

Many, one, none

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Buddhism is a healing, liberating and awakening path. As a path, we must journey on it. But this is only a manner of speaking: we do not really go on a journey—we **are** the journey. This means that our own practice is what makes Buddhism real for us: we realize it.

Another interesting point we should note is that this spiritual journey has no destination like a journey between two places. In Buddhist practice, the journey is our entering into our **inner space** with our mind, heart and spirit.

Knowing the mind

Our inner journey begins with knowing, taming and freeing the **mind**. How do we know the mind? “The mind” means both our mind and those of others. When we understand our mind, we also begin to understand how others think and feel. Hence, we need to start by knowing our own mind. When we really know our mind, we also begin to heal it of its woes and wounds.

Spend some quiet time just watching our mind—try not making any effort to think. We will be just watching our mind—like watching a peaceful lake. But the lake is never really still. There is always some slight ripple when a breeze blows over it. There are circles of ripples when a leaf or some object drops into the water, or when a fish or turtle pops its head at the water surface. Our mind ripples with thoughts, too.

Letting go

We will then notice that there are **many** ripples on this lake called the mind. The mind has the habit of making many of a single thought. One thought leads to many others. The secret to a still mind is to simply begin to letting go of **any** one thought. The reality is that we think there are **many** thoughts, but our mind holds only one thought at a time. When we understand this, we begin to **know** our mind.

This one thought is the **present** moment. We often miss this present and fall back into some past memory—this is just a constructed reality, nothing real. Or, we try to jump into some future of hope, fear or emptiness—again, this is merely a construction, a virtual reality.

Taming the mind

The only true reality is in the present. Even this present is moving so fast: it’s gone the moment we notice it. Hence, we have to keep being very attentive until it is a natural habit. We are beginning to **tame** our mind.

The attentiveness becomes a habit by simply doing it again and again—just like the way we breathe, or how we learned to walk as toddlers. The more attentive we are, we more attentive become. Then, we have learned to keep to the **one** mind, the present moment. We have learned to tame our mind—and then there is **none**: no more thoughts, that is.

What is thinking?

When we do this properly, we will notice that the tamed mind is filled with **joy**. It may be just a moment, but the joy is pervasive and seems endless. It fills our whole mind and body with joy; we feel fully joyful. The fully joyful mind is free of thinking. “Thinking” means looking for some “thing” or sense-object to chat about. The mind is so joyful, it stops doing this.

In fact, when the mind is joyful and stops thinking, we say that it **feels**. We don’t and can’t “think” joyful; we only *feel* joyful. Our next task is to hold this joyful feeling. Now, be warned: we can easily lose this joyful feeling—by thinking! One thought, that joy is gone.

The thought-free mind is joyful

Now we know: True **joy** is simply the mind free from thought—usually we call this the **heart**. The mind has become the heart of our life and being. When we do not know Buddhism or do not know enough Buddhism, we tend to stop here because it is so joyful. But this is like stopping our journey at some delightful spot and looking at the beautiful scenery and enjoying the ambience. Our journey is still not done—we are only about two-thirds way.

The last part of our journey is the key to our spiritual liberation and awakening. When we naturally feel joyful, we **free** ourself from suffering and negative emotions. But this may be just a temporary freedom. It is like we have broken out of an enemy prison, but we are still in enemy country. We have to get out of that country into the free world.

Wisdom

We are only truly free when we have cultivated **wisdom**. This is done by going back to the **one** of the mind, that is, mental focus through breath meditation or lovingkindness—the best is to do both in balanced harmony.

Notice that at every stage so far, we have been “**letting go**” of or renouncing the previous stages or conditions. We begin our inner journey by renouncing sense-objects—these actually form our **body**. Then, we renounce our **thoughts**, the “manyness” of the mind. As a result, our mind is thought-free and **one** with joy. We may be said to be “single-minded” or “one-hearted.”

Impermanence

In the last stage of our inner journey, we learn to renounce even that **one**, the source of our true joy. We do this by reflecting on the impermanence of this **one** and its joy. Even the greatest joy in the world is **impermanent**. When we understand this, we renounce even this joyful one. The reflection on impermanence is the only safe and direct path to the free world of unconditioned space and peace.

When we renounce the one joy, we realize an even greater joy—that of **awakening**. We have finally found the path of awakening that turns into to the unconditioned reality of

nirvana. This is our journey's end. We have awakened just like the Buddha and the arhats of early Buddhism.

The spirit of Buddhism

We mentioned that the thought-free mind is joyful. This does not mean that thinking is bad. It is bad when it prevents us from feeling, from directly experiencing life's moments of truth and beauty. However, when we have journeyed inwardly in this way, we begin to understand and to master how we think and feel.

Our thinking become clearer, our feeling become calmer; together they are profoundly true and beautiful. Our life becomes true and beautiful; we inspire truth and beauty in others. This is the "spirit" of Buddhism—it means the wisdom that heals, liberates and awakens us.

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