

# An Analytical Comparison of Meditation Between Hinduism & Buddhism

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## Abstract

Religion is an integral part of personal and social life. We are living through an era of disruptive innovations and an abundance of resources due to exponential technologies. Men want to take refuge into their respective religion to gain peace of mind & soul' and have adopted different techniques in this regard. The purpose of the research is to understand various techniques of meditations in the light of religious sacred text of both religions. This paper seeks to identify, highlight and explain meditation and its different steps particularly yoga. Meditation is a process by which an individual controls his/her mind and induces a mode of consciousness either to achieve some benefits or for the mind to simply acknowledge. It includes the spiritual developmental skills along with the achievement. The very purpose of meditation is to discipline the mind and reduces afflictive emotions. For centuries Buddhists and Hindus have used meditation as a tool to focus their energy inward to explore the mental state of joy, get rid of negative emotions and develop wisdom, compassion and improve wellbeing on an individual and societal level. The paper would depend on concept of meditation & explaining units of it along with multi themes regarding transformation of human soul. This paper work will provide theoretical orientation; make reference to relevant theoretical and empirical literatures for adequate clarification, comprehension and action sought where needed. Qualitative research methodology has adopted to find out similarities and differences of meditation between Hinduism & Buddhism.

**Keywords;** meditation, yoga, Hinduism, Buddhism, Religious text

## Introduction

Every religion has a stronger concept of spirit. The spirit has the greatest body of potential. Through yoga and meditation one can increase his spiritual potential level to that ideal stat.<sup>1</sup> Meditation has been encouraged in Hinduism and Buddhism as well. Meditation is the highest level of physical and mental concentration toward the god. Among the religious movements which primarily were carried out on the land of India to bring forth reforms in the ancient traditions of Hinduism, the most important movement was Buddhism which, with the passage of time, emerged as a separate religion and spread even out of India to the various countries of South Asia like Burma, Tibet, China, Thailand and other states because it produced eloquent orators and able preachers. When the revival of Brahmanism took place in India, it reduced the Buddhist into minority and eventually it rolled back from the land of its birth, India; it however flourished in other states of the South Asia, presently, almost 225 million followers of Buddhism are present all across the world.<sup>2</sup>The history presents no example of the teaching of high moral values like what Buddha presented. His teachings focused on the ways and means to refine and control bodily desires, which culminate in avarice, jealousy, selfishness, anger and revenge, he rather reiterated the principles which could inject the sense of integrity, peace, justice, affection, brotherhood, sympathy, non-violence and equality, which are the chief constituents of Buddhism. It is praiseworthy to mention that marvelous teachings of Buddhism directed humanity to the right path in the times of oppression, cruelty, selfishness and injustice.

## Hindu Meditation

In Hinduism (*Sanatana Dharma*), meditation has a place of significance. The basic objective of meditation is to attain oneness of the practitioner's spirit (*atman* with) omnipresent and non-dual almighty (*Paramatma* or *Brahman*). This state of one's self is called *Moksha* in Hinduism and Nirvana in Buddhism. But at the same time Hindu monks and later Buddhist monks also

are said to have achieved miraculous power by practicing meditation. The Hindu scriptures prescribe certain postures to attain the state where the mind is in meditation. These postures are called yoga. Clear references of yoga and meditation are found in ancient Indian scriptures like Vedas, Upanishads, and Mahabharata that includes Gita. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* defines meditation as “having become calm and concentrated, one perceives the self (*atman*) within oneself”<sup>3</sup>. In the Hindu method of meditation there are a set of rules to be followed in the process of yoga to successfully practice meditation.

### Yoga

Yoga is the most important meditation technique in Hinduism. Yoga is a *Sanskrit* word (*yuj*) meaning to bind, join, attach and concentration of attention.<sup>4</sup> Yoga is derived from the “*Yogasutra*” or “*patanjali-sutra*” (the religious scripture of Hindus). The philosophy of “*yoga*” is associated with *patanjali*. Hindus are commanded; to be steadfast in the performance of their obligation; O Arjun, forsaking attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is known as Yoga.<sup>5</sup> These states have been divided into five sections; “*Parman, Viparyaya, Vikalpa, Nidra* and *Smiriti*”.

There are eight parts or stages of Yoga.

1. *Yama*; it is the five refraining moral commandants and ethical disciplines’;
  - *Ahimsa*; not to give pain or kill any living thing. A yogi has believed in that to kill or destroy anything is insult for the Creator. Gentleness of mind is a characteristic for a yogi.
  - *Satya*; not to inform a lie as fact is the highest rule of morality. If the mind thinks reality, the tongue speaks fact, and then a person becomes healthy for union with the limitless.
  - *Asteya*; not to steal. A yogi reduces his physical needs as much as possible.
  - *Brahma-Charya*; the commitment to be single/celebacy. He stores his energies to grow intellectual and spiritual life.
2. *Aprigrah*; not to accept any kind of money. He makes his lifestyles pretty simple and trains his mind not to sense any loss or lack of something. *Niyama* is to keep the purified, as the purified body is the preparation of purified mind. Purification of body consisted upon wash and cleanses body while purification of soul consisted upon pure and fair thoughts. *Niyama* controls emotions and passion of a *yogi*. It has five steps;
  - *Saucha* (purity)
  - *Santosh* (contentedness)
  - *Tapas*(patience)
  - *Swadhya* (study)
  - *Isvara Pranidhana* (dedication to lord)
3. *Asana* is posture of yoga. *Asana* keeps blood circulation normal. It keeps the body healthy and powerful. A yogi conquers his body and makes it fit for vehicle of spirit. Practicing yoga develops agility, balance, endurance and great vitality. Dualities like loss and gain, victory or defeat, fame or de-fame, body and mind, mind and soul all vanish through mastery of *asana*. A yogi in *asana* can contemplate very calm full manner but at this stage a guru/ guide is must to guide.
4. *Pranayama* is rhythmic control of breath. “*Prana*” means breath or respiration and *ayama* mean length and expansion. Inhale, exhale and retention are the three steps of respiratory process. *Prana* should beneath manipulate very slowly consistent with one’s ability and dilemma. Otherwise, it will kill the practitioner.<sup>6</sup> Breathe control: (*pranayama*) practice of breathing technique, which plays a basic part in Hindu occultism and meditation exercises.<sup>7</sup> Yogi follows the proper rhythmic pattern of slow deep breath. This pattern strengthens the respiratory gadget, soothe the frightened gadget and decrease cravings. The “*chitta*” (mind) is like chariot yoked a group of effective horses. One is *Prana* (breath) and *Vasana* (choice) are parts of it. By controlling breath, one controls the mind.<sup>8</sup>
5. *Pratyahara* is with drawl of senses from their external objects. In this stage the senses are

brought under control and overcomes attractive spell of the worldly objects. A yogi is aware of that the course of damage or salvation lies inside him. In Hinduism, consciousness manifests in three “*gunas*” (qualities). These are;

- *Sattva* (pure/good) lead to mental clarity.
  - *Rajas* (activity) make one energetic
  - *Tamas*(restraining/ ignorance) it interrupts and clash into the functions of both *Sattva* and *Rajas*
6. *Dharana* is concentration. Mind is the centre of thoughts and classified into five states/ groups. 1<sup>st</sup> is *Ksipta* (scattered state) 2<sup>nd</sup> is *Viksipta* (distracted-mind) 3<sup>rd</sup> is *Mundha* (dull/stupid) 4<sup>th</sup> is *Ekagra* (attentive to one point/ superior intellectual power) 5<sup>th</sup> is *Niruddha*, where *manas* (mind) *ahamkar* (ego) and *buddhi* (intellect) all are restrained and one becomes a universal man.
  7. *Dhyana*; is the steady meditation. A yogi's mind is illumined by dhyana. His body, mind, senses, reason and ego are all integrated in contemplation- the Universal Spirit. He dedicated all his action and refuge into the lord, free from *Karma* and gets *Mukti*.<sup>9</sup>
  8. *Samadhi* is the state of super-consciousness of meditation. It is end of the *sadhaka* and peak of meditation. Yogi departs from the material international and merged into the everlasting. No duality left between knower and recognized. A yogi's heart sings the song that was sung by their spiritual Guru “*Sankaracharya*” in his *Atma Satkam*.

### **Buddhist Meditation**

Buddhist concept of meditation is closely associated with the religion and philosophy of Buddhism. It is presumption of historians that the basic idea of meditation passed to Buddhism from Hinduism, as the founder of Buddhism himself was a Hindu, before attaining *Moksha*. The Buddhist ideology and practices of meditation are preserved in ancient Buddhist texts. In Buddhism meditation is considered as part of the path towards nirvana. Gautama Buddha has said to have detected two important mental qualities that arise from practicing meditation. These are; serenity or tranquility that composes and concentrates the mind and insight which enables the practitioner to explore the five aspects that constitute the sentient being, namely matter, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness.

Meditation is very important in Buddhism. It is thought of as a mental exercise that helps one tap into the infinite force of the universe, explore the true nature of existence, gain insights into true reality, see the insufficiency and unreality of sensory experience, and develop correct thoughts and actions. Meditation is usually taught by a meditation master and the methods vary from sect to sect and person to person. Some methods of meditation are based on discourses in the Pali language. Buddhists often pray or meditate in pagodas. Pagodas are towers with multiple levels that started in South Asia and developed from the Stupa. Buddhist meditation roots are in eight fold path. Right efforts, right mindfulness and right concentration “*smadhi*” refer to meditation. The practice develops mental clarity, insight into conditional reality, freedom from negative states and ultimately *nirvana*. The most important form is insight meditation “*vipashyana*”.<sup>10</sup>In “*Vipashyana*” meditation, the meditator sits in comfortable body posture with cross legs or in half lotus position, closed eyes and focusing on breathing.<sup>11</sup>

A monk's meditation is to keep control over his senses and body.<sup>12</sup>The person who meditates is highly encouraged in their scriptures.<sup>13</sup>Buddha pursues his followers to meditate, and says to monks to meditate and not become a man to seek sensual pleasures only like eat hot iron put a man in painful condition. A concentrated meditation is associated with insight and who becomes successful in achievement of both is closest to “*Nibbana*”.<sup>14</sup>

Meditation practice in Buddhism: the last level of meditation practice in Buddhism that is called “*Nirvana*”. Almost all monks and nuns practice this meditation. The practice of trance “*Samadhi*” was accepted, even encouraged, but the states achieved were not given priority, as they were regarded as a diversion from nirvana realization. The key

practice was mind-full meditation “*vipauyana*”: a careful attending of three characteristics of existential reality suffering, impermanence “*anitya*”, and no-soul “*anatman*”.<sup>15</sup>

For meditation’ first of all, the worshipper is enjoined after leaving bed in the morning to wash face and repair him to a lonely place for meditation. He should sit in an easy pose and meditate on his heart the orb of the moon which originates from the first syllable-A- and on it think one of a beautiful blue lotus.<sup>16</sup>The complemented meditation and study specific rituals were seen as compassionate action that could achieve specific result for suffered humanity. The paritta text of pali canon are the one early manifestation as monks chant while their seniors pour water, symbolizing the blessings dispersal. Seven fold worship as a guideline for practice: 1<sup>st</sup> Honor the Buddha, 2<sup>nd</sup> Serve the Buddha, 3<sup>rd</sup> Confession of misdeed, 4<sup>th</sup> Delight in good actions of beings, 5<sup>th</sup> Invitation of Buddha to preach the *Dhrama*, 6<sup>th</sup> Arouse the thought of enlightenment, 7<sup>th</sup> Dedication of merit to all beings.<sup>17</sup>In Buddhism the person meditating is not trying to get into a hypnotic state or contact angels or any other supernatural entity. Meditation involves the body and the mind. For Buddhists this is particularly important as they want to avoid what they call 'duality' and so their way of meditating must involve the body and the mind as a single entity. In the most general definition, meditation is a way of taking control of the mind so that it becomes peaceful and focused, and the meditator becomes more aware. The purpose of meditation is to stop the mind rushing about in an aimless (or even a purposeful) stream of thoughts. People often say that the aim of meditation is to still the mind.

#### **Differences in Ideology of Meditation**

In Hinduism, the ideology behind meditation is more spiritual than religion. The purposes of meditation in Hinduism are varied, like physical, mental, and spiritual enhancement, and also control of mind. In the extreme sense Meditation is the way of getting in union with the creator or “*Paramatma*”. Buddhists on the other hand do not believe in God, but considers meditation as an integral part of their religion. The main purpose of meditation in Buddhism is self-realization or Nirvana.

#### **Difference in Techniques of Meditation**

The techniques of meditation as described in Hindu texts are very difficult and it takes years to master on even some of the lower-level meditation techniques in the hierarchy of techniques and significance. There are references in ancient Indian and Chinese texts of Hindu monks achieving mysterious powers like flying, breaking objects by looking at them and likes. Buddhist meditation techniques, on the other hand, are much simpler, though ancient Buddhist monks are said to have had used meditation to improve fighting techniques.

#### **Yoga .....Originally a Hindu Ritual**

Meditation is a central part of Hinduism, Buddhism but Yoga is essentially a Hindu tradition with its roots in the Vedic ritual symbolism and its internalization. Yoga is mentioned and explained in several ancient Upanishads, long before the emergence of Buddhism. Prior to the Buddha, yoga was practiced in many forms by the ascetics and ascetic traditions of ancient India. The rudiments of yoga practice are found in the *Katha* and *Svetasvatara Upanishads* (Maitri). The epic *Mahabharata* makes many references to yoga. The terms yoga and yogi occur about 900 times in the epic.

By all accounts, *Patanjali* did not invent the wheel of yoga. He codified it and standardized its teaching. During his wanderings as an ascetic monk, the Buddha practiced various forms of austerities and yoga. His enlightenment was a direct result of “*dhyana*”, an ancient form of meditation. The ascetic practices of both Buddhism and Hinduism draw heavily from ancient Yoga traditions in their respective ways to practice self-transformation. Both rely upon Yoga to restrain human nature and overcome desires and attachments. They use many common terms to explain the practices of yoga or stages in self-absorption. However, yoga has a much wider connotation in Hinduism than in Buddhism.

### Difference of Aim of Meditation

**1;** Hindu yoga aims to achieve liberation through union with the inner Self and in some yoga's through union with the Supreme Self, whereas in Buddhism it is meant to suppress the modification and disperse the formation of ego. In Buddhism self-absorption denotes the end of all desires and modifications and an experience with emptiness. In Hinduism also it denotes the end of all desires and modifications but an experience with transcendence or union with the transcendental Self.

**2;** In Buddhist meditation and contemplative practices, the focus or the emphasis is mainly upon the Not-self, which in Buddhist parlance means anything other than the Self. It includes the mind, the body, the world and all the objects in them such as thoughts, feelings, emotions, images, objects, etc., which we experience through our mind and senses. According to Buddhism, the not-Self is just a temporary formation. It exists both externally and internally. By knowing it and dissolving it from within, one can reach *Nirvana*.

**3;** By practicing mindfulness upon the Not-self (objective reality), the monks realize the impermanence of things and the important aspects of *Dharma* such as the Four Noble Truths. Thus, the Buddhist contemplative practices are outward. They keep the mind engaged with things through mindfulness practice, until peace and happiness are attained through equanimity, discernment and enlightenment. In contrast, the Hindu meditative practices are inward oriented. They are meant to know the subjective reality or the reality which is self-existent and free from objective reality. Therefore, they focus the mind upon the Self rather than the Not-self and aim to disengage the mind and senses from the Not-self or the world within and without. By withdrawing the mind and senses from worldly things and silencing them, a yogi concentrates his mind upon the thoughts of the Self or God to experience peace and equanimity. Thus, in Hinduism "*Samadhi*" is achieved by silencing the mind and senses, rather than keeping them mindful and actively engage with the objective reality

**4;** Hindus meditate to get in touch with Brahman, the ultimate, Hindu god. Some Buddhists use meditation to realize the Wisdom of selflessness. Some argue that their ultimate goals are the same "enlightened bliss" So "*Moksha*" to the Hindu, "*Nirvana*" to the Buddhists.

**5;** Buddhist meditation techniques are generally much simpler than those prescribed in Hindu texts. In addition, the range of purposes and techniques of meditation found in Hinduism is much larger than that found in Buddhism.

### Conclusion

In the Hindu method of meditation there are a set of rules to be followed in the process of yoga to successfully practice meditation. These are ethical discipline (*Yamas*), rules (*Niyamas*), physical postures (*Asanas*), breath control (*Pranayam*), one-pointed concentration of mind (*Dharana*), meditation (*Dhyana*), and finally salvation (*Samadhi*). Very few can reach the stage of *Dhyana* without proper knowledge and training from Guru, and fewer are said to have reached the final stage. Gautama Buddha (originally Hindu prince), and Sri Ramakrishna, are said to have been successful in attaining the final stage of salvation (*samadhi*). Yoga, the basic construct of meditation is said to have a number of beneficial effects so long as physical and mental wellbeing is concerned. In *Patanjali*, the ancient Indian scripture on medical science references are found of Yoga's disease healing capacities. These biological benefits of yoga are being increasingly recognized by the global medical fraternity. Like Buddhism, Hinduism also does not focus on divinity. It only shows the way of truth by its teaching. The right view is to make humans comprehend how to see and to understand things as they really are naturally. This is not affected by our prejudice of external factors such as our daily experiences, people around us and etcetera. Thus, self-observation of the true nature is vital. In other word, devotees will have internally total understanding of the Buddha's teaching. Buddhism will show only the right way to be enlightened. It is up to the devotee to save themselves by following rigidly the teachings. There is no god or religious teachers that could ensure them heaven or hell. Human

beings create their heaven and hell from thoughts, speech and deeds.

### Endnotes & References

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- <sup>5</sup> . Bhagavad Gita, 2:48, the detail of yoga is described in *Bhagavad Gita*, six chapter, Krishana explains yoga. Arjun.
- <sup>6</sup>: Bhagavad Gita 2:16
- <sup>7</sup> : Hindu World, p: 174
- <sup>8</sup> : Bhagavad Gita 4:30
- <sup>9</sup> : Bhagavad-Gita 6:38-47 ( The Lord Krishana answered Arjun about yoga)
- <sup>10</sup>: Kevin Trainer, Buddhism The Illustrated Guide (UK: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2004) p: 74
- <sup>11</sup> : Buddhism The Illustrated, p:75
- <sup>12</sup> : Dhammapada 25:362
- <sup>13</sup> : Buddhavagga181
- <sup>14</sup> :Dhammapada 25:371-372
- <sup>15</sup> : Religious Anthropology, p:120
- <sup>16</sup> : Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, The Indian Buddhist Iconography (India,K L Mukhopadhyay Calcutta 1958) p:20
- <sup>17</sup> : Religious Anthropology, p:121