

## Spirituality of Meditation

Excerpt from *Handbook of Meditation in Society 6:*

Sutta Discovery 60.1f: A psychopathology of mindfulness © Piya Tan 2023c (forthcoming).

**4.4.6.1** “Cosmic consciousness” is often a great tag for glib gurus to seize and hold an adoring, mindless crowd. No one has experienced cosmic consciousness, but most would wonder whether there is anything there, something that we may not know, much less understand. Cult Gurus love this as a one-way blindside to leash up their followers in the Guru’s hands. At best, we may say that an “experience” of some cosmic reality should bring us down to earth to have the compassion and wisdom to deal with the world’s sufferings. The Buddha does just this.

Rejecting the extremes of the scripture-based class exclusivism of the brahmins and the plain silliness of pretentious wanderers, the Buddha seeks his own way with what defines our humanity and the path to spirituality: by cultivating his own mind. Through the self-effort of **meditation**, the Buddha calms his mind of the wild emotions and clears it of bewildering views; he awakens to the true reality of things. Seeing through the religion of words and ways, the Buddha awakened to nirvana, the full freedom from space-time suffering.

**4.4.6.2** The Buddha calls his liberation **awakening** (*bodhi*), the ultimate mystical or spiritual experience, the highest conceivable state of consciousness while one lives. In practical terms, awakening is an experience where, through moral discipline and meditative practices, one gains complete and clear understanding of the true nature of reality, and of the nature of oneself in relation to reality.

Both the key terms “awakening” (*bodhi*) and “the awakened (one)” (*buddha*) come from the same Sanskrit root √BUDH, “to understand.” Awakening thus is a mystical experience that frees and purifies ordinary consciousness so that it is able to see true reality. The mind is thereby transformed into a qualitatively higher form, perhaps in a somewhat similar manner as becoming *lucid* reveals the true nature of the dream-world to the dreamer whose conscious state thereby transcends the ordinary dreaming mind.

According to early Buddhism, awakening entails the cessation of all selfish desires and clinging to material things, power status, sensual pleasures, socializing, and other passing worldliness. The true nature of everything is seen to consist in impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself (emptiness). Thus, even one’s own self is seen to be a mere illusion—at best a convenient convention for communicating with the world so that it, too, benefits from this awakening.

**4.4.6.3** The term **samādhi** is well known in Indian religions and post-Buddha Buddhisms, where it often refers to an enlightening or salvific state as defined or envisioned by their various sectarian tenets. In early Buddhism, *samādhi* or concentration is the last limb of the “meditation aggregate” (*samādhi-k, khandha*), and the 8<sup>th</sup> limb of the noble eightfold path. It comprises meditative training and practice—watching the body, feelings, the mind and realities—so that we unify the mind to uproot itself from the prison of the senses, and free the defiled mind to gain full mental freedom by way of **dhyana** (*jhāna*).

Instead of samadhi, early Buddhism uses the dvandva, **calm and insight** (*samatha-vipassana*), especially after emerging from a dhyanic state. If we see dhyana as a mystical state, then, calm and insight are the benefits of dhyana, since they are the twin-lenses with which we see true reality. All these experiences function together in harmony in a mystical union of subject and object that dissolves any idea of self or abiding entity, leading to full awakening.

Early Buddhist awakening (*bodhi*) differs from later revised notions of enlightenment in significant ways. Basically, awakening leads to **nirvana** (*nibbāna*)—an absolute non-state beyond time and space—a truth unique and universal.<sup>1</sup> There is nothing that can really define or describe a fire that has been extinguished: such is nirvana.

The revelatory insights and experiences are supposed to bring about an absolute emotional calmness, mental peace, cessation of suffering, and unconditional love and deep compassion for the unenlightened beings who continue to suffer. In the earliest days of the Buddha, he calls this **silence**, the way of the sage (*muni*) who has mastered *inner silence*, that is, the true peace that heals and frees.

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<sup>1</sup> Technically, *sub specie aeternitatis*, “under the aspect of eternity,” ie, as a particular manifestation of a universal law, without any relation to time. See SD 26.8 (1.1.3).