



Vipassana meditation

Vipassana (or *vipasyana* in Sanskrit) is often translated as ‘insight meditation’ as it aims to develop insight into the very nature of things, ultimately leading to wisdom and realization of the ultimate truth of nirvana. *Vipassana* uses our intelligence and our powers of observation and analysis to bring us to a deeper level of understanding. Usually *samatha* is practised first, as the basis for *vipassana*; this is because one needs to be mindful and focused to analyse a topic for any length of time without getting distracted.

The topics that a Buddhist might choose to take as his/her focus for *vipassana* meditation are almost limitless, but in general the main topics are related to the Four Noble Truths. It is also possible to contemplate on any life situations that we wish to understand more deeply and come to terms with. In particular, meditators train their minds to see the impermanence, the suffering quality, and the non-inherent existence of each object of meditation—that is, the Three Marks of Existence applied to specific objects or ideas.

Vipassana cultivates a type of understanding that is neither based on the senses nor on ordinary consciousness, but on what one might call the intuitive mind. *Vipassana* meditation ensures that one’s understanding of the Dharma does not remain theoretical but becomes personal and related to experience. In this way, Buddhists develop personal conviction about the truths of the Dharma and believe in them not simply because they have been taught to do so. It is also a way of developing an understanding of life that is in accord with the Dharma.

Because it is important to adapt meditation practice to our state of mind, Buddhism emphasises the importance of practising under the guidance of an experienced meditation teacher. Learning from books is unsatisfactory because we need advice and guidance when questions or difficulties arise.

From *Discovering Buddhism* by Dominique Side



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