Meditation Summary Sheet

(Pages 52-59 in the Buddhism textbook)

This summary sheet is to help you learn about Buddhist meditation. According to the AQA specification you need to know the following things:

‘• Meditation, the different aims, significance and methods of meditation:

• Samatha (concentration and tranquillity) including mindfulness of breathing  
• Vipassana (insight) including zazen  
• the visualisation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.’

Terminology

**Bodhisattva** - an enlightened person who chooses to return from death and help others (in Mahayana Buddhism only)

**compassion** - caring about others

**Dhamma** - the teaching of the Buddha

**kasina** - something focused on in samatha meditation, e.g. water or a colour

**mandala** - a detailed circular patterned picture used for meditation

**meditation** - calmly focussing the mind on specific teachings to understand them completely

**mindfulness of breathing** - a meditation technique that focuses on the experience of breathing

**samatha meditation** - 'calming meditation’ to develop deeper concentration

**scripture**  - holy writings

**thangka** - a detailed painting of a Buddha or Bodhisattva

**vipassana meditation** - 'insight meditation’ that focuses on understanding reality

**visualisation** - picturing an object or person in one’s mind

**zazen meditation** - ‘seated meditation’ from Zen Buddhism that requires awareness of the present moment

**Zen** - a type of Mahayana Buddhism from in Japan

The aims of meditation:

1. to **calm the mind** and make it still;
2. to develop **deeper insight** into existence by focusing on Buddha’s teaching.

The significance of meditation:

1. This is a very important **part of Buddhist daily life**.
2. Good meditation should **lead to less suffering and more compassion**, etc. from the meditator’s increased understanding of the Dhamma.
3. This in turn, should **lead to enlightenment**.

Methods of meditation

1. Before meditation a Buddhist **might chant part of the holy writings**.[[1]](#footnote-1)
2. The meditator may **focus** for a while on the movement of the body in **breathing** to calm the mind.
3. Many Buddhists will **focus on an object** such as a shape or a candle to help settle the mind.
4. A **Theravada** Buddhist will:
   1. use **samatha meditation** to gain calm, positive emotion followed by
   2. **vipassana meditation** to improve understanding.
5. **Tibetan** Buddhists may **focus on a passage** from the scriptures to analyse it.
6. Some types of **Mahayana** Buddhism will even **pray to a Buddha** or Bodhisattva, (although these are not gods).

Samatha ‘concentration & tranquillity’ meditation

1. This type of meditation focuses on every tiny movement and sound of **breathing** in order **to promote tranquillity** or calmness.
2. Samatha meditation will often involve a **kasina** which is something on which one focuses in great detail. This **may be a bowl of water** or the colour red, for example.
3. The **purpose of samatha meditation** is to make the mind **ready for vipassana** meditation.

Vipassana ‘insight’ meditation

1. This type of meditation is from **Theravada**.
2. Vipassana meditation is **different** from samatha meditation **because it focuses on teachings of Buddha** not on an object or on breathing.
3. Vipassana meditation might focus on impermanence, for example.
4. This type of meditation is **part of the Eightfold Path** and is seen as an important part of the path to enlightenment.

Zazen ‘seated’ meditation

1. **Zazen** literally means **‘seated’**.
2. It comes from **Zen** Buddhism in Japan, so it is a form of Mahayana Buddhism.
3. As with vipassana meditation, the **aim** also is **to understand the nature of existence**.
4. The **main focus of zazen is the present moment**. The meditator will simply think about this time now and its experiences.

Visualisation

1. **Visualisation** is used in some types of **Mahayana** Buddhism, especially **Tibetan**.
2. This is different from using a kasina. A kasina is physically seen but **visualisation is seen in the mind**.
3. The meditator may **look at an object and then put it out of sight**. They will then look at the object in their mind in as much detail as possible.
4. Tibetan Buddhists may use **deity visualisation**.
   1. This is not literally a god but a **Buddha or Bodhisattva**.
   2. The meditator will think about the ‘deity’s’ **character** not just appearance.
   3. They may visualise **themselves *as* a Buddha** to awaken their own Buddha nature.
   4. **Popular choices** include:
      1. **Gotama** Buddha (the original Buddha);
      2. The **‘Medicine Buddha’** (a different Buddha associated with healing);
      3. Buddha **Amitabha** (from Pure Land Buddhism who offers his worshippers rebirth into a paradise).
5. A Buddhist might use a **thangka**, a **detailed painting** of a Buddha or Bodhisattva before imagining it in their mind without looking.
6. They might use a **mandala**, a **detailed pattern** symbolising the universe, Buddha, the Pure Land, etc.
   1. In **Tibet** this is often made over a long time of **coloured sands** before being swept away to symbolise anicca (impermanence).

1. More information on chanting is found in the summary sheet on puja (worship). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)