

Buddhist Meditation Awakens the Unconditioned

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Over 2500 years ago in northern India, Shakyamuni Buddha, the Awakened One, taught that "there is an unborn, undying, unchanging, uncreated." This "unborn" or "unconditioned" are words some Buddhists use to point to the "something" that is greater than ourselves and yet simultaneously flows through each of us and every particle of the universe. Within every being exists an intuitive knowledge of our unborn Buddha nature, and Serene Reflection meditation is one way to open our hearts to this True Life. All can become as Buddha and realize Nirvana-the ultimate awakening to eternal peace and joy.

This meditation tradition, also known as Soto Zen, was called "peasant zen" in Japan, because it was simple enough for anyone to practice. It does not require intellectual knowledge, historical background, doctrinal beliefs, or expertise in esoteric ritual. The essential aspects are to sit still with an open and trusting heart, see the world as it truly is, and make the necessary changes within ourselves to live at peace in accord with our true nature.

In this stillness we allow our sense of a separate self with its thoughts, judgments, feelings, memories, to arise and pass away. All of these are transformed through meditation practice, and we come to know and live from something deeper, more reliable, bright, and universal. Buddhists call this the Buddha refuge. In daily life a Buddhist endeavors to harmonize his or her activities with the Buddhist precepts. Peace of heart does not blossom unless we develop a compassionate and responsible orientation to all life. Mindfulness in all thought, speech, and action is the place of practice, and Buddhist ethics may be boiled down to: like begets like; good begets good; suffering begets suffering. We look to the precepts as a guide for enlightened action, as a compass to help us cease from evil, do only good, and do good for others. The remedy for suffering is a Buddhist's primary focus, and the precepts are vital for converting suffering's cause-greed, hate, and delusion-into compassion, love, and wisdom. This study of ourselves in the mirror of the Buddha's teaching is the Dharma refuge.

A Buddhist has a third Refuge, that of the sangha, the community of practitioners, those who practice the Buddha Way. Training with others widens our experience in both time and space. We draw on the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha and subsequent masters down through the ages, together with the understanding offered by the "good spiritual friends" of this life. Sangha practice at a temple combines all three Refuges, often through ceremonies and services. Through this we learn how to bring reverence, harmony, and gratitude into daily life.

Contemplative Buddhist practice starts with each person looking within and doing something about themselves. Practitioners live an ordinary life, purifying our heart/mind and bringing benefit to others through generosity of spirit, kind speech, benevolent service, and empathy. These qualities express the enlightened mind and lead to the realization of true peace, the Unconditioned, by all.

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