

# **Institute of Buddhist Studies - Graduate Theological Union**

## **Introduction to Buddhist Meditation (HRSP 1508)**

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Class Meetings: Tuesday, 9:40am to 12:30pm at JSC Room 130

### SYLLABUS:

**Course Description:** The focus of this class will be given to the Early Buddhist Meditation practices that are found in the Pali Buddhist Texts and commentaries. Early Buddhist Meditation is a carefully design program for the gradual evolution of human thinking and behavior. The goal is the simple comfort of day-to-day life and the final achievement of ultimate mental perfection and mental health. The meditation practices prescribed for various mental disorders in both *Samantha* (calm) and *Vipassana* (insight) techniques of Buddhist meditation will be examined. This class will explore how Samantha meditation practices lead to transformation of negative emotional tendencies of a person into positive emotional balance. Forty different Samantha meditation exercises are discussed in the Visuddhimagga, i.e., different exercise is for different benefits. For example, an unkind person practicing loving-kindness meditation will become a compassionate and caring person. This balance is temporarily generated to develop a foundation to prepare a person to insight meditation practices to permanently remove the roots of such negative emotional tendencies through the cultivation of insight or wisdom. *Vipassana* meditation is the cultivation of mindfulness, that is, to monitor the mind itself. Well developed mindfulness is capable of capturing the arising emotions and thoughts before verbal and physical actions take place. Insight meditation results in clear comprehension of the causes and conditions of frustrations and fear (*dukkha*). Ultimately, this is the knowledge that leads to final elimination of suffering which is the goal of Buddhist practice.

**Course Format and Requirement:** Generally, one half of the class will be the lecture and the other half will be the class discussion. A portion of the class time may be utilized for actual practice of meditation exercises, as necessary. Class participation of all students is a requisite. Each week one or more student will be responsible for leading the class discussion after a brief presentation on an assigned subject. All participants should prepare a glossary of technical terms during the course form class and personal readings. A research paper of 12-15 pages before or during the final week is expected.

### **Required Reading:**

Vajranana Mahathera, Buddhist Meditation  
Khantipalo, Calm and Insight  
Silananda U, The Four Foundation of Mindfulness  
Nyanaponika, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation

## Supplementary Reading:

Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga, Nanamoli Translation)  
Gunaratana, Mindfulness in Plain English  
Sayadaw U Panditha, In This Very Life  
Sony, The Only Way to Deliverance  
Joseph Goldstein, Insight Meditation  
Harvey Aronson, Love and Sympathy in Theravada Buddhism  
Goldman Daniel, Buddha on Meditation & Higher States of Consciousness

## Bibliography

## Proposed Topics:

- **Introduction**

Place of meditation in the structure of Buddha's Teaching - Buddhist definition of the term meditation – *Bhavana* – Fourth Noble Truth and meditation – Transformation of the personality – Interaction of verbal, physical, and mental spheres – Elimination of mental illness (*Dukkha*) – Definite goal and definite method of reaching it – Three areas of cultivation – *Sila* – *Samadhi* – *Panna*.

- **Therapeutic Nature of Buddhist Meditation**

Analysis of the types of personalities – Major disorders of human mind – Buddhist approach of correcting them – Not a religious practice but a series of psychological exercises – Concentration exercises for beginners – Ten *Kasinas* – Using visual objects.

- **Re-conditioning of Personality – Passionate Types**

More serious set of exercises – Strict supervision of an instructor – *Vipassana Sutta* – Negative conditioning – Ten *Asubhas* – Advantages of this practice – Utilizing one's own weakness for the good – Ten Contemplations – Positive Conditioning – Contemplation of *Buddha* – *Dharma* – *Sangha* – Devine etc.

- **Development of More Practical Skills**

Loathsomeness of food – Analytical observation of the four great elements – The most popular positive conditioning – Development of a friendly personality – Becoming Divine here and now – Practice of *Metta* - *Karuna* - *Mudita* - *Upekkha* – Becoming one with God– Normal and healthy emotional states of mind.

- **Meditation of Friendliness**

*Dosa* – Anger or hatred – One of the three major causes of personal discomfort in the present society – Self-centeredness – Unpleasant experiences a person goes through – Consequent mental wound and *Metta*, the cure – Three types of complexes – Competition and resulting pain – General benefits of this mental exercise – Other three healthy emotions grow together with *Metta*.

- **Levels of Concentration – Additional Psychic Powers**

*Jhanas* – Form and formless – Buddhist analysis of the psychological states – Eight *Samapattis* and Five Psychic Powers – *Abhinna*s – Buddha's unique attainments – *Trividya* – *Jhanas* in related to Karma – After life – Inadequacy of all these attainments.

- ***Vipassana* Method of Meditation**

Buddha's unique contribution to the existing knowledge – Direct observation of the mechanism of mind – Only way to the highest knowledge – Insight or ultimate wisdom – *Satipatthana Sutta* – Four Foundation of Mindfulness – Direct observation of one's own mental process – Processing information input and output - Becoming conscious of consciousness.

- **Introspective Awareness and Insight**

*Asava*, influences – *Sanna*, perception – *Vinnana*, discriminative consciousness – *Abhinna*, deep knowledge – *Parinna*, full knowledge – *Panna*, insight and mindfulness – Full knowledge– Three Characteristics – Knowledge of things as they come to be – *Yathabhuta Nana* – Seeing Four Noble Truths the *Dhamma* – Causality – *Paticcasamuppada* – Seeing basics principles of Buddhism directly by oneself.

- **Other Classifications – Braking Away**

Development of Eight Fold Path – Five Faculties – Ten *Paramitas* – Seven Factors of Enlightenment – Other Classifications – Braking Away – Five hindrances – Ten Fetters – Four stages of braking away – *Sotapatti* – *Sakadagami* – *Anagami* - *Arihat* – Temporary and permanent stages of awakening – Freeing from all bonds.

- **Final Goal of Buddhist Meditation – Nirvana**

Buddhist definition of perfect mental health – Total absence of three poisons - irreversible cure – The most balanced state of mind a being can achieve – Awakening from the stream of delusion – Total absence of fear - Deathlessness - Freedom from all conditioning – Buddhist explanation of this achievement from psychological, ethical and behavioral points of view.

- **Uniqueness of Buddhist Meditation**

A brief comparison and contrast of Early Buddhist meditation and other Buddhist and non Buddhist practices – Zen Buddhist meditation – Buddhist esoteric practices - Hindu Yoga meditation – Transcendental meditation – an Early Buddhist analysis of them.