

Buddhist Philosophy

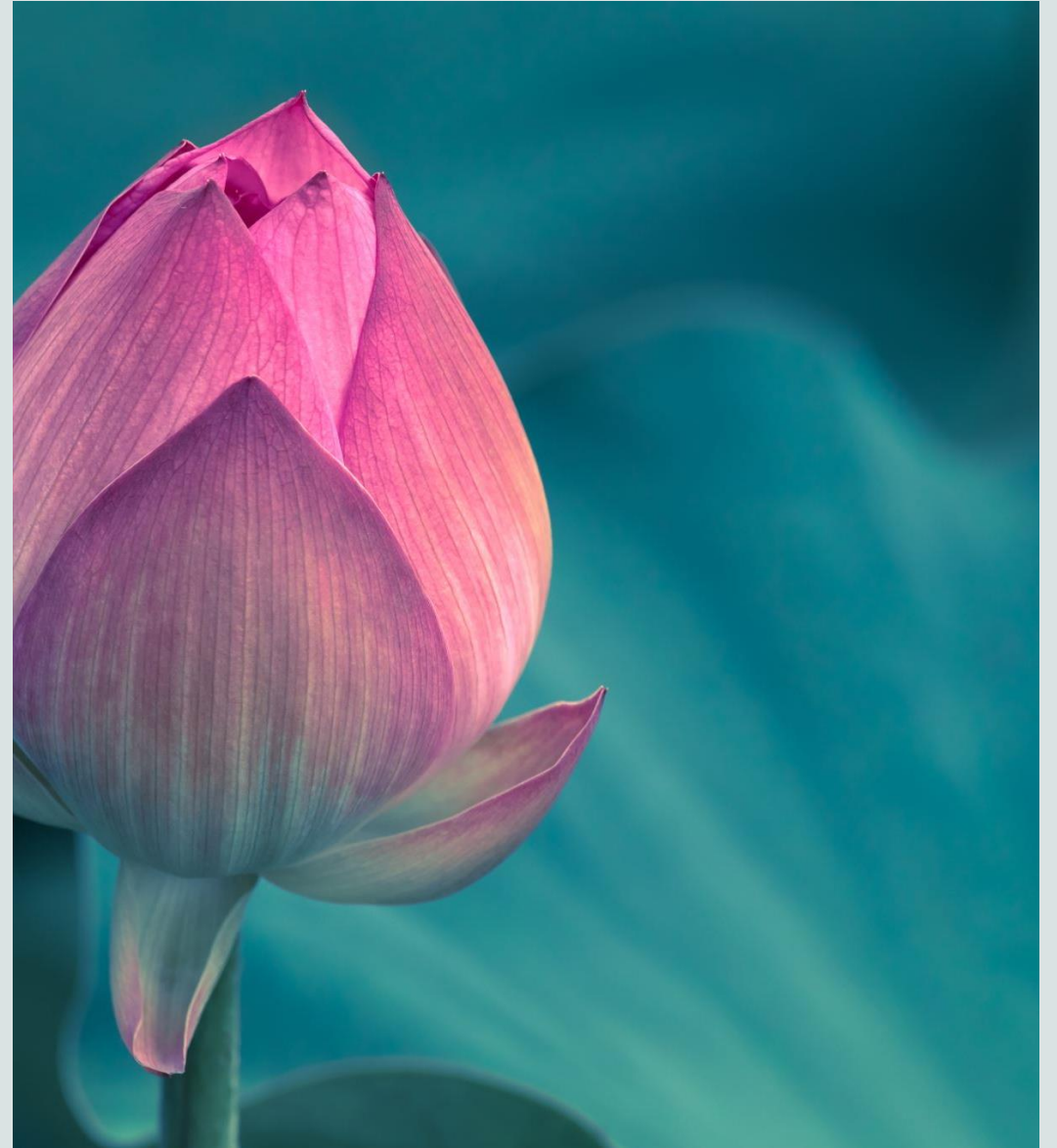
HPPH7019

Portfolio Component 1



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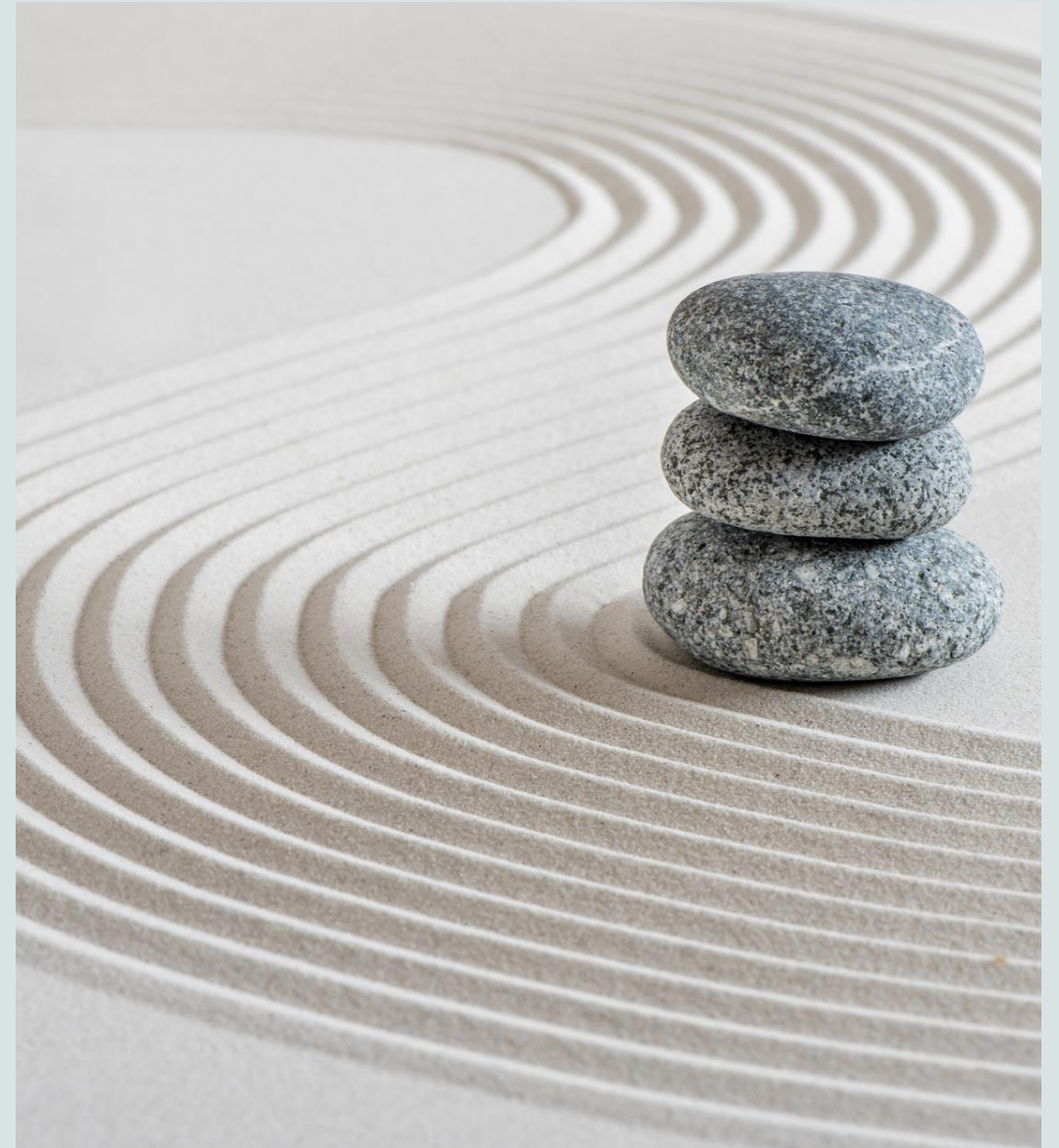
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A Meditation Practice: Zen Meditation



The Question: “Students are expected to present a topic on a kind of meditation practice. They can explain its theory, principle, method and effects.”



A Meditation Practice: Theory and History of Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism places prominence on the role of meditation. With its foundation dating back over centuries it still has a huge role to play in contemporary society both here and around the world.

‘The name “Zen” is the Japanese reading of the Chinese graph “Chan.” Chan is an abbreviation of “Channa” (禪那), which is a transliteration of the Sanskrit term dhyāna, meaning meditation.. Tradition says the south Indian monk Bodhidharma (c. fifth–sixth century ce) first transmitted the Chan Dharma to Chinese Buddhists around the year 520.’¹

Zen Meditation places great emphasis on finding the Buddha within ourselves. Importantly, it is available to all of us – if we are able to find the time and space to access it:

‘Chan practitioners seek understanding.. they hope to understand their own nature.. Because our nature is believed to be buddha-nature, seeing into one’s own nature is realising buddhahood .’²

¹ Ronald S. Green, ‘East Asian Buddhism’, in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. by Steven M. Emmanuel (Wiley Blackwell, 2013), Kindle eBook pp. 110-126 (p. 123).

² Ibid. pp.123-124.

A Meditation Practice: The Theory

The theory of Buddhism is based on practice and experiential learning which is fundamental to its teachings. This is attested to in *The Buddha and His Teachings*:

‘Philosophy deals mainly with knowledge and is not concerned with practice; whereas Buddhism lays special emphasis on practice and realization.’³

In theory, repeated practice will help enable a harmonious oneness without discrimination and without suffering. Through the experiential learning the mind will quieten and will be at peace. In his book *You Are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment*, Thich Nhat Hanh verifies this idea as:

‘you will have the opportunity to touch the nature of no-birth and of no-death, and fear will disappear. This is the language of Zen.’⁴

³ Venerable Narada Mahathera, *The Buddha and His Teachings* (Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc., (The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1998), p. 210.

⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *You Are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment* (Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2023), p. 85.

A Meditation Practice: The Principles

‘**Kenshō**’⁵ in Zen Buddhism is a very important concept and can be described as ‘seeing one’s nature’⁶. It is the goal of the meditative practice to see the truth of our own reality. In order to accomplish this Zen utilises specific practices which include shikan taza and kōan practice:

shikan taza

‘refers to a single-minded, diligent practice where the qualifying term “just” means the practice of meditation without any intervention of ego-logical interest, concern, or desire, so that the practice remains undefiled.’⁷

Sōtō School

kōan practice

‘A kōan is formulated like a riddle or puzzle and is designed in such a way that intellectual reasoning alone cannot solve it without breaking through the barrier of ego-consciousness by driving it to its limit.’⁸

Rinzai School

⁵ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 369.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Shigenori Nagatomo, ‘Japanese Zen Buddhist Philosophy’, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2024 Edition) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/japanese-zen/> [accessed 10 August 2024].

⁸ Ibid.

A Meditation Practice: The Kōan Practice

Kōans are like questions for the mind rather than specific texts to read, learn, and recite:

- ❖ They are utilised within the Rinzai school and are used not for abstract study but for experiential learning. *Zen Training (Shambala Classics)* states: ‘Whatever type of koan we may be working on, we do not treat it as a matter for abstract intellectual study. It has to become part of us.’⁹
- ❖ Eventually a practitioner will be ready for their private sessions and their passage of acceptance: ‘the Zen practitioner of the Rinzai school must pass them in a private consultation with a Zen master who verifies the practitioner’s state of mind before he or she is granted a seal of transmission.’¹⁰

⁹ Katsuki Sekida, *Zen Training Methods and Philosophy* (Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2012), Kindle eBook p.98.

¹⁰ Shigenori Nagatomo, ‘Japanese Zen Buddhist Philosophy’, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2024 Edition) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/japanese-zen/> [accessed 10 August 2024].

A Meditation Practice: A Focus on Shikan Taza

‘Zen Chan’s practical method for reaching understanding is most notably known in Japanese as zazen (座禅 Ch. zuo chan), seated meditation.’ ¹¹

- ❖ From this seated meditation a practitioner may use breath control and focus to help attain and maintain the meditation practice.
- ❖ It is also referenced as Silent Illumination which can create ‘high degrees of awareness’ ¹² and be an acute realisation of the here and now: the present moment. These higher degrees of awareness become more apparent as the practitioner progresses.
- ❖ The practice is available to all, we all have the innate ability to access Buddha-nature.

¹¹ Ronald S. Green, ‘East Asian Buddhism’, in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. by Steven M. Emmanuel (Wiley Blackwell, 2013), Kindle eBook pp. 110-126 (p. 124).

¹² Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 362.

A Meditation Practice: A Focus on Shikan Taza Continued

- ❖ This practice is a non-dualist practice in order to separate oneself from any attachment to any sense, subject or topic.
- ❖ Shikan taza does not need the use of complicated kōans, but instead, ‘is a deepening process of becoming aware of the original enlightenment.’¹³

Zen Meditation, as mentioned previously is accessible to all of us and can help generate compassion. It is a path which espouses compassion for all and equanimity for all.

¹³ Shigenori Nagatomo, ‘Japanese Zen Buddhist Philosophy’, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2024 Edition) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/japanese-zen/> [accessed 10 August 2024].

A Meditation Practice: The Shikan Taza Method

- ❖ **The Body Posture:** the practitioner first finds a comfortable seated posture. This could be via the lotus position or half lotus. At first they may be difficult to attain. Therefore, a beginner may need to sit simply with a straight back and legs straight out in front. The posture is especially important for the spine and to ground the body. ‘The adjustment of the body is necessary for the practitioner in order to experience the practical benefits of doing meditation.’ ¹⁴
- ❖ **The Breath:** important to meditation is the focus on the breath. The breath practice is relatively simple in that it the practitioner counts the breath (one inhale and one exhale as one count through the nose). Breathing is deep into the belly. Many ancient practices have valued breath exercises, e.g. Yoga. Contemporary studies are concluding many benefits ‘These slow and long techniques are open to everyone.. They’ve been practiced in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity.. for thousands of years, but only recently have we learned how they can reduce blood pressure, boost athletic performance, and balance the nervous system.’ ¹⁵

¹⁴ Shigenori Nagatomo, ‘Japanese Zen Buddhist Philosophy’, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2024 Edition) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/japanese-zen/> [accessed 12 August 2024].

¹⁵ James Nestor, Breath: The New Science of A Lost Art (Penguin Books, 2021), p. xxi.

A Meditation Practice: The Shikan Taza Method Continued

❖ **The Mind:** with cumulative results from the correct body posture and the focus of attention on the breath the practitioner can move into the realm of disconnecting the mind. This means that such a practice could be viewed as a key to unlocking the very essence of the mind or mindfulness. ‘To practise in this way, the meditator must keep one’s mind fully in the present..’ ¹⁶

The method and effects of this meditative practice can be profound even to a beginner and this is attested to by the **Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh** in *You Are Here*: ‘We all have the ability to generate this energy of mindfulness.’ ¹⁷

¹⁶ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 363.

¹⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *You Are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment* (Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2023), p. 8.

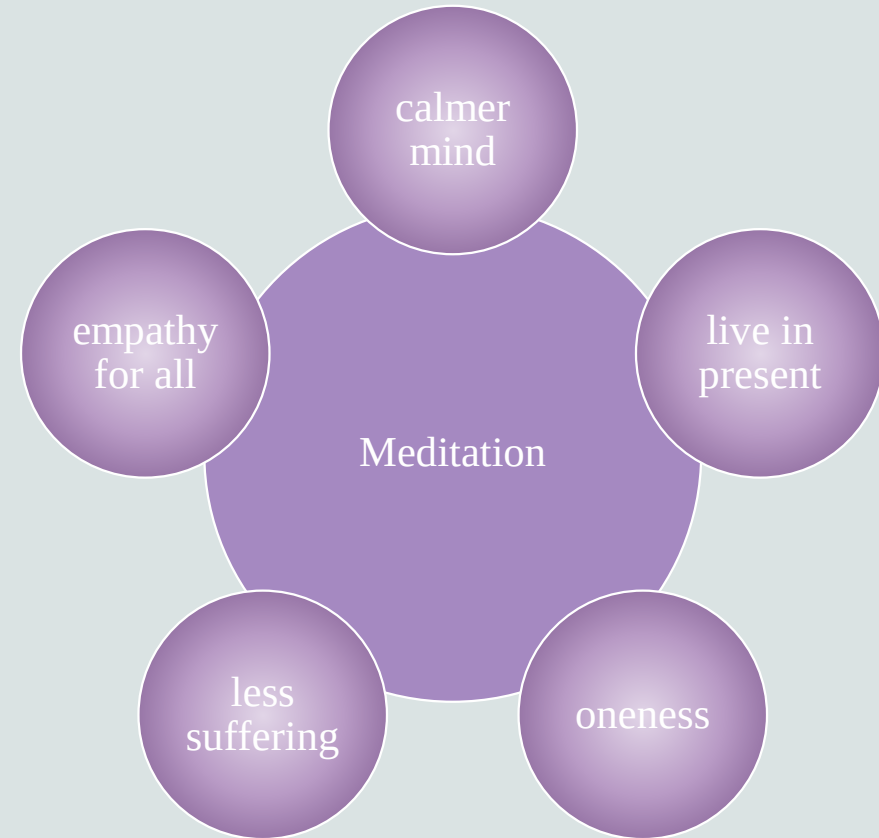
A Meditation Practice: The Shikan Taza Effects

These effects can be immediate and available to a beginner.

This is the wonder of Zen, the simplicity of entering the practice, being mindful and yet the availability of advancing to *enlightenment*.

*‘The one contains all—that is the insight of Buddhism.’*¹⁸

The effects can benefit us in our daily lives and the seed planted can grow. ‘In the case of mindfulness, it required a genius like the Buddha to discover the “hidden talent”.. and to develop the vast inherent power of that potent seed.’¹⁹



¹⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *You Are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment* (Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2023), p. 106.

¹⁹ Venerable Nyanaponika Thera, *The Power of Mindfulness* (Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc., (Wheel Publication, 1997), p. vi.

A Meditation Practice: Advanced Practice

The Shikan Taza advanced practitioner, in time, progresses toward a more advanced meditative practice:

- ❖ **No Thought:** to include the ability to focus attention on the present moment and without any other thought entering the mind. ‘The meditator seeks to bring an inner stillness to all activities, performing them with mindfulness, perhaps to the point of no-thought.’ ²⁰ One can withdraw responses to their senses.
- ❖ **Non-dualism:** sometimes a difficult concept but an important one where ‘Buddhist non-dualism dissolves the opposition of samsara and nirvana and opens prospects for bodhisattva action beyond the strictures of likes and dislikes’ ²¹

²⁰ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 366.

²¹ Peter D. Hershock, ‘Diversity Matters: Buddhist Reflections on the Meaning of Difference’, in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. by Steven M. Emmanuel (Wiley Blackwell, 2013), Kindle eBook pp. 675-692 (p. 688).

A Meditation Practice: Advanced Practice Continued

- ❖ **Space and time:** a oneness and connectedness that is beyond the traditional concept of one's mind without causation and the associated effects: 'by stilling the activity of our mind, a state is reached in which time, space, and causation, which constitute the framework of consciousness, drop away'²²
- ❖ **Nirvana:** no more suffering and the elimination of the causes of suffering. The truth.

‘the peace of nirvana – that transcends the limitations of language and logic.’²³

Beliefs in nirvana or awakening can include a sudden awakening with a progression toward an alignment of the whole body to that awakening. This is an insight into true nature but there is still progression.

‘in the final chapter of the Hua Yen Sūtra, it is suggested that, although the bodhisattva path consists of 52 distinct stages, as soon as one begins at the initial stage, one has already, in a sense, completed all 52 stages.

Nevertheless, one must still proceed through the stages one at a time..’²⁴

²² Katsuki Sekida, *Zen Training Methods and Philosophy* (Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2012), Kindle eBook p.33.

²³ Karen C. Lang, ‘Candrakīrti on the Limits of Language and Logic’, in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. by Steven M. Emmanuel (Wiley Blackwell, 2013), Kindle eBook pp. 331-348 (p. 331).

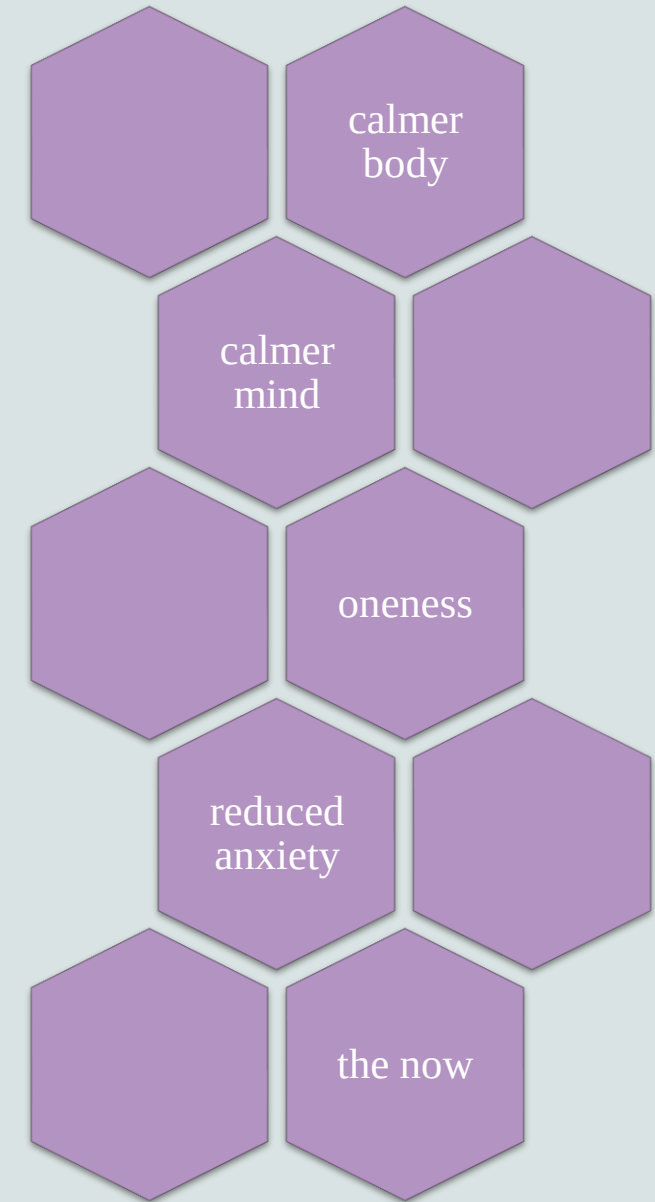
²⁴ Alan Fox, ‘The Huayan Metaphysics of Totality’, in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. by Steven M. Emmanuel (Wiley Blackwell, 2013), Kindle eBook pp. 180-189 (p. 189).

A Meditation Practice: A Personal Journey

My Journey into Zen Buddhism is very limited, however, I have attended Zen Meditation sessions both in person and virtually. It involved:

- ❖ **Shikan Taza:** there were no expectations placed on me and each and every one of those in attendance were made to feel welcome.
- ❖ **Silent Walking:** slow and silent walking around the room multiple times for very short periods.

These were held with Cheltenham Zen.²⁵



²⁵ Matt Harvey, 'Zen Meditation', unpublished seminars at Cheltenham Zen (Orange Yoga, Cheltenham, 2023).

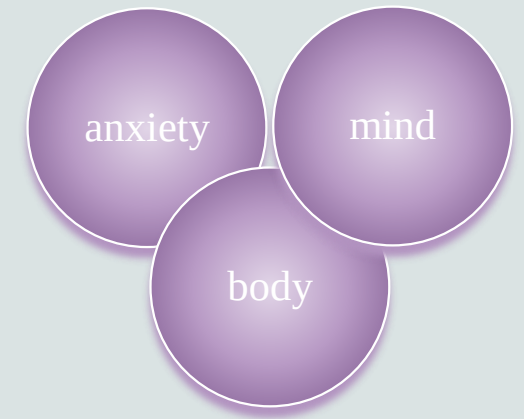
A Meditation Practice: A Personal Journey

Positive Immediate Effects vs Apparent Issues

- ❖ **Present Moment:** paying attention and having awareness of the *now*. This has never been a strength of mine.
- ❖ **Oneness:** the appreciation of space and time and its connectedness; the oneness of everything. I can start to appreciate the seed of mindfulness and oneness.

The appreciation of the present moment has had the most profound effect. For example: I can now appreciate the beauty and wonder in a simple walk; in a simple blade of grass. These are more long lasting effects.

Whereas the calming of the body, mind, and effects on anxiety levels have been more temporary. There are not any quick fixes because it has to become part of your life:



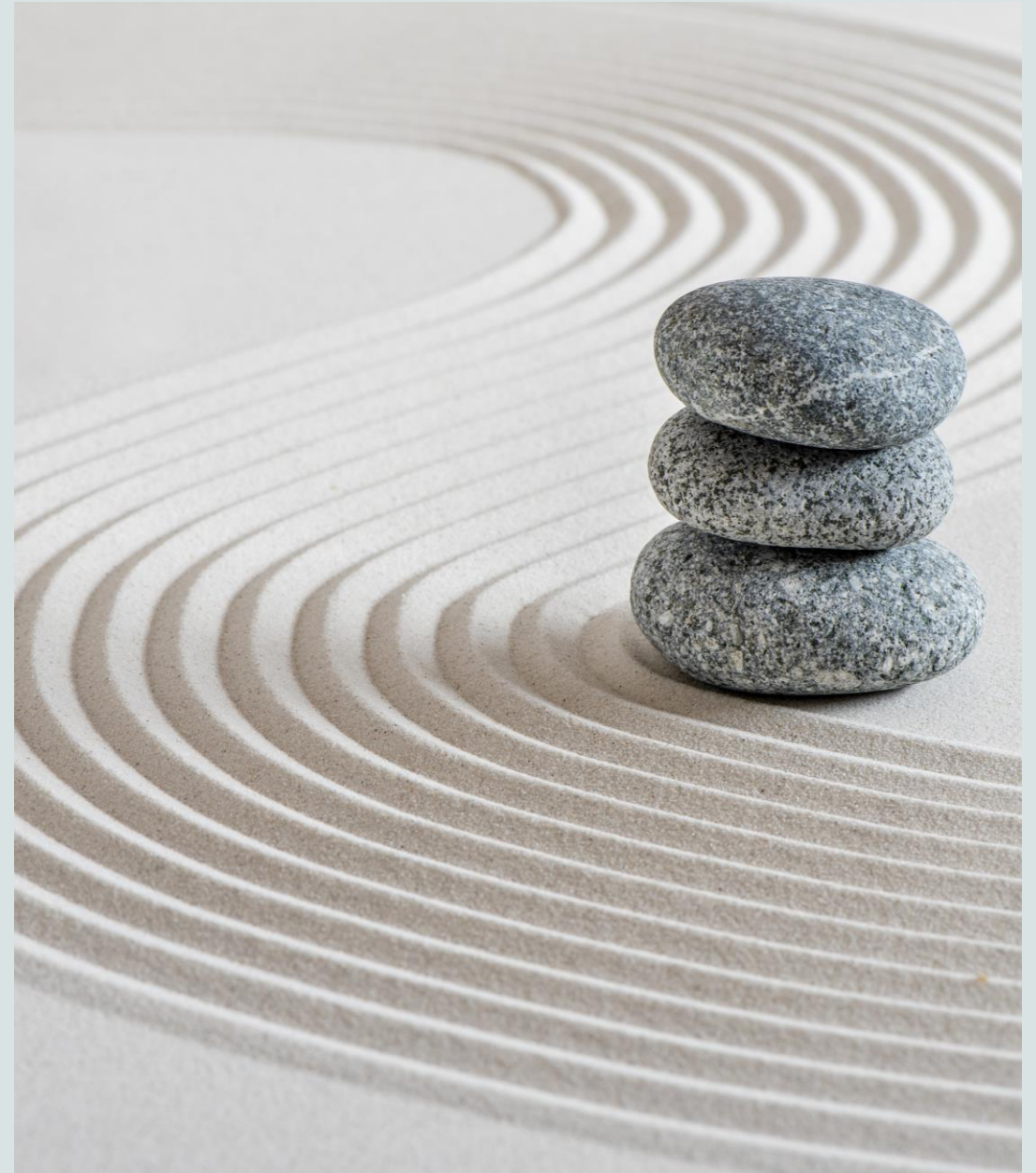
‘For meditation to work, it needs to become a path, a journey..’²⁶

²⁶ Gelong Thubten, *A Monk's Guide to Happiness: Meditation in the 21st Century* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2019), p. 85.

A Meditation Practice: Zen Meditation

Zen Buddhism and Shikan Taza is a profound practice which is available to all of us.

My personal journey, although limited in practice and experience, means that I will continue to explore the Zen pathway.





Thank you

Any Questions?