

Personal writing about the impact of buddhism teachings

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When deciding what to base my final essay on for this class, I wanted to make sure that I could relate a certain aspect of what I've learned about Buddhism to my life in some way. At first I wasn't sure where to start as we have covered such a wide variety of topics within the religion, but after a lot of thought I decided to relate it back to my academic interests in psychology. While Buddhism itself can be described as a very psychological religion, the specific topic within the religion I'm going to make ties with is meditation. My reasons for doing this not only lie in the fact that the act of meditation is psychological in itself, but that I also have practiced various meditation techniques myself over the past six or seven years of my life. The combination of what I have learned about Buddhist meditation, my love for the study of human psychology, and my own experience with meditation is unique and will allow me to further expand my horizons in each aspect of said combination.

Before taking Intro to Buddhism, my knowledge surrounding meditation as a whole was limited as I had only been taught a few techniques by my therapist when I was younger. I would use these techniques in various circumstances - when I was feeling angry, sad, or simply confused - and to this day they all still work for me. For the first few years, I had no real understanding as to how or why it worked for me - all I knew was that it was a safe space, or a getaway from anything that was bothering me in the world. Then as I got older and started to make decisions about my academic future, it was my interest in how the human psyche worked and the science behind it that led me into the field of psychology. While I have and continue to learn a lot within the subject and the science behind all of it, it wasn't until

I read deeper into Buddhist meditation when I began to understand the spirituality aspect of the practice. This is when I began to realize how complex it really is.

However, it must first be made clear that there are two very different definitions for meditation - the scientific/psychological one, and the Buddhist one. The scientific/psychological definition states that " meditation is a practice of concentrated focus upon a sound, object, visualization, the breath, movement, or attention itself in order to increase awareness of the present moment, reduce stress, promote relaxation, and enhance personal and spiritual growth". Now, the Buddhist definition is not quite as strict as it states, " meditation is a technique of mental concentration that eventually leads into enlightenment and spiritual freedom". When you compare the two definitions, it's clear that the scientific one is much more about explaining what the practice itself is like, whereas the Buddhist definition is more relaxed and focuses on the end product. That being said, there is much more to Buddhist meditation than the simple definition. There are two categories of Buddhist meditation - Samatha and Vipassana (important to know these are not the techniques - rather the labels to categorize the techniques). Already, with multiple categories, and more of a focus on the end result of the activity, it's clear that the Buddhist view of meditation is far more spiritual than psychological.

The first of the two categories, Samatha, focuses on clearing and gaining stability of the mind, while training it to concentrate. In order to accomplish Samatha meditation, the 40 objects of concentration must be present to help

focus and stay on track within the practice. The four most important objects within Samatha meditation are lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Once accomplished, the following elements will be developed: detachment from the external world and a consciousness of joy and tranquility; concentration, with suppression of reasoning and investigation; the passing away of joy, but with the sense of tranquility remaining; and the passing away of tranquility, bringing about a state of pure self-possession and equanimity. The second of the two, Vipassana, also known as insight meditation, focuses on looking within oneself, and cultivating one's own wisdom. While it is similar to Samatha, the end goal is not the same. The purpose of Vipassana is to come to the realization of important truths – in particular to realize the truths of suffering, and the undeniable, unavoidable fact of human existence. This practice is derived from mindfulness – the ability to observe an object and fully comprehend its content. As we can tell, the Buddhist mindset towards meditation is far more complex and deep than that of science or psychology. Personally, this is what I have enjoyed learning so much about because not only am I interested in the topic, but I have been able to try and apply a more Buddhist-like mindset to my meditation techniques.

As someone who has been practicing different forms of meditation for several years now in a more traditional, psychological sense, I have found the study of Buddhist meditation not only fascinating but helpful as well. The main area in which I believe the two viewpoints of the practice differ is the end result. While my former techniques would lead me to a sense of calm and more often than not happiness, the focus on the end result of pure

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enlightenment is something that was new to me. In order to become enlightened, one must become mindful of their surroundings, during meditation and in every day life. This is something scientific and psychological studies fail to realize as they purely focus on concentration - the act of focusing in a trancelike manner. Whereas, the Buddhist techniques of meditation results in the skill of being able to be fully present in everything one participates in. These differences have taught me that there is more to human emotion than the science behind it, and that spirituality truly exists and can be found through the correct techniques of meditation.