

Meditation

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Reasons to Practice

According to the Dalai Lama¹

- I. To bring about happiness and alleviate suffering
 - A. Heal physical illness
 - B. Lessen mental suffering

- II. To accept our suffering
 - A. Take responsibility for previous actions (karma)
 - B. Free the mind of physical pain and suffering

- III. To understand the emptiness of things
 - A. Lessen suffering from worldly attachments
 - B. Lessen the pain of insults, injuries, losses etc.
 - C. Lessen suffering from failure, turmoil, destruction etc.

- IV. To deal with the “obstructions”²
 - A. Pacify the mind and overcome the obstructions/blockages
 1. Desire
 2. Hatred
 3. Pride
 4. Ignorance
 5. Wrong views of reality
 6. Doubt
 - B. Gain contentment and tranquility that prevent the arising of suffering

- V. To work for happiness and the alleviation of suffering in future lifetimes

¹ Dalai Lama. *Opening the Eye of New Awareness*. Wisdom Publications, 1999, Chap. 1.

² Obstructions (*avarana*): factors that cause a being to remain unenlightened and enmeshed in samsara.

The Two Wings of Training in Meditation

According to Traditional Meditation Manuals³

I. Wing #1: Calm Abiding (Śamatha)

- A. One-pointedness of mind (samadhi) leading to meditative absorption (dhyana)
- B. Overcome hindrances to meditation [see table below]
- C. Arrive at tranquillity, mental ease, rapture, serenity

II. Wing #2: Insight (Vipaśyana)

- A. Dissolve the obstructions
- B. Insight into the true nature of reality: suchness, selflessness
- C. Advance on the path to liberation: enlightenment and nirvana

III. Note: Dealing with Hindrances to your Meditation

Hindrance to Meditation	Antidote
1. Laziness, reluctance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aspiration• Faith• Effort, resolve• Willingness
2. Confusion, forgetfulness (of the object of meditation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindfulness
3. Torpor/dullness and restlessness/excitement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introspection, clear comprehension
4. Not being willing to eliminate torpor and restlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motivation
5. Too much motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equanimity

³ Mario D'Amato, editor. *Maitreya's Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*. Columbia University Press, 2012, 72.

How To Meditate

According to the Śurangama Sutra⁴

I. Disentangle your mind

- A. Our thoughts are entangled with karma
- B. Our six consciousnesses are entangled with their objects (outflows)

II. Practice requires you to make a firm resolution

- A. Resolve to shift from samsara to nirvana
 - 1. You are originally enlightened, in essence a buddha
 - 2. The samsara world of birth-death-rebirth (suffering) is illusory
 - 3. Nirvana is still and quiet
 - 4. Like letting dirty water settle
- B. Resolve to let go of everything that is conditioned (karma)
 - 1. Examine the source of your afflictions
 - 2. Like untying a knot

III. Disengage yourself from the two impurities⁵

- A. Thoughts: defiled mental processes
- B. Emotions: defiled emotional attachment to those processes

IV. Find a basis for your practice

- A. All outward phenomena are impermanent—they provide no basis
- B. Work with one of the sense consciousness faculties
 - 1. Each sense faculty generates outflows
 - 2. Choose one (e.g. bodily feeling)
 - 3. Withdraw it from its objects and redirect it inward to return to the original and true
 - 4. Clear out all distortion in one faculty and they will all be purified
 - 5. Without relying on the thinking mind your understanding will be clear and perfect

V. Gateway to Deep Practice

- A. Understand that the self is empty
- B. Free yourself of attachment to phenomena
- C. When self and phenomena are emptied, they no longer arise
 - 1. Develop patience by means of samadhi: the state in which no mental objects come into being

VI. Practice leads to enlightenment⁶

- A. Disengage the faculties of consciousness and a pure brilliance will shine forth
- B. All phenomena will be transformed
 - 1. Like ice melting in hot water
- C. No thoughts take place and the mind is transformed into permanence, bliss, true self, the purity of the Buddha

⁴ *The Śurangama Sutra*. Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2009, V: Instructions for Practice.

⁵ Impure because they are based on ignorance of reality.

⁶ Synonyms: full awakening, nirvana, suchness of reality, buddha nature, pure consciousness, emptiness of Tathagatagarbha (womb of the Buddha), wisdom.

The Path of a Bodhisattva

According to Asanga and Vasubandhu (Yogacara)

I. The Four Bodhisattva Vows⁷

All beings, without number, I vow to liberate.

Endless blind passions I vow to uproot.

Dharma gates, beyond measure, I vow to penetrate.

The Great Way of Buddha I vow to attain.

II. The Ten Perfections and the Ten Bodhisattva Stages⁸

Perfection	Function	Bodhisattva Stage	Outcome
1. Generosity	Benefiting all sentient beings	1. Joyful	No distinction between self and other
2. Integrity	Not causing harm to sentient beings	2. Stainless	Spiritual discipline
3. Forbearance	Forgiving injuries caused by others	3. Radiant	Dedication to the teachings
4. Energy	Continuing to strengthen one's virtues	4. Resplendent	Craving is eliminated
5. Meditation	Practicing the teachings	5. Invincible	Mental dispositions are purified
6. Wisdom	Liberating others by offering them teachings	6. Face-to-face	Affliction and purification no longer matter
7. Skillful means	Continuing to practice the perfections endlessly	7. Far-reaching	No more subject-object split
8. Resolve	Taking up rebirths for the sake of other beings	8. Imperturbable	No more conceptual discrimination
9. Power	Preventing one's virtues from being overcome by adverse mental factors	9. Powerful	Understand everything

⁷ Rochester Zen Centre.

⁸ Based on Mario D'Amato, editor. *Maitreya's Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*. Columbia University Press, 2012, 96-98, 176.

Perfection	Function	Bodhisattva Stage	Outcome
10. Awareness	Perfecting awareness to remove delusion and help bring others to maturity	10. Cloud of Dharma	Buddhahood

III. Twelve Reasons to Practice the Perfections

- A. Because of your generosity, you don't value worldly things.
- B. Because of your endurance, you know it will take a long time.
- C. Because of your service to others, you know the perfections are about benefiting all sentient beings.
- D. Because you commit yourself forever, you endlessly benefit sentient beings through the perfections.
- E. Because you do not distinguish between self and other, your practice of the perfections proceeds on the basis of equality.
- F. Because your practice of the perfections proceeds without difficulty, it is carried out with joy.
- G. Because of your meditative skill, the perfections are cultivated on the basis of samadhi.
- H. Because of your mind training, your practice of the perfections proceeds on the basis of non-conceptual awareness. (Non-conceptual awareness is the fundamental awareness of buddhas.)
- I. Because of the scope of your undertaking, you cultivate the perfections with limitless forbearance.
- J. Because you take up the practice of the perfections, you attain the first bodhisattva stage.
- K. Because you continue to practice the perfections, you achieve results on the second through ninth bodhisattva stages.
- L. Because you fully develop the perfections, you attain the fulfillment of the tenth bodhisattva stage, the stage of Buddhahood.