at about the height of the navel. This gesture is very popular in East Asia. The Samadhi Mudra consists of the right hand placed on top of the left hand with the tips of the two thumbs touching each other. Yet another Mudra consists of the hands straight, placed on the knees, and the thumb and the next finger touching each other with the other fingers straight. This gesture of the hands is called Gyana Mudra. Other gestures are the Dharmachakra Mudra, Varada Mudra, Abhaya Mudra, Vajrahumkara Mudra and the Samaya Vajra Mudra. The Dharmachakra Mudra can be seen in the famous Sarnath statue of Lord Buddha. This gesture is also called the Bodhyangi or Vyakhyana Mudra. The Varada Mudra is the gesture of giving boon with the right hand while the Abhaya Mudra is the gesture of giving protection with the right hand. The Vajrahumkara Mudra, also called the Trailokyavijaya Mudra, consists of placing both hands crossed over one's chest with the right hand over the left hand and with both the palms facing the chest. A much less common Mudra is the Samaya Vajra Mudra which consists of the right thumb touching the right little finger with the middle three fingers of the right hand suggesting the shape of a thunderbolt. A meditator may also hold a Vajra or a Vishwavajra (crossed Vajra) in his right hand - if he does so, he is called Vajradhara (holder of the Vajra). After one has sat correctly, he must close his eyes and focus on the inhalation and exhalation of his breath (Anapana-smriti or Anapana-sati). Anapana (An-pan – in Chinese) means respiration. There must be no tampering with the natural respiration, a meditator's job is simply to focus his attention on his nostrils and observe the natural flow of breath. Respiration is natural, one has no craving or aversion towards it, it is always in the present (Nitya) and, since one breathes from the moment of one's birth to the moment of one's death, it is in fact a convergence of the past, present and future. Further, it is within the physical framework of the body. Respiration is thus an appropriate object for concentrating the mind, something that is not too easy. The mind does not usually want to stay in the present moment; it resides either in the past or in the future. A little effort is needed to prevent the mind from wandering about. This is called Right Effort. At this stage, there may be strong distractions in the mind that prevent the mind from concentrating. Sometimes these distractions appear to be overwhelming. The effort to focus on respiration should be continued in such cases. The key is never to give up. A learner soon discovers one thing ; meditation is hard work for a beginner. Right Mindfulness, which is mindfulness of breathing, follows Right Effort immediately. Right Concentration leading to Samadhi (San-mei – in Chinese, Sanmai, Zanmai – in Japanese), which is a transcendental state, follows. It may be described by Sat (being), Chit (consciousness) and Ananda (bliss, happiness). Sometimes, in lifting the mind to Samadhi, hurdles appear in the form of distractions in the mind. These distractions may be latent feelings of anger, craving, sadness, and so on. The remedy, in such cases, is to return back to Anapana-sati and try to lift the mind to Samadhi again. Shamatha meditation is an absorptive meditation whose object is to calm the mind. Vipashyana meditation is an analytical meditation. Shamatha meditation may be an end in itself or it may be a prelude to Vipashyana meditation. It is also possible to perform Vipashyana meditation without performing Shamatha meditation first. There are four parts to the practice of Vipashyana meditation. Kaya anupashyana (Kayanupassana - in Pali), Vedana anupashyana (Vedananupassana - in Pali), Chitta anupashyana (Chittanupassana - in Pali), and Dharma anupashyana (Dhammanupassana - in Pali). Anupashyana (Anupassana - in Pali) means to see minutely, that is, to scrutinise Here, Dharma indicates the contents of the mind (Chaitasika, Chetasika – in Pali). Each of the four, Kaya (body), Vedana (sensations), Chitta (mind) and Dharma (mental contents), must be subjected to

Anupashyana. The true nature of all four of these reveal themselves to the meditator and he is able to remove defilement from the innermost recesses of his mind (Anushaya, Anusaya – in Pali). Awareness and equanimity (Upeksha, Upekkha – in Pali), together, symbolise Vipashyana meditation. If either part is missing, one cannot attain Enlightenment. Vipashyana leads to clear insight into the physical and mental structure and thus leads to Bodhi. The complete knowledge of my physical and mental structure is called Sampragyana (Sampajanna – in Pali), if I have it I am called a Sampragya. In some forms of Mahayana Buddhist meditation, meditation on Lord Buddha (Buddhanupashyana) is performed.

Bodhyangas (Bojjhngas – in Pali) are factors contributing to Enlightenment. There are seven Bodhyangas: Smriti (Bojjhngas – in Pali), Dharma-pravichaya (Dhamma-vichaya – in Pali), Virya (courage, Viriya – in Pali), Priti (rapture and bliss, Piti – in Pali), Prashiddhi (deep tranquility and calmness), Samadhi, and Upeksha (Upekkha – in Pali). The Four Sublime States (Brahmavihara) are Maitri (Metta – in Pali), Karuna (compassion), Mudita and Upeksha (Bojjhngas – in Pali). Meditation entails making a conscious and free choice to withdraw from the affairs of the mundane world to pursue spiritual ends; one of the objectives being the subsequent re-establishment of contact with the conditioned world as a purer and wiser man. The decision to meditate is itself an act of freedom. We have, in life, the freedom to pursue an ethical way of living. This freedom leads us to Bodhi and Nirvana and thus sets us free.

Meditation is a pursuit of liberation, realisation is the end result. Post-realisation, one feels that one had been going about with his eyes closed and has now suddenly opened them. In the plane of the senses, his external world does not change but his way of psychologically processing his external world undergoes a drastic change. He becomes more peaceful with himself and with others. An awakened man, possessing an Enlightened mind (Bodhichitta), feels that he is surrounded by peace at all times (the process of developing an Enlightened mind is called Bodhichittodpada). It is important to understand that nobody tells him this; he feels it himself. He goes about doing his daily activities, but his way of processing his world has fundamentally altered for the better. He realises that he cannot and need not control all aspects of his external physical world. He realises that he gains more by letting go. He becomes aware of the non-peaceful moments in his life and tries to reduce their frequency and intensity. He opts for shifting his consciousness to his mind and becoming aware of his internal mental processes when waiting, for example, in a traffic jam or while waiting in a queue. He opts for harmony in his mental processes rather than chaos.

Ordinarily, animal instincts bind a man to the world of the senses. Man lacks the initiative to free himself from them. Rather, he reposes his faith on some superhuman power whom he tries to propitiate in the hope that he may be rescued from his troubles. Meditation may also be described as a Tapasya (a Sanskrit word whose root lies in the Sanskrit word Tapah which means heat), a burning of the impurities in the mind.

Zen Buddhism originated in China and is in vogue in East Asia. As mentioned before, it is a school of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism was propagated in China by Indian Buddhist monks like Kumarajiva (344-413 C.E.), son of Kumarayana, who went to China in 401 C.E., and Buddhahadra (359-429 C.E.), who went to China in 408 C.E., and by Chinese Buddhist monks who came to India, like Fa-hsien (or Fa-xian), who came to India between 399 and 414 C.E., and Hsuan-tsang (or Xuan-zang) (600-664 C.E.), who came to India between 629 and 645 C.E. Also, Gunabhadrha translated the Lankavatara Sutra into Chinese and Paramartha was another noted translator.

Mahayana Buddhism developed in India a few centuries after the Parinirvana of Lord Buddha. Emperor Kanishka convened the Fourth Buddhist Council, held probably at Jalandhar, in which the

scholar Vasumitra was President and another eminent scholar Asvaghosha, the author of Buddha Charita, was Vice-President. In this assembly, Buddhists became divided into Mahayana Buddhists and Theravada Buddhists. The Pali word Thera is derived from the Sanskrit word Sthavira which means Elder. Theravada Buddhism is the most orthodox form of Buddhism and has preserved the historical teachings of Lord Buddha in its Pali Canon. The Theravada Sutras (Suttas - in Pali) are the earliest available teachings of Lord Buddha, are in Pali, and are fully historical. The Pali Canon is called the Tripitaka in Sanskrit and the Tipitaka in Pali; Sutra-Pitaka (Sutta-Pitaka - in Pali), Vinaya-Pitaka and Abhidharma-Pitaka (Abhidhamma-Pitaka - in Pali) forming the three parts of the Tripitaka. Abhidharma means detailed philosophical discourses. The Sutta-Pitaka has five parts - the Digha Nikaya, the Majjhima Nikaya, the Khuddaka Nikaya, the Samyutta Nikaya and the Anguttara Nikaya. The Sarvastivada school's version is preserved in Chinese translation and has four parts - the Dirgha Agama, the Madhyama Agama, the Samyukta Agama and the Ekottara Agama.

Mahayana is a way of Buddhism followed widely across India and northern and eastern Asia. I have written before that in Mahayana Buddhism, individuals strive to take all others along with them to the ultimate goal of liberation. Mahayana Buddhism emerged in the context of the development of a different disposition towards Buddhism by some Buddhists; in terms of concepts relating to the Sangha, the Dharma and Lord Buddha. Firstly, schisms occurred on the level of "Sangha". The primary concern of several venerated Buddhist monks was to keep the Dharma and discipline (Vinaya) pure. They felt that this was the only way to sustain Buddhism in the long run. These Buddhist monks became some of the most sophisticated theoreticians in the Indian intellectual world. Certain other monks wanted the Vinaya to be flexible. The case of the Mahasanghika monks is the best example to show the conflict between these two viewpoints. These monks had added ten minor precepts for their group , for example, monks could get, keep and use money. In the Second Buddhist Council, held at Vaishali, they were called "Papishtha bhikshus" (the sinful monks). Their behaviour was unacceptable from the viewpoint of the orthodox Buddhists. These monks established their own tradition and called themselves "Mahasanghikas" (the monks of the Great Sangha). In this connection, it may be mentioned that there were as many as eighteen early schools including the Sarvastivadins, the Pragyaptivadins, the Sautantrikas, the Vatsiputriyas, the Sammitiyas, the Dharmaguptakas, the Lokottaravadins (an offshoot of the Mahasanghikas who carried the notion of the transcendental nature of Lord Buddha to the greatest extent among all the early schools), etc. It would not be out of place to mention that certain typical similes were employed by some schools as also by a monk like Nagasena who said that a chariot is merely a designation (Pragyapti, Pannatti - in Pali) depending on its own parts. The Vatsiputriyas, also called the Pudgalavadins because of their belief in a Pudgala (Puggala - in Pali) as a transmigrating entity, utilised the simile of fire and fuel to illustrate their thesis that the Pudgala is neither the same nor different from the five Skandhas and the Sautantrikas utilised the simile of seed and sprout. Nagarjuna's claim that anything that is Pratityasamutpanna is a Pragyapti indicates that he conceived the meaning of Pragyapti differently from Nagasena.

Fissures also occurred on the level of "Dharma". Three months before Lord Buddha's Parinirvana at Kusinagara, He declared in the Mahaparinirvana Sutra that the monks and the laity would have the Dharma and the Vinaya as their leaders in the future. However, some Buddhists, mostly the Mahasanghikas, found themselves having no shelter left except the Dharma. So they searched for the true Dharma. The statement of Lord Buddha, "He who sees the Dharma, sees me; he who sees me, sees the Dharma", also supported their quest. If one uses logical arguments to judge this sentence, an interesting question emerges. How must one see the Dharma so that one also sees Lord Buddha? For some Buddhist scholars, even today, Dharma is not merely the sermons of Lord Buddha. His life contains more latent implications, for example, the implications of His silence in certain contexts as in His silence in response to questions by Vacchagotra. Thus, for the Buddhist scholars alluded to above,

Dharma is something more and wider than the speech of Lord Buddha. The sermons are merely a part of Him, not the totality. When I return back to the context of the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism, I find that the Buddhists referred to above had shifted the ethical facet of Buddhism to a metaphysical focus. And what they did was to seek out the truest Dharma; one which also revealed the status of Lord Buddha after His Parinirvana. Simultaneously, the assumption that Lord Buddha still existed pervaded and caught the faithful minds of Buddhists. Dharma turned out to be a means to reach the state of Buddhata. If man realises the ultimate truth of all things, he is sure to free himself from all types of bondage. To see Dharma is to see the truth of phenomena. When the truth of phenomena is seen, the wisdom of Lord Buddha is fulfilled within oneself. That is the reason why when one sees the Dharma, he also sees Lord Buddha. Further, the state of the mind is linked to liberation. The state of liberation is conceived to be the same as the pure mind. A human mind, that is pure and detached from all types of impurities, is synonymous with the state of liberation. Also, there were groups that defined "Dharma" as the Ultimate Truth of Lord Buddha. The more these Buddhists investigated His life, the less they believed that He had gone away. Hence, to see Dharma is to see Lord Buddha's power penetrating through all things. These groups also tended to relate Dharma to Lord Buddha's great compassion (Mahakaruna) and felt that to see Dharma is to see the Buddha-Dhatu within oneself. Mahakaruna is Karuna (compassion) combined with Pragya (wisdom, Panna – in Pali, Zhi Hui, Pan-jo, Po-jo – in Chinese, Hannya – in Japanese). Clearly, the most important duty of man is to live and spend his life in accordance with Lord Buddha's intention. As His intention was to liberate all sentient beings from suffering, in order to realise the Buddha-Dhatu within oneself, it is crucial that one has to assist other sentient beings and take them along on the way to liberation. Pragya is required, in fact it is vital, because different Upaya (expedient means) should be deployed to bring different sentient beings on the path to Bodhi. The notion of Bodhisattva sprang up from this attitude. Bodhisattvas are perfect in Dana (charity), Shila, Kshanti (perseverance, Khanti - in Pali), Virya (Viriya - in Pali), Dhyana and Pragya. These are called the six perfections (Paramita, Parami - in Pali) of a Bodhisattva. Sometimes, ten perfections (Dasha Paramita) are considered (Maharatnakuta Sutra, Sutra 45, Taisho 310, pages 648 to 650. Translated into Chinese by Bodhiruchi) wherein perfection of ingenuity (Upaya), power (Bala), volition (Pranidhana) and knowledge (Gyana) are added to the usual six perfections. The same Sutra mentions the ten stages of a Bodhisattva and associates a perfection with each stage. This Sutra calls the Samadhi of a tenth-stage Bodhisattva, Shurangama Samadhi. The perfection of Meditation (Dhyana Paramita) is associated with the fifth-stage of a Bodhisattva. The standard Mahayana Sutra on the ten stages of a Bodhisattva, the Dashabhumi Sutra, maintains the same position. Also, fault-lines occurred on the level of "Buddha". When the Vinaya and the Dharma showed fault-lines, the only way out for unenlightened Buddhists was to go back to Lord Buddha as apart from Him, there is no other refuge. At that time, many Buddhists conceived the existence of Lord Buddha in the transcendental state. The Saddharma Pundarika Sutra (or The Lotus Sutra), a Mahayana Sutra, conceives of a transcendental Lord Buddha. Lord Buddha had returned to His universal form after His Parinirvana and He still existed. Lord Buddha had Three Bodies (Trikaya). The first and most fundamental body is called the Cosmic Body (Dharmakaya, Hosshin – in Japanese). The conceptualisation of Lord Buddha's All-Pervading, Eternal, Omniscient, Omnipresent and Radiant Dharmakaya provided for a more intense and immersive spiritual experience. The nature of the Dharmakaya is called Dharmakaya-Dhatu. When meditating, the state of Lord Buddha is the Blissful Body (Sambhogakaya, Hojin – in Japanese). The third body is the Constructed Body (Nirmanakaya, Keshin – in Japanese), which signifies the historical Lord Buddha. The Nirmanakaya of Lord Buddha had come and gone under the Will of the Dharmakaya. He was born to fulfil His human functions in leading human beings to liberation. It is believed that as long as humans do not realise the true Dharma, the anguish of departure from Lord Buddha takes place and that when the human mind is able to make a distinction between the pure mind and Klesha, the truism of Buddha-Dhatu becomes clear. In the conception of the Mahasanghikas, the concept of Rupakaya existed and Rupakaya was later split into

Nirmanakaya and Sambhogakaya in Mahayana.

Mahayana Buddhism combines the emotion of devotion (Shraddha, Saddha – in Pali) with the wisdom of logical reasoning. This is the appeal of Mahayana (Ta-sheng – in Chinese, Daijo – in Japanese) Buddhism.

The primary devotional school of Mahayana Buddhism is the Pure Land School of the Far East, where the Sanskrit “Namah Amitabha Buddha” is translated into the Chinese “Namo Amito Fo” and the Japanese “Namu Amida Butsu”. The practice of invoking Lord Buddha's name is known as Buddhānusmṛiti (Nien Fo – in Chinese, Nenbutsu – in Japanese). Devotion is also directed towards the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra (The Lotus Sutra) with the invocation “Namo miao fa lien hua ching” in Chinese and “Namu myoho rengekyo” in Japanese.

A certain school of Mahayana Buddhism conceives of four centres called Chakras located at different levels of the spine (the spine itself is called Avadhuti in this school). At the level of the navel is the Nirmana Chakra. At the level of the heart is the Dharma Chakra. At the level of the neck is the Sambhoga Chakra and at the level of the head is the Mahasukha Chakra (Mahasukha means great happiness). Meditation may also be initiated by focussing on the Nirmana Chakra with progressive focus on higher Chakras with the last focus being on the Mahasukha Chakra. In addition, while the meditator is focussing on the Dharma Chakra, he may imagine a five-pronged white thunderbolt (Vajra) emitting beams of light on the Dharma Chakra. At this stage, the meditator imagines himself to be Vajrasattva (thunderbolt being or diamond being). After the last focus on the Mahasukha Chakra, the meditator can perform Shamatha meditation. If he so wishes, the meditator may conclude his meditation by performing Vipashyana meditation after Shamatha meditation.

Reverting back to Zen Buddhism, we find that although Zen Buddhist experts were found amongst the laity, Zen Buddhism's greatest geniuses were found in the highly regulated life of the monasteries. Zen Buddhism spread to Korea and Japan from China. In Japan, circular brushworks called enshos are calligraphic motifs often used in Zen Buddhism.

In Zen Buddhist practice (the Sanskrit word Dhyana is a synonym of the Pali word Jhana, the Chinese word Ch'an, the Vietnamese word Thien, the Korean word Son and the Japanese word Zen), one can take the help of Koans (Japanese, Kung-an – in Chinese, Kongan – in Korean) or spiritual puzzles with the aid of which he can propel the mind to a transcendental state in which he can meditate. Zazen (Japanese, Tso-ch'an – in Chinese, the practice of Zen Buddhist meditation) leads to Enlightenment. At the usual existential level, Koans cannot be said to have any coherence and an existential leap is needed to bring harmony. The spiritual puzzle posed by a Koan may be such that even a strong will may be unable to go to the transcendental plane. The role of the Zen Buddhist master is important here. He can deliver a shock, an emotional one usually suffices, but a physical blow or other corporal shock may be needed so that the spiritual aspirant is propelled into a higher level of consciousness. The fundamental viewpoint of Zen Buddhism is that one is to point directly to one's mind, see it as it is (Yatha Bhutam) and become a Buddha. A very important difference between Theravada Buddhism and Zen Buddhism is that the former believes that Enlightenment is obtained slowly (or gradually) by means of practice while the latter is a believer in sudden Enlightenment (Tun-yu – in Chinese).

I give below an example of a Koan:

Before Enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water;

After Enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water.

The meaning is self-explanatory. Bodhi does not change the Samsara I am immersed in but it does

change and completely restructures my attitude towards that Samsara. Hsuan-tsang, the great Chinese monk who visited India during the time of Emperor Harshavardhana, once made the following remark about the state of realisation : “It is like a man drinking water; he knows by himself whether it is cold or hot.”. Once, Hui-hai Tai-chu came to the Zen master Ma-tsu Tao-i, the first of possibly the four greatest Chinese Zen masters. Ma-tsu asked him: “Why are you here searching when you already possess the treasure you are looking for?”. “What treasure?”, his interlocutor asked. Ma-tsu replied: “The one who is questioning me right now.”. Ma-tsu had an unswerving ability to bring the empirical “I” into focus at just the right moment. On another occasion, when asked, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from India?”, Ma-tsu replied with a classic answer: “What is the meaning of your asking this at precisely this moment?”. Ma-tsu followed the Hung-chou style of Zen. Ma-tsu Tao-i's disciple (Dharma heir, Fa-ssu – in Chinese) was Pai-chang Huai-hai. Pai-chang Huai-hai's disciple was Huang Po Hsi-yun whose disciple was Lin-chi I-hsuan, the founder of Rinzaï Zen. Soto Zen is the other major form of Japanese Zen.

Because contact of the six sensory bases with the external world do not result in any reactions in a liberated man, he is free. His mind is like a lamp that does not flicker. Non-attachment towards all beings and everything including the concepts of “I” and “Mine” is a characteristic of a liberated mind. The absence of ego in an Enlightened man leads him to adopt an attitude of dispassion and selflessness towards everything in his physical and mental world. He is virtuous. Temptations do not affect him. He is always cheerful, happy and optimistic. He radiates light wherever he goes. He is wise and compassionate (Mahakarunika) and does everything for the good of the world. He has risen above his previous mental conditioning (Samskara). He has risen above craving and aversion.

It must be remembered that in Buddhism, the only valid reason for waging a war is to fight evil forces. Any other war is unjust. Lord Buddha went to the field of battle and intervened to stop a war between the Shakyas and their neighbours and his words stopped King Ajatashatru of Magadha from attacking a neighbouring kingdom. Taking a life unjustly defiles a man. However, there is no sin in Buddhism, only delusion. Severely deluded men are unlikely to find cessation (Nirodha, Nivritti) from suffering (Shoka, Soka – in Pali) in this birth and the wheel of birth and death will roll on for them.

In India and China, legends surround Lord Buddha. A legend in India believes that the Hindu god of creation, Brahma, requested Lord Buddha to teach the Dharma. A legend in China says that a great Buddhist sage named Bodhidharma brought Buddhism from India to China. Another legend in China, recorded in the text Jen-t'ien-yien-mu, says that Lord Buddha explained the Dharma to his historical disciple Mahakashyapa by silently holding up a flower and Mahakashyapa (Mahakassapa – in Pali, Mahakasho – in Japanese) merely smiled, having understood the meaning. The sound of silence has a distinguished place in Buddhism, from Lord Buddha onwards stretching right upto the mythological householder disciple Vimalakirti. Historically, Emperor Ashoka was the first Indian emperor to spread Buddhism outside India. He sent his son, Mahendra (Mahinda – in Pali), and daughter, Sanghamitra (Sanghamitta – in Pali), to Sri Lanka.

Lord Buddha showed how man can integrate himself to the cosmos. In this and in many other aspects, He was a student of life and a leader of men. In a caste-ridden society, Lord Buddha strove to establish the equality of all men. In this, He was the world's first great socialist. Lao-tzu of ancient China in his book Tao Te Ching described the qualities a true leader should have; leaders tread fresh grass amongst other things. Lord Buddha possessed all of them and much more. He was the ultimate Tyagi, that is, renunciant; renouncing a throne, comforts of a palace, a wife and a son to leave his palace on horseback in search of Truth at night. In this, He showed Himself to be an exemplar of Holiness inspiring millions of others to follow suit. He elevated Himself to the level of a Purushottama and a Mahapurusha

(Superhuman Man).

Buddhism preaches ultimate tolerance to all faiths. A Buddhist hates none, loves all. Lord Buddha's love for man was like a father's love for his sons. The overarching philosophy of Buddhism encompasses loving-kindness (Maitri, Metta – in Pali) for all sentient beings. Buddhists co-exist peacefully with all religions on earth. It is invigorating to keep a statue of Lord Buddha in one's place of meditation just as a Christian keeps a crucifix in his room. It is not idolatry.

Buddhism is particularly relevant in the violence-ridden world today. As a Buddhist, I feel that mankind can do much better. Pacifism and non-violence (Ahimsa – Sanskrit and Pali, Avihimsa – Pali) are fundamental tenets of Buddhism. However, this does not mean that a man should not resist aggression. If an evil power engages in aggression, then a man should resist it with all powers at his disposal. Something called “Engaged Buddhism” is emerging in the West now. In this, Buddhists take up environmental and social issues as a part of their practice of the Dharma.

A radical indeterminacy underpins and permeates human existence. Things happen that we do not want; things that we do not want happen. To bravely work out our way through to emancipation, to bring order in place of chaos, to face life with fortitude requires immense Enlightened courage. In this context, Buddhism enables us to reach salvation. That is the raison d'être of Buddhism. The essence of Buddhism, as summed up by Lord Buddha Himself, is:

To cease from all error,
To get virtue,
And to purify the heart.

With Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi (supreme and perfect Enlightenment, Anuttara Samma Sambodhi - in Pali) of a man, he realises that death can be defeated only if it can be made unreal. His false self, or nothingness, dissolves into a vibrant awakened being.

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