

Mindfulness Meditation Practices

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This brief text was written for my own edification regarding the common meditation practices as taught in the Path of Individual Liberation, which were primarily based upon or redacted from the *sutras* (teachings attributed to the Buddha or his closest disciples) in the Pali Canon, in order to better understand the similarities and differences with my own Vajrayana tradition, especially Dzogchen. I will provide a brief summary of my insights at the end.

The Pali Canon is considered by some to represent the earliest teachings of the Buddha. But it is not quite that simple. According to tradition, this “collection” of texts was based on a meeting, “the First Council”, of the remaining Arhats (enlightened ones) 30 years after passing of the Buddha. Ananda, the Buddha’s personal assistant and known for his ability to recall the teachings, is said to have recited the teachings from memory at the meeting, which were then endorsed by the Council for memorization and recitation by the monastic community. It is likely that the Buddha made some changes during the 45 years of his teachings, accounting for at least *some* of the differences found in the Canon. For example, the earliest teachings appear not to include lists such as the *Four Noble Truths* or the Noble *Eightfold Path*, the structure of which may have been added by the Buddha or later disciples to facilitate memorization. In addition, most of the earliest texts appear to be in prose, like a story, with the core of the later ones likely to be in verse, like a poem (with a brief introduction and summary at the end in prose), which would also facilitate memorization.

The use of memorization and oral recitation (chanting) appears to have been common among the Brahmins, the priestly class in India from which many of his disciples are said to have converted from the Vedic tradition to Buddhism. They were often literate in Sanskrit, and perhaps local languages, leading me to consider that some of them may actually have written some notes on the Buddha’s teachings (though I have not seen such a proposal from Buddhist scholars).

Here is a list of some of the key dates related to the Buddha and the Pali Canon to help provide some context. The Buddha is generally said to have lived in northeastern India (the Ganges valley region) 563-483 BCE (some scholars say 480-400 BCE). The “First Council” was about 30 years later. King Ashoka (304-232 BCE), who unified much of the Indian subcontinent, is said to have become a strong supporter of Buddhism and sent missionaries to the far reaches of his kingdom where they erected pillars, many carved with references to Buddhist texts, roughly 200 years after the Buddha. (This mission facilitated the broader spread of Buddhism as well.) Could these missionaries have carried very early texts with them?

There is evidence that texts were written in various languages, including Sanskrit, various Prakrit languages (found mostly in western India) far from the Buddha’s

domain, and Sinhala languages of northeastern India. Pali now appears to be a variation on Prakrit languages. (Pali may not have been a spoken language. The word means “text” and more specifically a “scriptural text”, implying that it referred to a written form.) The Pali texts may have been copied from some of these earlier sources. Some believe that this was done in northern India, then taken to Sri Lanka, whereas others believe source documents (or memories) were taken to Sri Lanka, where it was first written in Pali. The Pali edition claims that the teachings of the Buddha were first written *only* in that language, but evidence indicates this would have happened no earlier than 29-17 BCE, thus making it almost certain not to be the earliest written source.

Part of the difficulty for modern scholars is the lack of “hard” evidence. Buddhism divided into 18 known schools about the 4th or 3rd century BCE, although there are indications in the sutras of early divergences even during the Buddha’s lifetime. For example, he was even asked late in his life how his disciples would know which were authentic teachings and which were not. Early writings have not survived well, owing heavily to the fact that most were mostly written on palm leaves in a moist climate, making survival difficult, if not impossible. The oldest texts are now being found written on birch bark stored in clay jars in northern parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan, this growing collection of scrolls with evidence of a Gandharan Canon, yet to be found, have been dated as early as 1st century BCE, making them the oldest physical evidence of the teachings since the pillars of Ashoka. There is some evidence that at least some of the citations on the pillars may have been copied from the same or similar sources that later led to the Pali Canon. The next oldest sources are stone or metal imitations of palm-leaf manuscripts from 2nd century CE. The oldest actual palm leaf is a Mahayana text dated to only 1015. The oldest Pali text (fragments) has been dated to 15th century, a few texts have been dated to the 18th century, and most existent texts are not until the 19th and 20th centuries!

Adding to the complexity, there is evidence that the Pali Canon was heavily redacted in the 5th or 6th century CE, and that redaction refers to an even earlier redaction around the end of the 1st century BCE. I have been unable to find any specific information on the nature of these redactions. Scholars have found evidence of texts being added to the collection over time, though apparently early Buddhists chose not to delete texts, leaving a collection that does include some disparity. The only surviving school of the early 18 is the Theravada tradition (also referred to as the Path of the Elders or Path of Individual Liberation). Their tradition follows parts of the Pali Canon, but not others. The tradition has been heavily influenced by the commentaries, especially Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*. Nevertheless, the Pali Canon remains, for now, one of the earliest and fairly “complete”, though heavily redacted, sources of the Buddha’s teachings. One of the themes in many of these individual texts is “mindfulness”, the topic to which I now turn.

Buddhism is often described as “training the mind”. Why? The Buddha described this training as a path to overcoming our greatest obstacles in life, those that create dissatisfaction or even suffering. There are a number of lists that he used in his teachings, but there are three main categories: attachment, aversion, and ignorance; or greed, hatred, and delusion.¹ “Attachment” includes various forms of desire or grasping for things we want, as well as clinging to things we have. It is not desire, grasping or clinging per se, but *strong* desire, grasping or clinging that create obstacles and result in our sense of dissatisfaction. Similarly, “aversion” are things we don’t want or like, even hate. Attachment and aversion in Buddhism are generally described in terms of “afflictive emotions” such as greed, pride, lust, jealousy, and anger or hatred that create dissatisfaction in our lives. We can overcome these by training our mind, resulting in a sense of peace and satisfaction.

The third category is “ignorance”. This is a lack of understanding of the true nature of mind and other “things”. This is a more challenging topic to address here, but it basically comes down to our worldview. The Buddhist worldview is based on the fact that everything and everyone are interdependent and constantly changing to some degree or other. And when we truly understand that and live accordingly, we will change our attitude and basic behaviors toward others, treating them with lovingkindness and compassion and understanding that their behaviors are due to *their* ignorance of the true nature of things.

Buddhist training then consists primarily of three parts: (1) moral discipline (*sila*), (2) meditation practice (*samadhi*), and (3) higher wisdom (*prajna*). My focus in this document is a form of meditation practice generally referred to as “mindfulness”. We often go about our day without paying much attention to what we are thinking, saying, or doing. The basic purpose of mindfulness as a practice is to learn to pay more attention, *focused attention*, in the broader context of moral discipline and wisdom. As noted above it is important to be aware as the Buddha often refers *not* to a particular thing or action as being the problem but being “obsessed” with that often is. For example, he refers to being “*obsessed* by sensual lust, *overwhelmed* by sensual lust, and ... *escape* from arisen sensual lust” (Bodhi, p. 270; emphasis added). It is easy to fall away from the moderation found in the principle of *The Middle Way* and tumble into extremes. There is even some flexibility about what is the “middle”. It is not a precise mathematical average, but a general range somewhere between the extremes, say the middle third, for example. In some cases that may be skewed more toward one extreme or the other, but they fall generally toward the middle nevertheless. Our western phrase *all things in moderation* comes to mind.

With that, the *Satipatthana Sutta* is usually considered to be the primary source of meditation instructions in the Pali Canon, the basis from which the Theravada tradition

¹ “Greed” is sometimes replaced with “lust”, used more broadly than contemporary use, where it usually refers specifically to sexual desires, or just “desire”, which lacks the sense of “strong desire”. The Buddha also differentiated between sense desires and desires for liberation, for example.

developed. My brief summaries describe three approaches to such mindfulness meditation practices. The first is based on the *Sutta* itself as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*. For comparison, two other versions are included, one derived from the scholar/translator Analayo in his third book on this topic, *Satipatthana Meditation: A Practical Guide* and the other from Thich Nhat Hanh's *Transformation and Healing: The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*. This is followed by an abbreviated version from the Bhikkhu Bodhi collection and a modern adaptation by Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1982) in "Practical Vipassana Meditation Exercises", which is primarily focused on lay practitioners that evolved into several systems through various Eastern and Western teachers, sometimes referred to as "insight meditation" (*vipassana*) for its emphasis on that aspect of the practice.

I also take a brief look at an alternative presentation from the Pali Canon focused on breathing meditation, the *Anapanasamyutta*. This includes two versions from Bhikkhu Bodhi's anthology collection and the popular variation developed by S.N. Goenka. Finally, I conclude the collection with some notes on another significant form of early meditation (preceding the Buddha, but also taught by him) on the *jhanas* from *Right Concentration* by Leigh Brasington.

Following these are my brief comments on the relationship of these practices to the main practice of *trekcho* in the Dzogchen tradition of Vajrayana, primarily taught in the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.

Although I have tried to summarize these approaches with sufficient detail for readers to actually do these practices, I recommend that you look at the texts listed in the References at the end for more depth of explanation that may be necessary or helpful to doing these practices. As always, it is also *very important* to find a teacher who can help provide guidance in learning to meditate or engage in other practices. Finding a good teacher is another discussion altogether, so if you need to do so, be sure to look into some of the guides for searching and examining a prospective teacher before making your choice. I cite several in my book, *Innate Happiness*.

As mentioned briefly above, there is another primary form of meditation that was described by the Buddha in the Pali Canon, found in two parts: (1) the four *jhanas* (Pali) or *dhyanas* (Sanskrit) and (2) the four higher formless absorptions (sometimes referred to as the higher *jhanas*). In Vajrayana Buddhism these are generally referred to as (1) *shamata* (single-pointed calm abiding) with signs (a specific object of focus) and (2) advanced *shamata* without signs. In the practice in this summary, these are basically what is described as sub sections three and four of the "refrain" at the end of the first set of practices from the *Satipatthana Sutta* translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi.² In Pali texts, the results of these are sometimes referred to as "serenity" and "insight", which together lead to liberation. To add to the complexity, Vajrayana Buddhism describes *vipassana*

² For more detailed descriptions of *shamata* and *vipassana*, see my *Innate Happiness: A Direct Guidance Manual for Householder Yogis and Yoginis*.

(insight) meditation as a contemplation on “the nature” of self, other, mind, etc., where a specific list of questions is analyzed to bring about insight or understanding into that nature.

Although similar, the Pali and Vajrayana systems don't exactly match. The *jhana* approach, particularly the more contemporary versions, tend to look to Vajrayana Buddhists like a blend of the *shamata* and *vipassana* without actually doing either. In the following descriptions, however, I will only summarize the *jhana* approach. The differences with Vajrayana Buddhism are not necessarily “better” or “worse”, “right” or “wrong”. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. When combined with other practices, both appear to provide paths to *nibbana* (*nirvana*) or liberation.³ So the choice may be more of an individual preference, dependent in part upon one's degree of aspiration. Nevertheless, there may be a way to integrate strengths of each to further enhance the development of *samadhi* (meditative concentration), as we will see later.

The Satipatthana Sutta (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness) – Bhikkhu Bodhi¹

There are two versions of this *sutta* in the Pali Canon, long and middle length versions. The primary difference is that the longer version has a more in-depth analysis of the Four Noble Truths. For our purpose, the middle length version is sufficient.

The purpose of *Satipatthana* is the “establishment of mindfulness”. Mindfulness, here, means applying *focused attention* without drifting off – easier said than done! This is often paired with knowing whether you are actually paying attention or have drifted off. Some sources use the term “awareness” for this latter experience, as opposed to paying attention to the object, which is “mindfulness”. Others reverse these, use them as synonyms, or use entirely other terms, so it is important to “pay attention” to this when you are reading as well!

Including various subdivisions within the four main categories of *Satipatthana* (contemplations on the body, feeling, mind, and phenomena), there are 21 subjects of meditation. The initial steps facilitate development of serenity, then begin to develop our insight. Note that you do each and *every* part listed, which can take a long time. However, in some sections there are condensed options listed near the end of that section. Still, I recommend following the detailed format several times first if at all possible. With that deeper experience, you can then move to a condensed version.

1. **Contemplation of the body**: subduing longing and dejection in regard to the world, and moving toward increasingly subtler levels of calmness
 - a. Mindful of breathing (rising and falling of the abdomen) in/out
 - i. Then mindfulness of the qualities of long/short breaths;

³ Although the finer points of their descriptions of *nirvana* or liberation also vary at least somewhat.

- ii. Experiencing qualities of the whole body in/out;
- iii. Tranquilizing the bodily formation in/out
- iv. Contemplation of (a) the body internally/externally/both or (b) the nature of the body's arising or vanishing or both or (c) "there is a body" with bare knowledge and mindfulness; dwell independent, not clinging to anything [detached]
- b. The four postures; contemplate internally/externally/both while:
 - i. Walking
 - ii. Standing
 - iii. Sitting
 - iv. Lying down
 - v. Or however the body is...
- c. Clear contemplation (of purpose, of achievability, without losing the object of focus, and having no abiding "self") of activities internally/externally/both:
 - i. Going forward/returning
 - ii. Looking ahead/looking away
 - iii. Bending and stretching
 - iv. Wearing robes, carrying outer robe and bowl (may not apply for you)
 - v. Eating/drinking/chewing/tasting
 - vi. Defecating/urinating
 - vii. Walking/standing/sitting/falling asleep/waking up/talking/ keeping silent
 - viii. Dwelling independently, not clinging to anything in the world
- d. Contemplate the unattractive (impure) nature of the body internally/externally/both:
 - i. Head and body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, connective tissue, stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, urine
 - ii. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world
- e. Contemplate the elements of the body internally/externally/both:
 - i. Earth - form
 - ii. Water - liquids
 - iii. Fire - heat
 - iv. Air - breath
 - v. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world
- f. Nine charnel ground contemplations internally/externally/both of corpses in different stages of decay:
 - i. The nature of the corpse 1-3 days dead - bloated, livid, oozing matter (and yours)
 - ii. The nature of the corpse being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, worms (and yours)
 - iii. The nature of the skeleton held together, with flesh and blood (and yours)

- iv. The nature of a skeleton held together, without flesh, and smeared with blood (and yours)
 - v. The nature of a skeleton held together, without flesh and blood (and yours)
 - vi. The nature of disconnected, scattered bones (and yours)
 - vii. The nature of bones bleached white (and yours)
 - viii. The nature of bones heaped up (and yours)
 - ix. The nature of bones more than a year old, rotted and crumbled to dust (and yours)
 - x. *Or* contemplate the arising/vanishing/both of the body
 - xi. *Or* contemplate that “there is a body” with bare attention and continued mindfulness
 - xii. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world.
 - xiii. Insert “refrain” here (see end of these practices).
2. Contemplation of feelings⁴ internally/externally/both:
- a. When feeling a carnal (physical, especially sexual) pleasant feeling
 - b. When feeling a spiritual pleasant feeling
 - c. When feeling a carnal painful feeling
 - d. When feeling a spiritual painful feeling
 - e. When feeling a carnal neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling
 - f. When feeling a spiritual neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling
 - g. *Or* dwell contemplating the nature of arising/vanishing/both of feelings
 - h. *Or* dwell contemplating “there is a feeling” with bare attention and continued mindfulness
 - i. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world.
 - j. Insert “refrain” here (see end of these practices).
3. Contemplation of mind (in 8 contrasting pairs) internally/externally/both, thereby understanding the mind with/without each of the following:
- a. Lust
 - b. Hatred
 - c. Delusion
 - d. Focus (vs. distraction)
 - e. Exalted and unsurpassable (meditative attainments – jhanas and formless absorptions)
 - f. Unexalted and surpassable (lack thereof)
 - g. Concentration
 - h. Liberation
 - i. *Or* dwell contemplating the nature of arising/vanishing/both of mind
 - j. *Or* dwell contemplating “there is mind” with bare attention and continued mindfulness
 - k. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world.

⁴ All “feelings” are grouped into one.

- l. xiii. Insert “refrain” here (see end of these practices).
4. Contemplation of phenomena: moving toward “insight”:
 - a. Understanding when there is any one of the five hindrances (sensual lust, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt) or not;
 - i. How each arises, is abandoned, and does not arise again in the future – increasing concentration;
 - ii. OR dwell contemplating the nature of arising/vanishing/both of phenomena;
 - iii. OR establish mindfulness that “there are phenomena” with bare attention and continued mindfulness;
 - iv. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world.
 - b. For each of the five aggregates (form, feelings, perceptions, thoughts⁵, and consciousness)
 - i. Understand internally/externally/both the aggregate, its origin and its passing away;
 - ii. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world.
 - c. For each of the six internal and external sense bases (eye/seeing, ear/hearing, nose/smelling, tongue/tasting, body(skin)/touching, mind/thinking)
 - i. Understand each sense base internally/externally/both;
 - ii. Understand the fetter (the desire and lust that binds the sense faculty to its object) that arises dependent on both;
 - iii. How the fetter arises, how it is abandoned, and how it does not arise again in the future;
 - iv. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world.
 - d. The seven factors of enlightenment become manifest (mindfulness, discrimination of phenomena, the energy factor present, the rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity) internally/externally/both
 - i. Understand whether the factor is present or absent;
 - ii. How it arises and how it comes to fulfillment by development;
 - iii. Then dwell independently, not clinging to anything in the world.
 - e. Understand each of the Four Noble Truths
 - i. *Dukkha* – suffering, dissatisfaction, discontent...
 - ii. The cause – ignorance of the true nature of self and phenomena – emptiness (*shunyata*) – lack of any inherent self-existence because self and all phenomena are interdependent (or dependent upon other causes and conditions) and impermanent
 - iii. The cessation – nirvana (peace) or liberation from *dukkha*
 - iv. The path (ethics, meditation, and wisdom; or right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration⁶)

⁵ Sometimes described as volitional or intentional mental formations

⁶ Order varies, many starting with right view. Others say they are developed concurrently, like the 8-spoked wheel that is a symbol of the Noble Eightfold Path.

In practice, each of the above main topics is followed by a “**refrain**” of four subdivisions as follows:

1. First:
 - a. Internally: contemplate the object within your personal experience
 - b. Externally: reflect on the object in the experience of others
 - c. Both: develop a comprehensive and balanced view of the object
2. Second: (gaining insight into impermanence, suffering, and nonself)
 - a. Origination of the object
 - b. Vanishing of the object
 - c. Both
3. Third:⁷
 - a. Bare, constant attention on the object
 - b. Knowledge of that attention (awareness)
4. Fourth:
 - a. Dwelling in complete detachment
 - b. Not clinging to anything

A Satipatthana Practice Guide – Analayoⁱⁱ

There are a variety of contradictions among the teachings of the Buddha as articulated among the numerous *suttas* (or *sutras*), including among just those included in the Pali Canon. It is highly unlikely that we will ever know exactly what the Buddha taught. So it is up to us, with some help from scholars and teachers, to make the most of what we do have. Analayo has applied his scholarly skills to developing such a practical approach that may appeal to many.

His model is based upon the *Satipatthana* sutra. He notes that he has been influenced by Buddhadasa, Sayadaw, and Goenka, each also represented in this document. After a discussion of “embodied mindfulness”, which relates to the contemplation of the body, there are seven contemplations in Analayo’s approach: (1) body – anatomical parts, (2) body – the elements, (3) body – mortality, (4) feelings, (5) mind, and phenomena (*dharmas*) subdivided into (6) hindrances and (7) awakening factors and dwelling independently without clinging to anything.

He notes that we need to purify our moral conduct before cultivating mindfulness, though this is not addressed in his instructions, but may be found in teachings on the Five Lay Vows or the Ten Unwholesome and Ten Wholesome Actions elsewhere.

Some features of the *Satipatthana Sutra* are not included. One is the four steps of mindfulness of breathing, focused on contemplation of the body, although this is

⁷ The third and fourth are very similar to *shamata* – single-pointed calm abiding. (See *Innate Happiness* or other sources.)

indirectly embedded in the steps below. Another is the contemplation of bodily postures and activities, also indirectly embedded. Another is the impermanent nature of the five aggregates, indirectly embedded.

Analayo recommends adopting an “open awareness of whatever happens at any sense-door, grounded in whole-body mindfulness” as the foundation of all of these contemplations. This is a *felt sense*, whereas contemplation of mind is a *mental state*. But whatever happens is *impermanent*. In daily life there is also a sense of *internal* (us) and *external* (others). Sitting meditation tends to focus on us, while daily life tends to focus on others. Eventually these tend to merge into an embodied mindfulness of anything that happens. He summarized the key aspects of the meditations as:

- Diligently contemplate internally and externally
- Clearly know arising and passing away (impermanence)
- Be mindful just for the sake of knowing and mindfulness
- Remain free from desires and discontent so as to dwell independently, without clinging to anything.

Or more briefly still, “keep calmly knowing change” and “never cling to anything”. Analayo provides some additional guidance on embodied mindfulness:

- Begin with *altruistic intent* for the benefit of others.
- Stay in the present moment, fully aware of what is happening right now, alert and attentive.
- Avoid hyper-attentiveness, but open receptivity and a soft alertness.
- Know the difference between mindfulness (as above) and consciousness (continuous “knowing”, but not “permanent”).
- “Clearly knowing” includes concepts, but mind is free in the presence of those concepts.

[NOTE: “The distinction between concepts and “ultimate realities” does not exist in the early Buddhist discourses.” Also, tranquility (*shamata*) and insight (*vipassana*) are not distinguished as to whether the object of meditation is a concept or ultimate reality, but they are considered to be complementary meditative qualities. The only ultimate reality in the early Buddhist texts is *nirvana* - peace.]

- Be aware of unwholesome and wholesome concepts and thoughts.
- Note the difference between actual practice and just thinking about practice.

Whole-body Mindfulness

Analayo also provides some preliminary practices on whole-body mindfulness as a point of entry. Mindfulness of the whole-body then provides an *anchor* to avoid distraction and fantasy during the other practices:

- Mindfulness of bodily postures - note walking, standing, sitting, lying down, etc. [“Proprioceptive awareness” - the ability to sense the position of the body and its

movements.] A sense of embodied awareness, being grounded in the body. Think “*there is body.*”

- Mindfulness of bodily activities – note moving forward and returning, looking ahead and away, flexing and extending the limbs, wearing inner or outer clothes, eating, drinking, tasting, defecating and urinating, talking and keeping silent, etc.
- Maintain mindfulness present in the background after the direct experience.
- Approach it with a relaxed inner smile. Take a conscious breath before writing or talking.
- Intention is a key factor to successful practice.
- Balance mindfulness of (1) the present moment, (2) mind, and (3) circumstances.
- Return to the sense of whole-body presence... continuously.

The Practices

1. **The body** (1st *satipatthana*) – nature of the body (as it “really” is, deeper understanding, free from attachment)
 - a. **Anatomical parts:** nonattachment (deconstruction of unrealistic ideals of beauty and sexual attractiveness)⁸
 - i. Skin (including hair and nails) – slowly scan head to feet by touching your skin (or a sense of knowing each part)
 - ii. Flesh (muscles, tendons, organs) – slowly scan feet to head feeling your parts that are accessible
 - iii. Bones (and teeth) – slowly scan head to feet feeling your bones
 - iv. Develop a general sense of the presence of the whole body, and note your *relationship* towards your body (e.g., pure or impure, dirty or clean, beautiful or not beautiful, attachment or aversion); it is just skin, flesh, and bones. Continue this practice until you arrive at an attitude free from either sensual desire or aversion.
 - v. Conclude by resting in open awareness of the present moment, impermanence and change. Recognize distractions and return to open awareness.
 - vi. Adjust the practice as needed to meet your needs with a focus on non-attachment, non-aversion to your body.
 - vii. In daily life apply this understanding to the bodies of others and/or apply these steps to the whole-body mindfulness above (during various bodily postures and activities during the day).
 - b. **The elements:** earth, water, fire, wind, space⁹ – empty of a self, i.e., no “self-existence”.

⁸ *Satipatthana Meditation – A Practice Guide* includes a detailed approach as well from the instructions in the *Satipatthana Sutra*.

⁹ The space element is not in the *Satipatthana Sutra*, but is found elsewhere, such as the *Maharahulovada Sutra*.

- i. Earth quality - slowly scan head to feet contemplating hardness, resistance, stiffness, especially the bones.
 - ii. Water quality - slowly scan feet to head contemplating liquidity, wetness, cohesion, especially various bodily liquids.
 - iii. Fire quality - slowly scan head to feet contemplating warmth and/or coldness, especially in the skin.
 - iv. Wind element - slowly scan feet to head contemplating motion, vibrations, oscillation, especially breathing.
 - v. Space element - slowly open to being aware of the present moment with a sense of non-attachment, building to a sense of freedom from identification or the "body" as "mine".
 - vi. Contemplate while walking; walk without any notion of a walker. Note that we are all made of the same elements, we are *interconnected* and *impermanent*.
 - vii. Continue contemplating *the elements externally* connected to the body (e.g., touch, temperature, wind/air inside/outside; interdependence; none are self-existent; this leads us to the *Four Immeasurables* of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity for all beings, free from attachment or aversion. *Earth* is our rootedness in what is wholesome and productive for others; *water* adapts, be flexible and adaptive to circumstances; *fire* provides warmth and love to those in need; *wind* keeps us moving, progressing on the path; and *space* enables open awareness beyond attachment or aversion.
 - viii. Conclude by resting in open awareness of the empty nature of the present moment. Recognize non-attachment, a sense of freedom and whole-body awareness, giving rise to compassion.
- c. **Mortality**: death is certain - impermanence
- i. Imagine your skeleton - focus on the skeleton, held together with sinews, inside our body
 - ii. Stages of decay (optional) - see Bikkhu Bodi's *Satipatthana Sutra*, 1.f. above.
 - iii. This in-breath could be your last - then relax and let go on the out-breath.
 - iv. Continue while walking, standing, eating, lying down, etc.
 - v. Visualize dying with the dissolution of the elements: *earth* - heaviness; *water* - dryness; *fire* - coldness (esp. toes and fingers); *wind* - slowing and shallowness of breath; *space* - loss of consciousness.
 - vi. Conclude by resting with a sense of diminishing clinging and attachment, a freedom from identification, and a powerful perception of impermanence.
2. **Feeling** (2nd *satipatthana*): the way *feelings* (not emotions) impact the mind; pleasant, unpleasant, neutral - impermanence and conditionality; note before acquires full force
- a. First Stage

- i. Pleasant feelings – lead to desire and clinging; scan head to feet for pleasant feelings
 - ii. Unpleasant feelings – want it to stop, disappear; scan feet to head for unpleasant feelings
 - iii. Neutral feelings – get bored, search for entertaining distractions; scan head to feet for neutral feelings
 - iv. Whole body – scan feet to head for all three (seek qualities, e.g., smooth or rough, throbbing or pulsing, pressure or lightness, tension or ease, especially the strength of the *push* of the feeling, clamoring for our attention; once noted, can attend to it, e.g., scratch, move, etc.)
 - v. Examine other senses for feeling experiences.
 - vi. Contemplate unpleasant sensations in terms of the elements: *earth* – weight, need to eat or defecate; *water* – need to drink, urinate; *fire* – heat or cold; *wind* – need to breathe.
- b. Second stage: subtle feelings (pain, joy)
- i. Worldly feelings (related to flesh): lust, anger, delusion; *pleasant* – increase sensual desire; *unpleasant* – deprived of sensual pleasures; *neutral* – indifference to sensuality.
 - ii. Unworldly feelings (not related to flesh, joy and happiness of deep concentration; happiness of liberation): free from lust, anger, delusion; *pleasant* – decrease sensual desire; *unpleasant* – frustration or anxiety of not yet attaining liberation (going overboard) or failing to live up to our own standards; *neutral* – neutral feelings of meditation or equanimity.
 - iii. Feel impermanence – requires some intentional effort.
- c. Helpful suggestions
- i. Beware of falling into “thinking” rather than watching mental events.
 - ii. If unable to feel, even neutral feelings, just note that.
 - iii. Conclude by resting in whole-body awareness with a sense of impermanence. Be aware that “there is a feeling”.
3. **Mind** (3rd *satipatthana*): mindful/not mindful, lust/no lust, anger/no anger, delusion/no delusion – impermanence, therefore “suffering”, therefore no self-existence
- a. In general, this phase is characterized by continuous monitoring of the state of mind:
 - i. Presence or absence of lust (passionate desire, attachment) – pleasant feelings
 - ii. Presence or absence of anger (aversion) – painful feelings
 - iii. Presence or absence of delusion (ignorance) – neutral feelings
 - iv. Presence or absence of distraction from mindfulness
 - b. Higher states of mind:
 - i. Knowing mind has become great or not (opening of the heart –degree of lovingkindness, compassion, joy, equanimity)

- ii. Knowing mind to be surpassable or not (whether meditation can be taken further)
- iii. Knowing mind to be concentrated or not (deepening of tranquility)
- iv. Knowing mind to be liberated or not (absence of *self-existence* or fundamental ignorance of the true nature of things)
- c. Helpful suggestions:
 - i. Rejoice in wholesome conditions of your mind.
 - ii. Integrate the experience of the mind with body and feelings (*satipatthana* 1 & 2); continuously monitoring your mind.
 - iii. Conclude by resting in open awareness of the present moment, impermanence and change. Recognize distractions and return to open awareness.
 - iv. The flavor and texture of well-established mindfulness has qualities such as being open, receptive, flexible, alive, centered, clear, and calm.
- 4. **Dharmas** (4th *satipatthana*) – monitoring mental qualities that obstruct and those that lead forward to liberation
 - a. **Hindrances**: (1) recognize whether present or not, ideally at the sense door, then (2) contemplate (a) how arises, (b) how removed, and (c) how to prevent recurrence. Recognition alone may be sufficient for those of weak strength. Those of greater strength require more:
 - i. Sensual desire – antidotes: contemplate impermanence of pleasant feelings and/or anatomical parts (sexual desire) with strong intention and an element of playfulness. Follow with restrain or moderation at the sense door.
 - ii. Anger – antidotes: impermanence of unpleasant feelings, no *self-existence*, and lovingkindness meditation
 - iii. Laziness or inactivity (“sloth or torpor” e.g., sluggishness, boredom, [body or mind], avoidance, attitude – antidotes: joy of present moment, inhalation as last breath, recollecting an inspiring teaching, more mental clarity
 - iv. Restlessness-and-worry – antidotes: joy of present moment, relax and let go on exhalation, whole-body awareness, contentment, not too tight or too loose, set aside for after practice
 - v. Doubt – antidote: investigation, set aside for after practice, ask for help or do it yourself (trust yourself), distinguish between wholesome and skillful vs. unwholesome and unskillful, practice patience and understanding, examine your own abilities, try another practice, do walking meditation
 - vi. Conclude by resting in open awareness of the present moment, impermanence and change. Recognize distractions and return to open awareness.
 - b. **Awakening factors**: (1) recognize whether present or not, then (2) how arises and (3) how perfected; *presence of these seven awakening factors testifies to our capacity to awaken*, even if currently weak:

- i. Mindfulness – the foundation: memory, interest, receptivity, avoiding minor details and associations, unbiased observation, flavor of being soft, awake, and present (SAP).
 - ii. Investigation – keen interest, inquisitiveness, wish to follow up to understand, knowing the condition of your mind, meta-awareness
 - iii. Energy – patience and persistence, active and continuous engagement, unshaken
 - iv. Joy – subtle joy of being in the present moment, unworldly joy, rejoicing in the absence of hindrances, ongoing intention
 - v. Tranquility – calmness of body and mind, at ease, leads to ultimate, lasting happiness
 - vi. Concentration – bringing together, collectedness, unified serenity, four absorptions that arise as part of a cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path approached with an analytical attitude (precede Buddha; discourses vary in meaning of the term).
 - vii. Equipoise – calming equipoise, superb balance of the mind free from desires and discontent (and returning the moment it is lost)
 - c. Helpful suggestions:
 - i. May be practiced sequentially, including study and contemplation, or in three groups: i, ii-iv, v-vii; also applied to external situations (“others”).
 - ii. Progression of insight through seclusion (from hindrances and distractions), dispassion (fading away of craving and attachments), cessation (ending of “suffering” etc.), letting go (discern the true nature of existence and able to be at peace). “There should be small but noticeable changes for the better in our personal well-being and in how we relate to others.”
 - iii. Conclude by resting in open awareness of the present moment, impermanence and change. Recognize distractions and return to open awareness rooted in mindfulness of the whole-body.
5. **Dwelling independently**: not clinging to anything

The Four Establishments of Mindfulness – Thich Nhat Hanhⁱⁱⁱ

In another alternative, Thich Nhat Hanh has presented a very simple and direct approach that may appeal to many. I have focused here on the exercises in his description, sometimes abbreviated, and eliminating the terms “I”, “me”, and “mine”, which are contradictory to most other sources and teachings of the Buddha.

1. **Exercises for observing the body**
 - a. Conscious breathing – Sitting straight, breathe in, aware of breathing in. Breathe out, aware of breathing out.
 - b. Following the breath:

- i. Breathe in a long breath, aware of breathing in a long breath. Breathe out a long breath, aware of breathing out a long breath.
- ii. Breathe in a short breath, aware of breathing in a short breath. Breathe out a short breath, aware of breathing out a short breath.
- c. Oneness of body and mind - Breathing in, be aware of the whole body. Breathing out, be aware of the whole body.
- d. Calming - Breathing in, calm the body. Breathing out, calm the body.
- e. Positions of the body - When walking, be aware of walking. When standing, be aware of standing. When lying down, be aware of lying. In whatever position, be aware of the position of the body.
- f. Bodily actions:
 - i. Going forward or backward, be aware of going forward or backward. When looking in front or behind, bending down or standing up, apply full awareness to those actions.
 - ii. When eating or drinking, chewing or savoring food, be aware of all of this.
 - iii. When passing excrement or urinating, be fully aware of this.
 - iv. When walking, standing, lying down, sitting, sleeping or waking up, speaking or being silent, shine awareness on all this.
- g. Parts of the body -
 - i. Be aware of the body from the soles of the feet upward and from the hair on top of the head downwards;
 - ii. Be aware of a body contained inside the skin and full of all the impurities which belong to the body: the hair of the head, the hairs on the body, the nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, bowels, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, mucus, joint fluid, urine.
- h. Body and universe - Be aware that in this body is the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.
- i. The body as impermanent - Be aware of the nine stages of decomposition of a corpse:
 - i. The corpse is bloated, blue, and festering.
 - ii. The corpse is crawling with insect and worms. Crows, hawks, vultures, and wolves are tearing it apart to eat.
 - iii. All that is left is a skeleton with some flesh and blood still clinging to it.
 - iv. All that is left is a skeleton with some blood stains, but no more flesh.
 - v. All that is left is a skeleton with no more blood stains.
 - vi. All that is left is a collection of scattered bones - here an arm, there a shin, here a skull, and so forth.
 - vii. All that is left is a collection of bleached bones.
 - viii. All that is left is a collection of dried bones.
 - ix. The bones have decomposed, and only a pile of dust is left.

- j. Healing with joy¹⁰ –
- i. When you are fully aware of the body as body, a feeling of *bliss* arises during concentration and saturates every part of the body.
 - ii. Further, a feeling of *joy* arises to saturate every part of the body.
 - iii. Further, a feeling of *happiness* arises with the disappearance of joy and permeates the whole body.
 - iv. Further, the whole body is enveloped with a *clear, calm mind*, filled with understanding.
2. **Exercises for observing the feelings**
- a. Identifying feelings – Whenever there is a pleasant feeling, be aware of experiencing a pleasant feeling. Whenever there is a painful feeling, be aware of experiencing a painful feeling. Whenever there is neither, be aware of experiencing a neutral feeling.
 - b. Seeing the roots of feelings and identifying neutral feelings –
 - i. When there is a *pleasant* feeling based on the *body*, be aware of experiencing a pleasant feeling based on the body.
 - ii. When there is a *pleasant* feeling based on the *mind*, be aware of experiencing a pleasant feeling based on the mind.
 - iii. When there is a *painful* feeling based on the *body*, be aware of experiencing a painful feeling based on the mind.
 - iv. When there is a *painful* feeling based on the *mind*, be aware of experiencing a painful feeling based on the mind.
 - v. When there is a *neutral* feeling based on the *body*, be aware of experiencing a neutral feeling based on the mind.
 - vi. When there is a *neutral* feeling based on the *mind*, be aware of experiencing a neutral feeling based on the mind.
3. **Exercises for observing the mind**
- a. Observing the desiring mind:
 - i. When mind is *desiring*, be aware of desiring; when mind is not desiring, be aware of not desiring.
 - ii. When mind is *hating*, be aware of hating; when mind is not hating, be aware of not hating.
 - iii. When mind is in a state of *ignorance*, be aware mind is in a state of ignorance; when mind is not in a state of ignorance, be aware mind is not in a state of ignorance.
 - iv. When mind is *tense*, be aware mind tense; when mind is not tense, be aware mind is not tense.
 - v. When mind is *distracted*, be aware mind is distracted; when mind is not distracted, be aware mind is not distracted.

¹⁰ Note the similarity here to the first Four *Jhanas* described near the end of this text based on *Right Concentration* by Leigh Brasington.

- vi. When mind has a *wider scope*, be aware mind has widened in scope; when mind has a narrower scope, be aware mind has become narrower in scope.
 - vii. When mind is *capable of reaching a higher state*, be aware mind is capable of reaching a higher state; when mind is not capable of reaching a higher state, be aware mind is not capable of reaching a higher state.
 - viii. When mind is *composed*, be aware mind is composed; when mind is not composed, be aware mind is not composed.
 - ix. When my mind is *free*, be aware my mind is free; when my mind is not free, be aware my mind is not free.
- b. Observing anger:
- i. Whenever anger is present, be aware that anger is present; when anger is not present, be aware that anger is not present.
 - ii. When anger begins to arise, be aware of it; when arisen anger is abandoned, be aware of it; when anger already abandoned will not arise again in the future, be aware of it.
 - iii. When mind is not attached, be aware my mind is not attached¹¹; when mind is not hating, be aware mind is not hating.

4. Exercises for observing the objects of mind

a. Discriminative investigation:

- i. When the factor of awakening, investigation-of-phenomena¹², is present, be aware investigation-of-phenomena is present.
- ii. Be aware when not-yet-born investigation-of-phenomena is being born and when already-born investigation-of-phenomena is perfectly developed.

b. Observing "internal formations":

- i. Be aware of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind and form, sound, smell, taste, touch, objects of mind, and the internal formations which are produced in dependence on these two things.
- ii. Be aware of the birth of a new internal formation, abandoning an already produced internal formation, and when an already abandoned internal formation will not arise again.

c. Transforming "internal formations":

- i. Be aware of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind, and form, sound, smell, taste, touch, objects of mind, and the internal formations which are produced in dependence on these two things.

¹¹ At this point, Thich Nhat Hanh talks about "Love Meditation" focused on love and compassion with altruistic intent. However, no specific instructions are included. Numerous love (*metta*) meditations are available that could be used for this purpose, including one in *Innate Happiness* as part of the Four Immeasurables.

¹² Phenomena include: the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind), the six sense objects (form and color, sound, smell, taste, tactile objects, and mind-objects), and the six sense consciousnesses (sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, feeling or recalling).

- ii. Be aware of the birth of a new internal formation, abandoning an already produced internal formation, and when an already abandoned internal formation will not arise again.
- d. Overcoming agitation and remorse:
 - i. When agitation and remorse are present, be aware agitation and remorse are present; when agitation and remorse are not present, be aware agitation and remorse are not present.
 - ii. When agitation and remorse begin to arise, be aware of it; when already arisen agitation and remorse are abandoned, be aware of it; when agitation and remorse already abandoned will not arise again in the future, be aware of it.
- e. Sowing seeds of peace:
 - i. When the factor of awakening, joy (ease, letting go) is present in me, be aware joy is present; when joy is not present, be aware joy is not present.
 - ii. Be aware when no-yet-born joy is being born and when already-born joy is perfectly developed.

The Anapanasamyutta Sutta (Mindfulness with Breathing) – Bhikkhu Bodhi^{iv}

Alternately, *Anapanasamyutta* expands the four establishments of mindfulness into 16 steps all based on breathing meditation, which are said to fulfill all four establishments of mindfulness, the seven factors of enlightenment, and true knowledge and liberation (without grasping at these with thoughts of “I” or “mine”). Here is a brief overview:

1. Preparation: find a peaceful setting, sit with crossed legs and back straight.
2. Mindfully breath in ... and out, knowing if each is long or short.
3. ***The Four establishments of mindfulness***
 - a. Body: *experience* the breath in ... and out (long); the breath in ... and out (short); the whole bodily formation while breathing in ... and out; *tranquilizing* the bodily formation while breathing in ... and out.
 - b. Feelings: *continue, experiencing* rapture, happiness, mental formation, and tranquility ... while breathing in and out
 - c. Mind: *continue, experiencing* the mind, gladdening the mind, concentrating the mind, and liberating the mind ... while breathing in and out
 - d. Phenomena: *continue, contemplating* impermanence, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment ... while breathing in and out
 - e. Repeat
4. ***The Seven Factors of Enlightenment***
 - a. Mindfulness - *contemplating* the body in the body
 - b. Discrimination of phenomena - *discriminate* phenomenon with wisdom, examine it, investigate it

- c. Energy – when energy is aroused, examine it
 - d. Spiritual rapture – when energy goes to fulfillment, spiritual rapture arises
 - e. Tranquility – uplifted by rapture, the body become tranquil
 - f. Concentrated mind – becoming happy, the mind becomes concentrated
 - g. Equanimity – thus concentrated, look at the mind with equanimity
 - h. Dwell contemplating feelings in feelings, mind in mind, and phenomena in phenomena and in this way, they will fulfill the seven factors of enlightenment
5. *True Knowledge and Liberation* is attained based on seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release (from the Seven Factors of Enlightenment)

This alternative has a strong resemblance to the method of Mahasi Sayadaw, which we turn to next.

Practical Vipassana Practices - Mahasi Sayadaw^v

After the period of colonialization of Southeast Asia, Buddhism was largely destroyed by the European colonizers. But out of this emerged a renewed vision of how to practice, with a focus on lay practitioners rather than the traditional monastic community. Both were changed by the outcome, initiated by Mahasi Sayadaw in the twentieth century. He describes it as, “The practice of Vipassana or Insight Meditation is the effort to understand correctly the nature of the mental and physical phenomena within one’s own body”, sensory experiences, observing and noting each. There are two main practices: (1) basic practice and (2) progressive practice, outlined below:

Basic Practice

1. Preliminaries:
 - a. Devotion to the Buddha by appreciating nine qualities: (1) the Buddha is holy, (2) fully enlightened, (3) perfect in knowledge and conduct, (4) a welfarer, (5) world-knower, (6) the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, (7) teacher of gods and mankind, (8) the awakened one, and (9) the exalted one.
 - b. Reflect upon all sentient beings as the receivers of your lovingkindness, and identify yourself with all sentient beings without distinction.
 - c. Reflect on the repulsive nature of the body and its impurities to diminish or eliminate unwholesome attachment.
 - d. Provide psychological protection by reflecting on ever-approaching death.
2. Exercise I:
 - a. Focus your mind on your *abdomen* rising and falling (use hands if needed).
 - b. Notice each movement.
 - c. Develop your attention, concentration, and insight.
 - d. Avoid words or deep or rapid breathing.

3. Exercise II:
 - a. Notice if thoughts occur and make a note such as “imagining”, “thinking”, “reflecting”, “intending”, “wandering”, etc. until it passes away.¹³
 - b. If you need to swallow or bend your neck and so forth, note those as well.
4. Exercise III:
 - a. If feelings of fatigue, stiffness, etc. arise, note them naturally and continue.
 - b. If it becomes unbearable, change your position.
 - c. Note each part of your intention and action while acting in a slow and deliberate manner. Then continue with the contemplation.
 - d. With practice, you may be able to let physical or mental distractions dissolve on their own. Note any that arise, that dissolve.
 - e. Note any feelings of interest, enthusiasm, or rapture.
 - f. If you get up to get a drink, note each tiny intention and movement.
 - g. With sufficient practice, you will even overcome drowsiness.
 - h. Sensory experiences, thoughts and feelings will become more noticeable, more subtle.
 - i. Continue this practice during regular daily activities like taking a shower, eating, etc.
5. Advancement in Contemplation:
 - a. When noting details is no longer easy, revert to noting only rising and falling.
 - b. When contemplating body movements, there is no need to note seeing and hearing. However, if repeated seeing or hearing occurs several times, note the seeing, then return to the abdomen rising and falling.
6. Basic Exercise IV:
 - a. If you feel lazy, note it, but do not give up.
 - b. If you become doubtful, note it.
 - c. If you wish for good results, note it.
 - d. If you think about the teaching or practice, note it.
 - e. Then do contemplation on recollection: Is it mind or matter? Be aware of examining.
 - f. If you feel regret in your progress, focus on the feeling of regret.
 - g. If you feel happy, focus on the feeling of being happy.
 - h. If there are no feelings to note, revert to rising and falling.
 - i. Pay attention *constantly* from the moment you awaken until you fall asleep.
 - j. Eventually you will be able to continue even during sleep, so that your contemplation becomes *continuous*.

¹³ One concern I have with the approach here of “noting” or “naming” is that this becomes a habit, creating new neural pathways that we are later told to “dissolve”. I recommend simply “noticing and letting go” without words or labels, or better yet just refocus your attention of the object of focus – body, feeling, mind, etc.

Progressive Practice

1. When you become aware of each occurrence of a sensory experience – rising and knowing (as distinct processes) – note the difference between a bodily process and a mental process (body and mind).
2. Note the sequence of intention and action, the intensity (such as heat or cold), mental images, bodily sensations and the location of each. Note “sitting and touching” or “lying and touching”. Note how seeing arises from the contact of the eye and a visual object, and hearing arises from the contact of the ear and sound.
3. Note the sequence of this happens because that happens. Note the “causal factors” (such as *karma*) and “conditioning factors” (other circumstances). A thought may arise regarding former existences, but apart from causes and conditions, there is no “being” or “person”. Minimum such reflections are sufficient.
4. Sensations such as itching, aches, dullness, stiffness may arise. When noticing is stopped, they disappear. When noticing is resumed, they reappear. They will fade away gradually.
5. Images of all kinds may appear. Note them, but focus on sense objects and mental process associated with those sense objects.
6. If one becomes lazy, senses will overlap before noting the beginning, middle, and disappearance of one before noting another. Increase your concentration.
7. At this stage, you begin to notice that an object appears suddenly and disappears instantly. Reflect on the impermanence of all things, their being subject to “suffering”, and they are without a “self”. Reflect that objects not experienced are the same. Do not focus on these reflections (excessive reflecting is an impediment), but note their arising and falling, then return to sensory objects.
8. At this point, noticing accelerates. Objects appear in quick succession until you cannot keep pace. Notice only in a general manner without “naming”. Note clearly what arises and comprehend every object that arises. When this becomes tiring, revert to the basic practice of noticing the rising and falling of the abdomen.

In a separate talk from these instructions, Mahasi Sayadaw noted that “when one comes to realize firmly that all these phenomena are impermanent, suffering, and non-self, one will attain nirvana.... In fact, it may be within a month or twenty days of meditation practice. Those whose perfections are exceptional may have these experiences within seven days.”

Mindfulness with Breathing – Buddhadasa Bhikkhu^{vi}

This approach is similar, based upon **The *Anapanasamyutta Sutta***. Each group includes four steps called “tetrads”, for a total of 16. The breath (*prana* or life force) is

contemplated directly in only two steps. There are various properties to be considered: (1) long duration, (2) short duration, (3) coarseness, (4) fineness, (5) easiness, and (6) uneasiness. [Normal breath is considered “short”.]

This model also addresses five factors associated with the *jhanas*, levels of contemplation or meditation. However, the English translations of two of these factors described by Buddhadasa in the introduction to chapter 5 seem to be reversed. *Piti* is translated as “contentment” and *sukha* as “joy”. But the text that follows says they are “not peaceful” and “tranquil” respectively. My dictionary (*Oxford Desk Dictionary and Thesaurus*) describes contentment as “tranquil happiness” and joy as “extreme gladness, delight, elation”, the exact opposites as initially defined in the text. Similarly, Leigh Brasington, in *Right Concentration: A Practical Guide to the Jhanas*, describes uses “contentment” as the major factor of the third *jhana*. In addition, other sources list these two factors as “joy” and “happiness” respectively. Because “happiness” includes such a wide variety of descriptions, I have opted for “joy” and “contentment” (tranquil happiness) in this summary.

Each session begins with #1. Over time, the earlier parts will take less time, but firmly establish the foundation to continue on to the next step. [After the formal meditation session, continue to apply the contemplations throughout the day and night, as long as you are conscious.]

1. **Contemplation of the body** (*kayanopassana*) with focus on the breath (**first tetrad**).
 - a. (Step 1) Knowing the long breath properties, qualities, influence, and “flavor”:
 - i. How pleasant is it?
 - ii. Natural and ordinary?
 - iii. What kinds of calmness and happiness arise?
 - iv. Differences with short breath?
 - v. How the body works in relation to the long breath –
 1. How does it move?
 2. Where does it expand? Contract?
 3. On deepest possible long breath, does the chest expand or contract? Abdomen?
 - b. (Step 2) Knowing the short breath properties, qualities, influence, and flavor (as above). [Note, Buddhadasa describes short breath as uneasy, agitated, uncomfortable and making the body feel similarly; whereas long, fine breath can calm and cool the body so, for example, can calm and cool our emotions.]
 - c. (Step 3) Knowing how the breath regulates the body:
 - i. Experience the body being conditioned by the breath and then the process of that conditioning on the inbreath; the outbreath. Note how the three become calmer, finer, more peaceful, and calm the mind.
 - ii. Five higher-order methods (stages):
 1. Following – same as previous steps (repeat or review)

2. Guarding – choose a point along the breath’s path on which to focus (usually the opening of the nostrils); stay on that point, breath usually calms further
 3. Raising a mental image – imagine any shape, form, color (e.g., candle flame, small sphere of light, sun or moon) at the guarding point (#2 above)
 4. Playing with mental images – change the image or alternate between images, play with them; breath and mind become even more calm
 5. Concentrated focus on a mental image as an object of attention
- d. (Step 4) Contemplating the breath to calm the body – select a single image (soothing, relaxing, easy to focus on, e.g., a white dot, something neutral (no emotional content))
- i. The five *jhana* factors:
 1. Noting an object of focus (*vitakka*)
 2. Experiencing or sustaining that focus (*vicara*)
 3. Joy (*piti*) – delight, elation
 4. Contentment (*sukha*) – tranquil, peaceful
 5. One-pointed focus (*ekaggata*) – the peak or pinnacle [this stage is said not to be necessary here as long as there are clear experiences of joy and happiness]
 - ii. This may take 3 days to 3 years, depending on individual faculties and commitment to practice. The degree of contentment and joy is likely to be proportionate to the extent of calming.
2. **Contemplation of feelings** (*Vedana*) (**second tetrad**)
- a. (Step 5) Contemplate feelings of joy with each in breath, with each outbreath until we experience the calming effect on the body. Find out what the feeling is like. Fully experience it:
 - i. What is its “flavor”? Heavy? Light? Course? Subtle? (in/out)
 - ii. What is its influence on the mind, on thoughts? (in/out)
 - iii. Observe when it is not present; what is the mind like? (in/out)
 - iv. Observe when it is intense; how much greater is the joy? (in/out)
 - v. See how the courses kinds of joy differ from the medium and finest types, and how their influence on the mind differs (in/out). [Note that joy is more course, less refined and subtle than contentment.]
 - b. (Step 6) Contemplate contentment arising out of joy, which calms and soothes:
 - i. Experience the “flavor” of contentment with every inhalation and exhalation.
 - ii. Focus on “contentment” arising out of “joy”, a cooling down (in/out).
 - iii. How light is it? How heavy? How course? How subtle? (in/out)
 - iv. How does “contentment” flavor awareness and experience? (in/out)
 - v. With joy, the breath tends to be rough; with contentment it is fine. Joy is course; contentment calms and becomes subtle.

- vi. [Note: sometimes joy can interfere with contentment, so it may require effort to ensure that it does not fade away.]
- c. (Step 7) Experiencing the “mind-conditioner” – the feelings of joy and contentment condition the mind in the same way that the breath conditioned the body (above).
 - i. Joy is course and excited, strong resembling the body, may even dance or bounce with joy; the mind is excited or disturbed and interferes with “special insight” (in/out).
 - ii. Contentment is calm and tranquil, soothing and relaxing; in the mind it leads to tranquil, refined states and can cause subtle and profound thoughts, including “special insight” – impermanence, dissatisfaction, and not self-existent (in/out).
- d. (Step 8) Calming the feelings breathing in and breathing out, developing control of the mind over feelings:
 - i. Concentration methods –
 1. Developing a higher concentration, e.g., 3rd or 4th *jhana* (in/out)
 2. Bring in another kind of thought to intervene or suppress joy (in/out)
 3. Focus one-pointedly on nirvana (in/out)
 - ii. Wisdom method
 1. Realize the “true nature” (impermanent, interdependent, having parts) of all things to understand how joy arises and how it will cease ... that it is “illusory” and not “real”¹⁴ (in/out)
 2. Contemplate the attractive qualities that attract our heart and its unhealthy consequences (in/out). [Joy excites (its charm) and disturbs, driving away tranquility (its unwholesomeness); then joy will dissolve and disappear.
- 3. **Contemplating the heart-mind (third tetrad)**
 - a. (Step 9) Contemplating or experiencing mind in all its aspects at each moment of practice.
 - i. Observe the mind at each step: what is its condition now? How is it changing? What arises in the heart-mind? What are the mind’s characteristics at this moment? What kind of experience is it? (in/out)
 - ii. Observe whether there is a superior state of mind, sharper than usual, more satisfying, higher, or merely a common state. What is the state right now? (in/out) [This can be difficult to know as most of us have not experienced such a noble state, but we can discern whether there is more to be developed.]
 - iii. Is mind concentrated, focused or not? To what extent is it focused? (in/out)

¹⁴ “Illusory” here means that it *lacks* any inherent self-nature, is independent of any cause or condition, i.e., it is *not* uncreated, unchanging, permanent (or *is* created, changing impermanent). “Real” would be *having* these qualities or characteristics (uncreated, unchanging, permanent). But those are not to be found, thus all are “illusory”.

- iv. Is mind liberated, empty of attachment or grasping or clinging to anything? [Buddha generally talked of “strong” forms of these hindrances, not forms of moderation.] Is there anything arresting the mind right now? Or is it free? In either case, know it clearly. (in/out)
- b. (Step 10) Delighting the heart-mind
 - i. Intentionally make the mind joyful, delighted and content by knowing and using Dharma (e.g., practicing the previous steps successfully); focus specifically on the feelings of joyful delight, success, and contentment. We have the control to eliminate dissatisfaction (*dukkha*).
- c. (Step 11) Concentrating the heart-mind
 - i. Concentrate or focus the mind in order to drive away any unwanted feelings. We will observe mind that is firm, steady, undistracted, and focused on a chosen object, empty of defilements – stable, pure, and ready – concurrently knowing impermanence, interdependence, and no self-existence. [These qualities can be present while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down.]
- d. (Step 12) Liberating the heart-mind – not letting the mind become attached to anything
 - i. Examine the danger, pain, suffering in any moment that we “cling” to something as “I” or “mine”. Realize the benefits and advantages of non-attachment.
 1. Material objects (in/out)
 2. Immaterial objects (in/out)
 3. Traditional activities (religious or secular) (in/out)
 4. All things viewed as “I” or “mine” (in/out)
 - ii. Five hindrances: (1) feelings of sensuality, (2) aversion, (3) depression and drowsiness, (4) agitation and distraction, and (5) doubt and uncertainty (in/out).
 - iii. Three defilements: (1) greed, (2) anger, and (3) delusion (in/out).
 - iv. Liking and disliking, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, attachment (in/out)
 - v. Mind becomes gentle, supple, sensitive and quick, ready for the 4th tetrad.
- 4. **Examining “truth”** – the internal “things” (**fourth tetrad**)
 - a. (Step 13) Contemplate impermanence of:
 - i. The breath, the breath and body, heart-mind; experience impermanence directly (in/out).
 - ii. Unsatisfactoriness, no self-existence, emptiness, suchness, and conditionality (cause and effect) (in/out).
 - b. (Step 14) Study how realization of impermanence dissolves attachment – *equanimity* or even-minded stillness regarding all physical and mental formations – includes dependent origination or *interdependence*; subject, object, and action involved (in/out). [Includes the 5 aggregates: form, feeling, perception, thoughts, and sense-consciousness; as well as the 12 links of dependent origination: ignorance, formations, consciousness, name & form,

- six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, old age & death.]
- c. (Step 15) Quenching of attachment
 - i. Ending fearfulness - birth, aging, illness, death (in/out)
 - ii. Cessation of symptoms of dissatisfaction - sorrow, grief, bemoaning, despair, sadness, pain, frustration, depression (in/out)
 - iii. Grasping at what we like or want; rejecting or renouncing what we dislike or do not want (in/out)
 - iv. Clinging to aggregates (individually or collectively) as “me” or “mine” (in/out)
 - v. Realizing the emptiness of attachment (in/out)
 - vi. Drinking, tasting, savoring the “flavor” of nirvana (deep peace, innate happiness; in/out)
 - d. (Step 16) Contemplate letting go of all attachments, burdens of life - “living above the world” (*lokuttara*); supreme liberation - letting go, release!

Condensed & Shortcut Versions for Ordinary People

Buddhadasa Translator - Santikaro Bhikkhu^{vii}

Condensed Version (p. 123) - once you understand the entire 16 steps, you can condense them, such as:

1. Concentrate the mind by contemplating the breath:, long, short (normal), and then the feelings in the body that arise in each.
2. Contemplate everything you know and experience with every breath in/out; how they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self-existent ... until you experience letting go, release, and no attachment!
3. Note the ending of defilements and the ceasing of attachments.

Shortcut version (p. 125) - using any *bodily activity* for mindfulness:

1. First Tetrad - activity
 - a. Get to know the activity from all angles
 - b. See what influence that activity has on the body
 - c. Find the way to perform that activity with optimal effect on the body and allows an appropriate degree and type of concentration
2. Second Tetrad - feelings
 - a. Examine the feelings that arise when the activity is done well and successfully
 - b. Study the influence these feelings have on the mind
 - c. Calm that influence
3. Third Tetrad - mind

- a. Experience different types of mind that arise during that activity
- b. Train to gladden, concentrate, and liberate the mind during that activity
- 4. Fourth Tetrad – body, feeling, and mind; most important!
 - a. Contemplate all aspects of that activity – body, feeling, mind – as impermanent, unsatisfactory, having no self-existence.

The Vipassana Meditation of S. N. Goenka^{viii}

Goenka was another popular teacher of Vipassana meditation who significantly influenced Western students. Analayo, above, point out that there is no textual basis in the early discourses for the “body scan” that is included here. The goal is to achieve an extraordinary calmness of mind, deep compassion for *all* others, a sense of humor, and transcendent happiness. *Vipassana*, meaning “insight”, is treated as the direct experience of “truth”.

Goenka taught his approach in 10-day workshops beginning with three and a half days of mental concentration, followed by formal *Vipassana* training on the fourth day, then further steps each day to the end. The initial effort required eases into relaxed alertness as mind becomes calm and every moment is full of affirmation, beauty and peace.

1. First, it is important to understand and practice ethics, in which *intention* and *results* of the action are most important. The precepts involve doing good, or at least no harm. Wholesome actions involve lovingkindness and compassion with altruistic intention for all beings. The five unwholesome actions for nonmonastic practitioners are: (1) killing, (2) lying, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) stealing, and (5) intoxication. Detailed explanations are available elsewhere.
2. Awareness of respiration – pay attention to the breath entering and leaving the nostrils ... with a focus on “awareness”. Do not try to control the breath. Beware (not “be aware”) of distracting thoughts. If they arise, return your attention to breathing immediately. Keep repeating to develop a *new habit* ... one with patience and calmness. Breath becomes soft, regular, light, shallow, even seeming to stop altogether; but actually the *mind* becomes tranquil, the body becomes calm, and metabolism slows so less oxygen is required.¹⁵ This tends to require sharper concentration as we continue to hone the mind.

This does require some effort, especially in the beginning. The Buddha taught four types of “right effort”:

- a. to prevent evil, unwholesome states from arising;
- b. to abandon them if they should arise;

¹⁵ Note that this is somewhat contradictory with other versions in which breath is slowed, but deepened or elongated, most likely in an intentional way, especially when investigating its impact on the body.

- c. to generate wholesome states not yet existing; and
 - d. to maintain them without lapse, causing them to develop and to reach full growth and perfection.
3. He then moves to a discussion of the wisdom element, the third training (ethics, concentration, and wisdom – the Three Trainings) and the practice of *vipassana*. We must address not only the obvious defilements, but our subconscious ones as well. Goenka refers to self-indulgence vs. self-restraint (in moderation) based on ethics and concentration skills developed above. This requires deep concentration, observation of the reality within oneself – the *insight* of direct experience, not teachings from others. Here, the practice involves a body scan, paying careful attention to sensations within the *mind* and corresponding sensations in the *body*.
- a. Observe bodily sensations – methodically; head to feet and feet to head (any sensation, e.g., heat, cold, heaviness, lightness, itching, throbbing, contraction, expansion, pressure, pain, tingling, pulsation, vibration, etc.) *ignoring the cause*. Do not jump from one sensation to the next, but move slowly to each part of the body and simply observe. If you become distracted, return to a focus on respiration to sharpen the mind, then return to the body scan.
 - b. Observe changes – the *impermanence* of sensations, including “self” or “ego”, and other things we like. *Strong attachment* to things that change (everything) leads to our sense of dissatisfaction (*dukkha*). Observe without reacting, without judging (*equanimity*). Observe also our *aversions*, dislikes. Do not react; let it be as it is.
 - c. Awareness of sensations and our reactions enables us to *choose*. The mind becomes balanced and peaceful. Becoming *alert* to our sensations is the most accessible way to experience impermanence and to break the old mental habit of reaction. Then you smile and be happy!

Thus, the main focus is on developing (1) *awareness* of sensations and their *impermanence* and (2) *equanimity* through not reacting. By observing unpleasant sensations without reacting, we eradicate aversion. By observing pleasant sensations without reacting, we eradicate craving (attachment). By observing neutral sensations without reacting, we eradicate ignorance. This is called *nirvana*.

But *real happiness* comes from also performing actions that contribute to the welfare of others along with actions that cleanse the mind. It is not indifference, but purity of mind, full of lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, along with equanimity. This is the greatest good.

The Jhanas - Brasington^{ix}

The following descriptions are based on the Pali Canon, which differ from the commentaries often used, e.g., the Theravada tradition uses primarily Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* commentary.

The other forms of meditation described above focus upon "mindfulness" applied in the context of *vipassana* or insight meditations. Some mention the *jhana* meditation. (*Jhana* literally means meditation.) These practices were well known prior to the Buddha, though they may have been reorganized and in some cases applied differently by the Buddha and/or his later followers. He is said to have learned the two sets (see below) respectively from his two teachers, Arada Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta prior to his enlightenment. In the sutras the Buddha often described meditation on the *jhanas*. In some sutras in the Pali Canon, the Buddha even describes these as leading directly to his liberation. So, to complete the picture of the descriptions of early meditation, I have included a brief overview of these *jhana* practices (*dhyana* in Sanskrit).

There are four *jhanas* described as focused attention on an object (similar to *shamata* with signs) and four *higher jhanas* focused on no object, formless states, or "mind" (similar to *shamata* without signs). In later texts, these two sets are sometimes combined as the eight *jhanas*. There is also a preliminary practice called "access concentration" that prepares us for the *jhana* practices, for a total of nine.

"But wait! There's more!" Yes, there is also mention of an even higher state attained by the Buddha called *nirodha-sampatti* – the "cessation of feelings and perceptions", which is briefly included here.

NOTE: Don't try to "do" the *jhanas*; you can't. Set the conditions and wait ... practice patience!

The Four Jhanas

1. **Access concentration** – abandoning *hindrances* or *unwholesome states* - sense desires (wanting or craving), ill will, laziness and sluggishness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt – so they do not arise or distract, if they do arise:
 - a. Intentionally relax
 - b. Select an object of focus, usually the breath (similar to previous practices above – see Mindfulness of Breathing; in this case "knowing each in and out breath is a sign of reaching access concentration)
 - c. Abide in relaxed diligence (alertness); ok to move, just be mindful of moving
 - d. If distracted, repeat
 - e. Stay fully focused on the meditation object
 - f. Breath becomes very subtle (may no longer be aware of breathing)
 - g. Shift attention to a pleasant sensation (preferably physical), e.g., a slight smile, as in many images of the Buddha or lovingkindness at the heart center;

- if mind wanders several times, return to focus on the breath, a sign of insufficient concentration
- h. Observe the physical pleasantness until it begins to grow in intensity, gladness arises, the transition to the *first jhana*.
 - i. Generally, practice access concentration for a month or more before continuing, even when signs are present
2. **First jhana – rapture** (a sense of joy!) and happiness, accompanied by thinking and examining (in the background), secluded from the hindrances (above)
 - a. Focus undistractedly on the pleasant physical sensation (not emotional) from the access concentration
 - b. The feeling should grow stronger (tends to be slow at first, but more quickly with more experience)
 - c. Rest in the experience 10-15 minutes until it suffuses the whole body (if becomes too intense, start over with access concentration)
 3. **Second jhana** – single-pointed focus on calming **tranquility** arises, without thinking or examining
 - a. The sensation will calm into happy tranquility with a decline in rapture or joy and thinking (may experience some ebbs and flows in the transition) – feels much like ordinary happiness
 - b. Rest in the happy tranquility for 10-15 minutes or more, until it fully suffuses the whole body
 4. **Third jhana** – mindful and clearly comprehended **contentment** arises
 - a. Take a deep breath and let it all out as you dial down the intensity of the second *jhana*
 - b. Happiness declines as contentment or satisfaction arises
 - c. Rest in the contentment for 10-15 minutes or more, until the whole body is fully suffused with contentment
 5. **Fourth jhana** – **undistracted quiet stillness of deep concentration** and a mind fully purified by equanimity
 - a. Let go of the contentment and rest in quiet stillness with concentrated even-mindedness (*equanimity* – neither pleasant nor unpleasant)
 - b. Maintain quiet stillness and equanimity (may experience a sense of isolation and withdrawal) for 10-15 minutes or more, until the whole body is fully suffused by a “pure bright mind”¹⁶ (may even visually experience a bright whiteness, like sitting under a white sheet in bright sunlight with eyes open)
 6. **Continuing the practice**
 - a. Each practice session begins with access concentration and continues one step at a time until you reach the level of your advancement. That level may change from one session or day to the next.

¹⁶ No clear explanation is given of this term, but may relate to the Buddha saying he was “awake” or the term “alertness” or “clear seeing” – insight.

- b. Continue by moving up and down the steps, e.g., 1-2-3-4-3-2-1 or 1-2-3-2-3-4-3-4-3-2-3-2-1.
 - c. Practice patience! Let each experience deepen.
 - d. Move from one step to another with shorter durations.
7. **Insight meditation** – The Buddha found that the *jhanas* were insufficient in and of themselves; he extended his wisdom through practices called insight meditation:
- a. Insight is a direct, understood experience, “knowing and seeing” of body, elements, impermanence, mind, etc. (as in some of the other practices above) and applies on and off the cushion.
 - b. Two types:
 - i. *Meditations*: wordless sensory observation.
 - ii. *Contemplations*: thinking about topics: impermanence, emptiness, no-self, interdependence or dependent origination, the Four Noble Truths, etc.
 - c. Insight meditation is usually described as following the *four jhanas*. However, in other cases (mostly what appear to be later additions) they are described as following the *four higher jhanas*.¹⁷

The Four Higher Jhanas – immaterial or formless states¹⁸

- 8. **Fifth jhana: sphere of limitless space** – passing beyond bodily sensations with no attraction to perception of things, one sees limitless space; focus on the *sense of expansion* (if you are not visual, just sense the spaciousness, know that it is there) for 10-15 minutes or more.
- 9. **Sixth jhana: sphere of limitless consciousness** – shift to *awareness* of your awareness (consciousness) as big as limitless space; just and experience for 10-15 minutes or more.
- 10. **Seventh jhana: sphere of no-thingness** – shift to awareness of the *content* (or lack thereof) of limitless consciousness (not “emptiness”, i.e., lack of inherent existence); may experience as blackness, deep purple, or dark blue – there is a sense of space (may be very intense or can be “a pretty cool place to hang out” with nothing to disturb you! Experience for 10-15 minutes or more.
- 11. **Eighth jhana: sphere of neither perception nor non-perception** – “perception” here infers identifying and naming or labelling things, so this can be seen as neither naming nor not naming (may also be translated as “neither consciousness nor unconsciousness”; but this state has no characteristics, making it difficult, if not impossible, to describe (how can you name without naming? how can you know without knowing?); this state is very subtle and difficult to sustain.

¹⁷ According to the earliest sources, these may have originally been taught as four alternate experiences, which later became a sequential list.

¹⁸ These four states are similar or even identical to those often described in Vajrayana practices of trekcho in Dzogchen, or in Mahamudra.

12. **Continuing the practice** – as above with the four *jhanas*:

- a. Each practice session begins with access concentration and continues one step at a time until you reach the level of your advancement. That level may change from one session or day to the next.
- b. Continue by moving up and down the steps, e.g., 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 or 1-2-3-4-5-6-5-6-7-6-7-8-7-8-7-6-7-6-5 up and down
- c. Practice patience! Let each experience deepen
- d. Move from one step to another with shorter durations; concentrate

The Ninth Jhana(?) – cessation of perception and feeling

1. Higher perception cessation or just “cessation” is found in many contexts in the Pali Canon. In one the Buddha states, “It is only when the Tathagata withdraws his attention from outward signs, and by the cessation of certain feelings, enters into the signless concentration of mind that his body knows comfort”. And in another the Buddha describes “full awakening” based on “attending to the singleness dependent on the signless concentration of mind”. [This appears to similar to the *higher jhanas*, and “singleness” sounds like single-pointed concentration without signs.]
2. It is described as requiring “extremely deep concentration” and is apparently similar to the *first jhana* in Buddhagosa’s much later *Visuddimagga* commentary.

All of these *jhana* states are sometimes referred to as concentration (*samadhi*) states that enhance your “insight” practice into the true nature of mind and phenomena.

Summary and Commentary – Khenpo Drimed Dawa

What have I learned? My interest in “mindfulness” began early in my studies and practices of Buddhism, but in my Vajrayana tradition it is not particularly emphasized. We are more likely to engage in *shamata* practice, which is similar, but frequently does not emphasize using the skill being developed in meditation when *off* the cushion. But I was exposed to it through readings and videos of Thich Nhat Hanh and a few others. When I recently began to look deeper into the early tradition, including many of the sources cited above, I became more aware of the emphasis on mindfulness by the Buddha. My key takeaway from this experience has been how helpful these practices can be, especially early in one’s development, when also combined with Buddhist ethics.

The skill of *focused attention* on a fairly wide variety of topics provides a significant level of skill development not found in early Vajrayana training. By training on this variety of topics one expands the neural pathways involved in a way that facilitates applicability to activities off the cushion. Remember that we are training our mind primarily to enhance our view and actions, not to be a good meditator. Meditation is just the *practice*, the rehearsal for the performance of everyday life!

There is another point that I would like to make here. Dzogchen is sometimes criticized as not being an authentic Buddhist teaching. One striking factor in reading a variety of sources based on the Pali Canon (at least at the highest forms of practice), is the similarity with many of the teachings in the Dzogchen tradition! Some sources believe that there is lack of evidence of Dzogchen until around the 10th or 11th centuries in Tibet. While the elaboration of these practices may have happened at that time, the Pali Canon seems to have the basics of Dzogchen (though not by that name) present for all to see.

Now keep in mind that Theravada and Insight Meditation as we know it today, though based on the Pali Canon, has been cherry-picked and, in many cases, heavily modernized. Just as Tibetan masters emphasized commentaries over original sources in their scholastic teachings, so did Theravada and its secular Insight Meditation branch, particularly those based on or derived from the Buddaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, and later during a rejuvenation of the tradition (after colonization of SE Asia almost eliminated the Buddhist tradition in those countries) and Mahasi Sayadaw's influence in the 20th century. As I read the sources directly from translations of the Pali Canon, I can't help but speculate that perhaps the Mahayana movement did something similar, though also including a few other sources, particularly those preserved in Sanskrit, to articulate another common view of the Buddha's teachings very early in the development of Buddhism. The primary difficulty for scholars in this difference is the lack of any evidence of an extensive collection of these texts comparable to the Pali collection until the first Chinese collection around the turn of the 4th century CE.

What about Dzogchen? In *tantra* in general and Dzogchen specifically, the practices of *shamata* and *vipassana* are emphasized with strong similarities and very specific benefits nearly identical to the mindfulness and *jhana* practices as described by the Buddha in the Pali Canon. In Dzogchen there is more emphasis on the *nature* of mind, though mind more broadly speaking is also one of the branches of mindfulness training in the Pali.

The principle focus of Dzogchen *trekcho* meditation (and post-meditation experience) is on *rigpa* (pure awareness – awareness itself, before one becomes aware of sensory experiences, thoughts, etc. – the potentiality of mind rather than the perceptions or other actions that it enables). But the direct experience of *rigpa* is very difficult to articulate clearly. So it is often said to be ineffable. Or it is *like* space (like empty space without any objects, not space itself), or it is awareness of awareness (*rigpa* or pure consciousness or metacognition), or it is *like* nothingness (similar to the *Heart Sutra* – “not” a vast list of things or experiences; you can't say what it is, only what it is not), or like Nagarjuna's *tetralemma* (not a thing, not no-thing, not both, not neither). So these are amazingly similar to the Four Formless Absorptions of infinite space, infinite consciousness, infinite nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception.

Various texts in the Pali Canon attribute one or other of these experiences being described by the Buddha as key to his enlightenment. They include the first *jhana*, the

fourth, the seventh and the eighth, as well as mindfulness meditation itself, each explained by the Buddha as being very key in his realization, liberation, or enlightenment. None of these differ significantly from the meditations articulated in the Dzogchen tradition that was transmitted from India into Tibet. These and other sources in the Pali tradition could well be the root sources for the development of the Dzogchen tradition. Perhaps it is time for a more solidly integrated form of the tradition.

Again, I am speculating, but it seems quite possible, if not probable, that a small group of practitioners could easily have taken these understandings and practices as their focus, based on the original teachings of the Buddha, and practiced it as yogis. Keep in mind that the six years Gautama spent on the *shramana* path was referred to as the path of the *pratekyabuddhas* – who achieved liberation practicing primarily on their own as yogins. And the Buddha continued to refer to *pratekyabuddhas* in his teachings, and continued to have occasional interactions with followers of this tradition. That model was there, for all to see, though with the Buddha's modifications, such as the Middle Way, among others. Why would his modified approach not be one of the options followed by some of his disciples, practiced in secret and passed along through an oral tradition (much like the early years, if not centuries) of the Buddhist tradition?

Furthermore, with the influence of *tantra* practices in India, ca. 4th-5th century or perhaps much earlier, since that only represents the later monasticized version of *tantra*¹⁹, would this lineage also not be somewhat influenced or even embraced by these yogis and yoginis? Then, after the transmission into Tibet (attributed to Padmasambhava in the late 8th century) along with the beginnings of the monastic tradition, until early Dzogchen was largely driven back to its yogi roots (householders, but not monastics, were still permitted to engage in these practices) by King Lang Dharma.

But with the arrival of the new monastic tradition of the second dissemination of Buddhism into Tibet (11th-14th centuries), the yogi tradition began to exert its reaction to this new monastic tradition. It started to document and expound upon the yogi and yogini practices in written forms. These became integrated with the early forms of *tantra* texts and practices as the highest forms of practice – Dzogchen and Mahamudra – just as their Formless Absorption predecessors had done with the Four *Jhanas*.

I admit that this is speculation, and although I am a scholar by training and professional experience, I do not have the specific expertise to be able to analyze these ideas in their earliest sources to determine whether there is any validity to my ideas. And few texts have survived from this time to even examine. Perhaps others will find it to be of sufficient interest to be worthy of investigation.

¹⁹ Although commonly thought of as the practice of engaging in sexual union during meditation, *tantra* is a detailed practice that primarily involves the powerful practice of visualizing a buddha form, then oneself as that Buddha form, then becoming a Buddha. But that is well beyond the scope of this text.

In the meantime, I offer this brief text of summaries of related practices on mindfulness and wisdom as a developmental tool for those who seek liberation in this lifetime. And specifically for Vajrayana beginners, I strongly recommend expanding basic *shamata* (and perhaps *vipassana*) practices with the addition of mindfulness practices as attributed to the Buddha by some of his earliest followers.

Finally, I think it is important to note that these practices are but a small part of the Buddha's teachings, as best we know them today. A more complete, but concise, overview can be found in the term *bodhicitta* – the mind or heart of enlightenment. There are two main parts: relative and ultimate. The relative is further divided into two parts: intention and action. The relative is based on altruistic intention – the intention to benefit others without expectation of anything in return. First, we develop our intention to do that for the benefit of all sentient beings, then we follow through with *action bodhicitta*, especially with lovingkindness and compassion for all beings.

Found in the Pali Canon and emphasized in Mahayana and Vajrayana, these represent one of the two wings of liberation. The second part (wing) of *bodhicitta* is wisdom. This is where the *vipassana* meditation practice comes in. Mindfulness meditation helps prepare us to mindfully engage in lovingkindness and compassion for all. *Vipassana* meditation helps give us the insight into the true nature of mind to help us achieve a *transcendent* understanding (beyond ordinary experience). Together we can then apply that wisdom with great compassion for ourselves and all other beings ... better and better and better, until becoming a fully realized Buddha. Emaho!

Khenpo Drimed Dawa
May 20, 2019
Tucson, Arizona

ⁱ *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* – Bikkhu Bodhi (Editor)

ⁱⁱ *Satipatthana Meditation: A Practice Guide* - Analayo

ⁱⁱⁱ *Transformation & Healing: Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* – Thich Nhat Hanh

^{iv} *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* – Bikkhu Bodhi (Editor)

^v "Practical Vipassana Meditation Exercises" – Mahasi Sayadaw;
<http://www.buddhanet.net/imol/pracexter.htm>

^{vi} *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners* – Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka* – as taught by William Hart

^{ix} *Right Concentration: A Practical Guide to the Jhanas* – Leigh Brasington