

# The Impact of Insight Meditation on the Development of Mental Health

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**Abstract:** *The current paper explores the impact of insight meditation, also known as vipassana meditation on mental health. To understand these ends and means, how Vipassana mediation helps us to live a noble and joyful life with the practice of Vipassana Mediation. Furthermore, the current paper has been explored the importance of mental health for the individual and society as an unity. The Social Ripple Effect illustrating the impact of our deeds has been described to explore the unseen effects of our speech and actions. Our world could become peaceful for all to enjoy and live happily. Therefore, the change has to begin with each individual. If the jungle is withered and we want to restore it to life, we must water each tree of that jungle. If we want world peace, we ought to learn to be peaceful ourselves. Lastly, this work compares Buddhist philosophy and Western psychology to see how both fields are similar or different regarding the concept of mental health. Both the development of the ideal healthy person and the ways individuals can stray from it are culturally defined. Buddhist psychology argues that the root causes of suffering can be permanently uprooted, whereas Western psychology states that they are immovable, hardwired, and unchangeable. In this view, Vipassana's ability to settle the human mind, transforming its turbulence into calmness with improved energy, makes it a significant mental health measure and an excellent approach to potential human development to achieve high mental health standards.*

**Keywords:** Insight Meditation, Peace, Mental Health, Vipassana Meditation, Human Mind, and Society.

The Teaching of all the Buddha's

*"To refrain from all the evils,*

*To cultivate what is good,*

*To purify one's mind,*

*This is the Teaching of all the Buddhas."*

Dhammapada, verse 183

## I. INTRODUCTION

Based on this verse from the Dhammapada, Vipassana can be summarized in a few short lines: One, to abstain from all evil. Two, to do good. And three, to purify the mind.

At first sight, these three deeds seem like simple objectives, but it is so difficult to practice. In the face of difficulties, we might forget these three simple guidelines for a peaceful solution to our conditions. However, how simple they seem in words and actions is beyond difficult in practice. Practicing Vipassana wholeheartedly means eventually moving towards accomplishing these three objectives. Our minds can fulfill these worthy goals. What we need to do is sit and practice Vipassana. The purifying of the mind of underlying negativities will then happen automatically; with the practice, one penetrates one's entire physical and mental structure with the clarity of insight (Goenka, 2003).



Like wars and conflicts have to be fought vigorously and won over with victory, we as well need to fight with strength and win with honor for love, peace, and harmony for humanity. Our world needs heroes who excel in morality. Instead of conquering the many external enemies, true Buddhist moral heroes win the battles by fighting their inner enemies of hatred, desires, ignorance, and selfishness. In the struggle against the internal enemy, the Dhamma heroes find themselves conquering their minds, doing this in silence and stillness on the meditation cushion. Feeling love and empathy for humankind and wishing to contribute to the peace in the community, one using the sword of mindfulness and equanimity (balance of the mind) is sitting in meditation with the conviction to clear away his hatred, anger, and foolishness. With this pure and excellent intention, he is determined to win the battle over his ego, contributing to peace and harmony. The one, who sits in meditation, is the real hero of this world because he has the high moral intention to fight himself to achieve a harmonious, happy world for all living beings. With meditation, we could achieve a world where humankind lives peacefully and in harmony. We can be excellent Dhamma heroes that practice meditation for the happiness and benefit of all.

Vipassana meditation, according to Ven. Sayadaw U Janakabhivamsa (1997), the purpose of it is to achieve the cessation of suffering through correctly comprehending mental - and physical processes in their true nature. Since the result of vipassana meditation is the development of insight, Vipassana is also known as "insight meditation." With Vipassana meditation, we cleanse our minds by realizing how mind-body processes work; defilements will be eradicated, and they will not return. The impurities that penetrative insight (*Vipassana-nana*) has destroyed will not be able to harm or attack us again, nor will they arise again. Thus, insight meditation allows us to cleanse our minds of impurities. There will not be any suffering (*dukkha*) when the defilements are entirely eradicated, and the mind is wholly purified; suffering then ceases to exist.

Insight meditation, also called *Vipassana* Meditation, is a Pali word that means "to see things as they really are." (Mahasi Sayadaw, 2018; S.R. Goenka, 2006). In Indian tradition, it belongs to one of the most ancient meditation techniques. Vipassana is observing things for what they are, not simply for what they appear to be to our senses. This technique which involves self-observation of the sensations in the body and mind, is the direct experience of mental-physical phenomena within oneself. It is a scientific method of exploring the Dhamma, or natural laws, within the boundaries of one's own body and mind. Vipassana is not merely experiencing the universal truth on the intellectual level but experiencing this truth at the experiential level, within ourselves, so it becomes a truth coming from ourselves. Through objective self-observation, one achieves purification of the mind (Goenka, 2006). Mr. Goenka (2003) describes Vipassana as "*an art of living leading to more happiness in the mind and body.*"

Around 2,550 years ago, Buddha gave the world a new method by which physical and mental diseases can be cured from the root, known as Samatha and Vipassana meditation. The root cause of physical diseases is the ill-functioning of the mind, and Buddha has called the mind the source of all immoral and moral deeds. However, based on the teachings of the Four Noble truths, Buddha states that our mind can be purified and overcome the ill-functioning.

Purification of the mind, according to the Buddha's teaching, is the constant effort to purify the mind of defilements. These dark, unwholesome mental energies run beneath the surface stream of consciousness and contaminate our thinking, attitudes, values, and deeds. Principal among the defilements is the three that the Buddha referred to as the "roots of evil": greed, hatred, and delusion. From these three emanate their numerous offshoots and variants: anger and cruelty, greed and envy, hypocrisy and vanity, conceit and arrogance, and a multitude of incorrect views.

In Buddhist teaching, meditation is a process of mental development designed to achieve inner purity and spiritual freedom. Since all impure states of consciousness result from ignorance, the purification of the mind is achieved by attaining wisdom, knowledge, and perception of things as they truly are. However, wisdom does not arise by chance or casual good intent but only in a mind that has been purified. For wisdom to emerge and achieve permanent purification through removing impurities, we must develop a preliminary purification of the mind as a basis for the emergence of all liberating insight.

Mindfulness techniques, including vipassana meditation, appear to be linked in various ways to well-being. Different research on the effects of intensive vipassana meditation has revealed considerable improvements in practitioners' mental health. Important behavioral examples include less distractive and reflective thinking, less anxiety and mood disorder symptoms, and enhanced emotion control. These results imply that Vipassana meditation may impact well-being via modifications in emotion regulation. According to this research, vipassana meditation increases psychological

health and well-being, including positive affect, life satisfaction, and mindfulness. It also results in a decline in mental health conditions such as depression, stress, and negative affect (Krygier et al., 2013). According to studies, By practicing Vipassana, a person's brain develops the capacity to respond to a subject with the highest efficiency (Knytl&Opitz, 2018). Vipassana meditation may be beneficial for treating anxiety neurosis, depressive neurosis, phobias, addictions, and personality disorders. Additionally, Vipassana corrects maladaptive response patterns and cultivates character strengths (Fleishman, 1999).

## **II. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH?**

Buddhism strongly focuses on maintaining good mental health since it views mental illness as the root cause of all suffering on an individual, community, and global scale. Physical and mental illnesses don't just impact the person who suffers from them; they ripple out and affect those around them. A healthy mental state will make it much easier for an individual to live an active life in which self-discipline and moderation are valued and cultivated.

One of the fundamental mental practices taught in Dhamma is how to coexist peacefully with other people in a community. One must refrain from deliberately inflicting pain and suffering on other members of society. Taking lives, stealing, sexual immorality, and violent behavior are all considered to be manifestations of a mental disorder. Those with disturbed mental health cannot live their lives in peace, and their hostility and strong desire to cause harm to others are merely a manifestation of a more serious mental illness.

In the Buddhist worldview, health and disease refer to the overall condition of a human being. They are interwoven with several aspects unrelated to healthcare, such as the economy, education, social and cultural milieu, and morality. To comprehensively understand health and illness, each dependent element must be considered carefully. Therefore, one must consider the big picture when thinking about health. It is the manifestation of harmony on all levels: within oneself, in one's social connections, in the community, and in one's relationship with the natural environment. To be concerned about a person's health means to worry about their physical, mental, and moral elements, as well as their social, family, and professional interactions and environment. Therefore, mental health denotes a state of complete and whole well-being (Ratanakul, 2004). A person's mental health significantly impacts their entire environment, which should be carefully maintained.

Mental Health is, therefore, holistic. If an individual becomes ill, it has the potential to disrupt all of their connections and create disharmony. Thus, harmony in one's mental and physical health contributes to the overall balance of our society. The health and well-being of individuals affect global issues and can pose a risk to the formation of society toward peace and harmony. Since the beginning of industrialization, humans have been confronted with various health-related problems. At present, people all over the world are experiencing the outcome of these health issues (Szreter, 2004). Both Buddhism and mental health appear to be inseparable within this broader context in terms of leading the way to well-being that emerges not only for humankind but also for the entire world (Sarath Ananda, 2019). When a family member is ill, that person is unhappy, and as a result, the other family members are also unhappy. Suppose the majority of a nation's population suffers from a multitude of diseases and is subject to problems due to those mental disorders. The weight these places on society and the globe is something that simply cannot be ignored. If society becomes unsettled due to its problems with individuals, it will impact the nation's ability to achieve its common goals. For this reason, it is necessary to have physically and mentally healthy individuals, families, and communities if one wishes for the world to move toward harmony and peace.

**The Social Ripple Effect:**

When anything is dropped into water, it causes a series of ripples called the "ripple effect." The dropping of an object in water generates a pattern that radiates outward from the point of origin. The force of the impact is observed as waves that keep on expanding and spreading outward. The deed of throwing a small stone into water will have an effect that can be experienced much farther away than the initial entry point. This effect illustrates that small actions can lead to much more extensive changes, even though we cannot see how far they reach (Long, 2001). The same can be stated about words, acts of kindness, or friendliness. The individual or persons who are directly affected by the words or deeds are the ones who experience the immediate ripple effect.

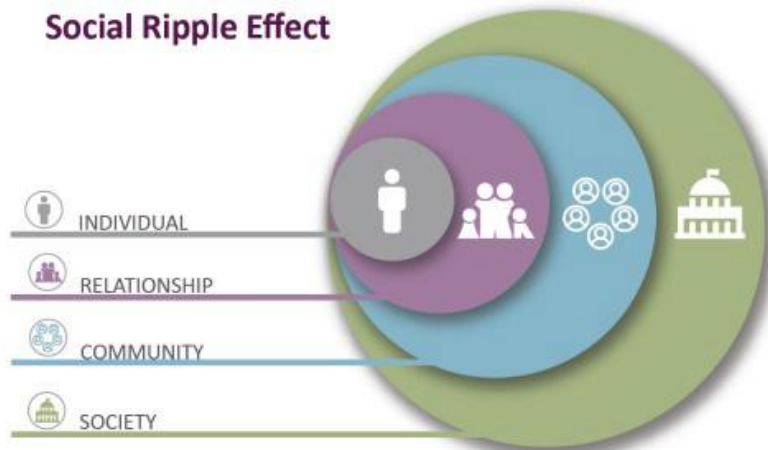
Furthermore, after that, it starts expanding and multiplying as the story of the effect is being told. It then impacts another person and can either encourage them to grow as people or cause them to stagnate. The ripple effect illustrates



how deeply connected we are to one another and how far-reaching the impacts of our actions may be. It also shows how much stronger our influence on one another is than we often imagine it to be.

What kind of waves are we creating when we interact with the people around us, both the ones we know and those we don't know? The concept of ripples reminds us that even the smallest of our good deeds can significantly impact another person and affect others who come into contact with the same person. Should we offer a good experience with one person, the ripple effect will hopefully be that they will have a pleasurable experience with the next person they interact with, and so forth and so forth, so affecting the lives of many others found in the ripples. On the other hand, a poor encounter with the initial person may set off harmful ripples, so initiating a sequence of events will not enrich people's lives but rather damage them.

With a positive attitude and a healthy mental state, defined by the unmeasurable attitudes that Buddha had taught us through his teachings on the Dhamma, we can improve the lives of so many people and even the planet. Attitudes of genuine kindness, compassion, expressive delight, and tranquility are all examples of desirable mental states. When we make beneficial adjustments in our minds and take care of our mental health, we develop the attributes that enable us to provide others with feelings of gratitude. We can recognize the existence of other individuals by paying loving and concerned attention to them. We can express to other people our admiration and appreciation for who they are and the contributions they make to the world. When someone is shown sincere respect and gratitude, along with an honest demonstration of that admiration and appreciation, it can make all the difference in whether or not they feel needed and important, ultimately putting them on a path emotionally, physically, and mentally beneficial. Admiration and gratitude for someone create positive ripple effects. If we continue to generate positive ripples throughout our days and lives, it will support the growth of many human beings and other living beings.



Based on Social-Ecological Model conceived in 1988 by Dr. Kenneth McLeroy

The illustration of the ripple effect: how individual healthy minds affect the health of society.

The word "ripple" serves as a reminder to us that the encounters that we have with other people have the potential to cast a positive or negative ripple effect that could spread for miles or, in this case, lives. To say that one person can change the world is, in most cases, an exaggeration, but picture what could happen if a lot of people, if not everyone, viewed their relationships with others in this way and strived to produce positive ripples. The beautiful impact that we may have on ourselves and others by acting in this manner has the potential to be immeasurable.

The comparison of Buddhism and Western Psychology on Mental Health:

The Western concept of the person and the self emphasizes separateness or individuality. Non-Western cultures highlight the person's embeddedness in the community and society. Anthropologists have described this separateness extensively (Fulton & Siegel, in Germer et al., 2005). In Western psychological traditions, healthy development is becoming individuated. People are not dependent on others, aware of their own needs, and respectful of their boundaries, with a clear and stable sense of identity and a self marked by cohesiveness and esteem. Both the development of the ideal mentally healthy person and the ways individuals can stray from it are culturally defined. Western psychology emphasizes individual autonomy, "restoring the autonomous self." Written psychotherapy plans

express these cultural ideals. Therapists say treatment intends to “increase self-esteem, understand one’s own needs in a relationship, develop a more unified sense of self, “self-efficacy,” establish boundaries, and so on. This is the Western view of self-restoration and self-esteem.

### III. THE SELF IN BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY

Vipassana meditation helps us experience ourselves as a field of movement, continually changing. As insight into the self-as-process grows, we see the foolishness of accepting our ignorant adherence to the idea that the “I” is fixed, enduring, or even truly “mine.” This is because the “no-self” of Buddhist psychology does not involve eliminating responsive ego functions; instead, it describes an observing ego that is much more objective and less identified with individual desires than we typically see in Western psychotherapy. This knowledge minimizes our self-protection and self-identity concerns and allows us to behave compassionately to others as we realize our interdependence with all creation. In Buddhist psychology, establishing a stable sense of identity, self-esteem, self-efficacy, etc., is considered a “pathology,” a delusion from which mindfulness meditation begins (Fulton & Siegel, in Germer et al., 2005).

Modern writers often say mindfulness meditation begins where Western self-development ends (Boorstein, 1994). In this analysis, Western psychotherapy takes a person so far along development, while Vipassana meditation continues the process from that point. Both Psychodynamic and mindfulness meditation traditions have discovered that heart impulses cause suffering.

Freud proposed two drives—erotic and aggressive—as the source of human motivation (Freud & Breuer, 1895/1961). Freud called them instinctual; they are “hardwired” and unchangeable. Humankind cannot transcend the violent, ignorant, and greedy from the standpoint of Freud. Buddhism identifies three “basic causes” of suffering: greed, hate, and illusion. The resemblance of the first two root causes to Freud’s instincts are evident: erotic drive = greed and aggressive drive = hatred. Western psychology and Vipassana meditation illustrate how these forces disrupt mental life and offer solutions to understand and address them. However, the ultimate status of these root causes differs from the two standpoints.

Buddhist psychology argues that they can be uprooted permanently. Buddhist psychology considers the endpoint of effective psychoanalytic treatment—ordinary human unhappiness—as the pathological point of departure for meditation practice. It aims beyond symptom reduction to a condition beyond suffering, aspiring to enlightenment. The idea that impulses could be eliminated reveals a potential for human perfection unseen in Western psychological traditions.

Vipassana’s ability to settle the human mind, transforming its turbulence into calmness with improved energy, makes it a significant mental health measure and an excellent approach to human potential development. The meditator is freed to live for higher values and richer aims, such as loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and peace. Thus, Vipassana takes people from selfishness to maturity, social love, charity, and personal development. Our words and actions influence our environment as they ripple further than we imagine.

With a positive attitude and a healthy mental state, defined by the unmeasurable attitudes Buddha taught us through the Dhamma, we may enhance the lives of so many people and even the world. Kindness, compassion, joy, and calm are desirable mental states, making changes towards mental health. Because of our interconnectedness, the sound changes we bring about in ourselves and the world around us serve as a stimulator for broader social transformation and progress (Col et al.).

Conclusion:

The Buddhist attitude to life is that whatever the unpleasant circumstances, issues, or obstacles people confront in their lives, their hope and positive vision for a better life and future are never lost. The Buddhist teachings always persuade and promote individuals that the road of virtues is fruitful if they have the knowledge to handle situations. The achievement of a stable mind, a mind like a mountain unmoved by anything, whether a storm, intense heat, or any harsh environmental circumstances, is the way of handling challenges. A solid and healthy mind is present, ready to face whatever the universe delivers at him. This mind is on the Dhamma Path, a path that leads to the development of a personality that makes happiness and joy a way of life. By following the Path, people feel part of the tremendous peace. Buddhism is good for you; because it corresponds to the healthy lifestyle we all desire. Spiritual healing is the ultimate goal of all religious traditions, including Buddhism, of putting us “right” with our true nature, our inmost good-natured

hearts. Similar to the Buddha, we can heal and become complete. According to the Buddha's excellent teachings, enlightenment is our actual nature and will naturally come forth through a pure mind and heart. To reach this perfect healing, we must follow with the disciplined effort the Vipassana Path, a lifelong pursuit of spiritual understanding (Fleischman, 1990).

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