

Practical Study Guide for Seekers on the Path to Enlightenment

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CLASS



TRADITIONS OF BUDDHISM

Tibetan Buddhism is a branch of Buddhism that similarly is linked to all branches of Buddhism that originated from Buddha Shakyamuni in what was then India and now is in modern day Nepal.

There are three main schools or disciplines of Buddhism. These three are Theravadin, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. All three traditions of Buddhism follow the core teachings of the Buddha, The Four Noble Truths and The Eightfold Path.

Theravadin Buddhism is focused on conservative matters of the doctrine of the Buddha, renunciation and monastic disciplines to achieve enlightenment or Nirvana for oneself. Theravadin traditions focus strongly on Meditative Absorption, Calm Abiding Meditation or Samadhi. Theravadin Buddhism teaches mostly that enlightenment can be achieved through monastic ordination and disciplines or through several lifetimes.

Mahayana Buddhism is similar however the motivation is to reach enlightenment not simply for oneself but for the wellbeing of others. Mahayana Buddhism also introduces its followers to Bodhisattva's. Bodhisattva's is commonly referred to as the Courageous Ones. For Bodhisattva's vow to reach enlightenment for the purpose of helping all in Samsara reach enlightenment as well.

In Mahayana Buddhism once Nirvana is achieved their motivation is to guide others towards achieving enlightenment and freedom from suffering from that enlightened state. In brief the motivation is to reach enlightenment to be of better benefit to others. The Mahayana branch of Buddhism also teaches that anyone can reach enlightenment even a layperson or one without monastic ordination.

Vajrayana Buddhism is a form of Mahayana Buddhism and thus contains teachings from all three branches of Buddhism and is commonly referred to as the Diamond or Lightning

vehicle of Buddhism. A tradition of Buddhism where one can achieve enlightenment quickly in this very lifetime depending on your dedication to the Buddhas' teachings. Vajrayana Buddhism originated in Medieval India, Bhutan and Tibet and can be traced back to the Buddha.

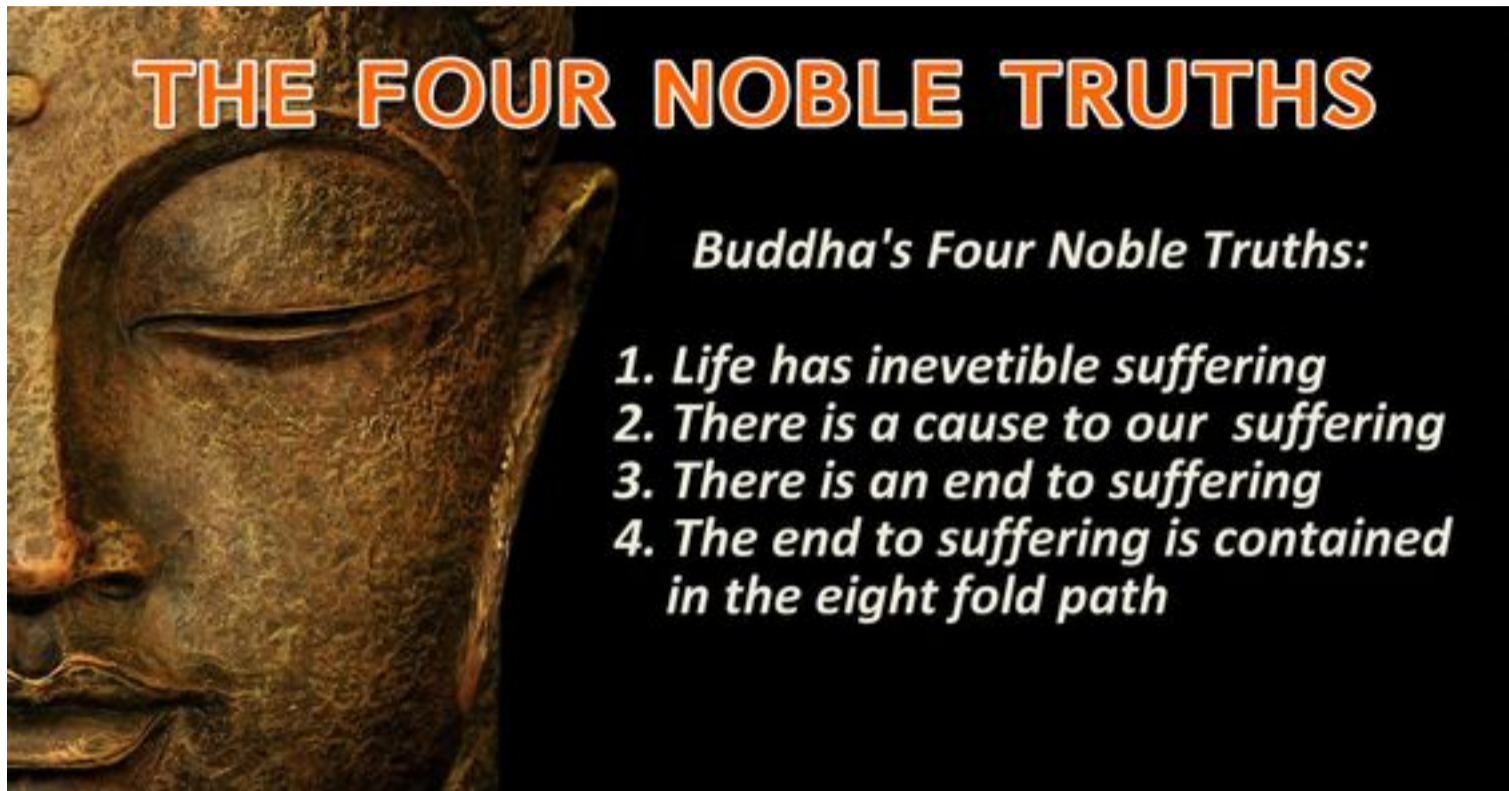
It was introduced to Tibet from India by Guru Padmasambhava. Vajrayana Buddhism acknowledges and thus follows not only the disciplines from Theravadin and Mahayana traditions of Buddhism but also texts, practices and teachings from fully realized or enlightened masters.

As the historical Buddha Shakyamuni first turned the Wheel of Dharma out of great wisdom and compassion for all beings and helped countless beings achieve Buddhahood. The countless buddha's that followed also gave teachings on how to achieve enlightenment. Vajrayana Buddhism has kept extensive records and texts on the teachings of these enlightened masters.

The first Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma in our Era was Buddha Shakyamuni. His first teachings after reaching perfect, precious and complete enlightenment was: The Four Noble Truths.

It is important to understand these Four Noble Truths as the foundation of how Buddhists view their existence in Samsara. Samsara has many interpretations and is a Sanskrit word that roughly translates to "Wandering the cyclic state of all matter, life and aimless existence in mundane world."

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS



The First Noble Truth is commonly referred to as 'Duhkha' which in Sanskrit translates to suffering, causes of pain, discomfort, sorrow, distress, grief, misery or circumstances of stress. The Buddha taught that life has unavoidable suffering.

Specifically and commonly known sufferings are Birth, Old Age, Sickness and Death. There are several other forms of suffering we will experience in life. The Buddha wasn't trying to depress or discourage anyone by stating this, rather the opposite. He was stating a truth in a way that allows us to recognize a problem, identify it and find a solution.

The Second Noble Truth is referred to as Samudaya or "Cause of Suffering". The Buddha taught that suffering is Caused by the "Three Poisons" Ignorance, Attachment and Aversion. If you contemplate this you can understand that these underlying emotions create the causes and conditions for suffering. When you act from a mental state of Ignorance, Attachment or Aversion you create negative actions or karma. In Buddhism mindfulness,

awareness, compassion and wisdom are fundamental positive qualities that should be perfected and implemented in daily life as remedies to negative states of mind.

The Third Noble Truth is referred to as Nirvana in Sanskrit which is freedom from suffering. Here you begin to understand the altruistic motivation of the Buddha's teachings. He didn't just state, 'life is suffering and these are the reasons they are.' He stated that there is a way to liberate oneself and others from suffering and achieve Nirvana. This is why it's important to understand the root cause of a problem. By understanding the circumstance clearly you're able to remedy it.

The Fourth Noble Truth is referred to as Marga in Sanskrit or more commonly the 'Noble Eightfold Path' to the cessation of Suffering. Which is how we are able to liberate ourselves and others from the causes and conditions of suffering and achieve enlightenment or Nirvana. Once we have reached enlightenment we are free from Samsaric sufferings and able to be of most benefit to others.

The Four Noble Truths

1. 'There is Suffering.' Dukkha
2. 'There is a Cause of Suffering'.' Samudaya
3. 'There is an End to Suffering', Nirvana
4. 'There is Path to end Suffering.' Marga (The Noble Eightfold Path)

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The Noble Eightfold Path

1. Right View
2. Right Thought.
3. Right Speech.
4. Right Conduct.
5. Right Livelihood.
6. Right Effort.
7. Right Mindfulness.
8. Right Concentration.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH



The Division of Wisdom

- 1.) Right Understanding
- 2.) Right Thought

The Division of Ethical Conduct

- 3.) Right Speech
- 4.) Right Action
- 5.) Right Livelihood

The Division of Mental Discipline

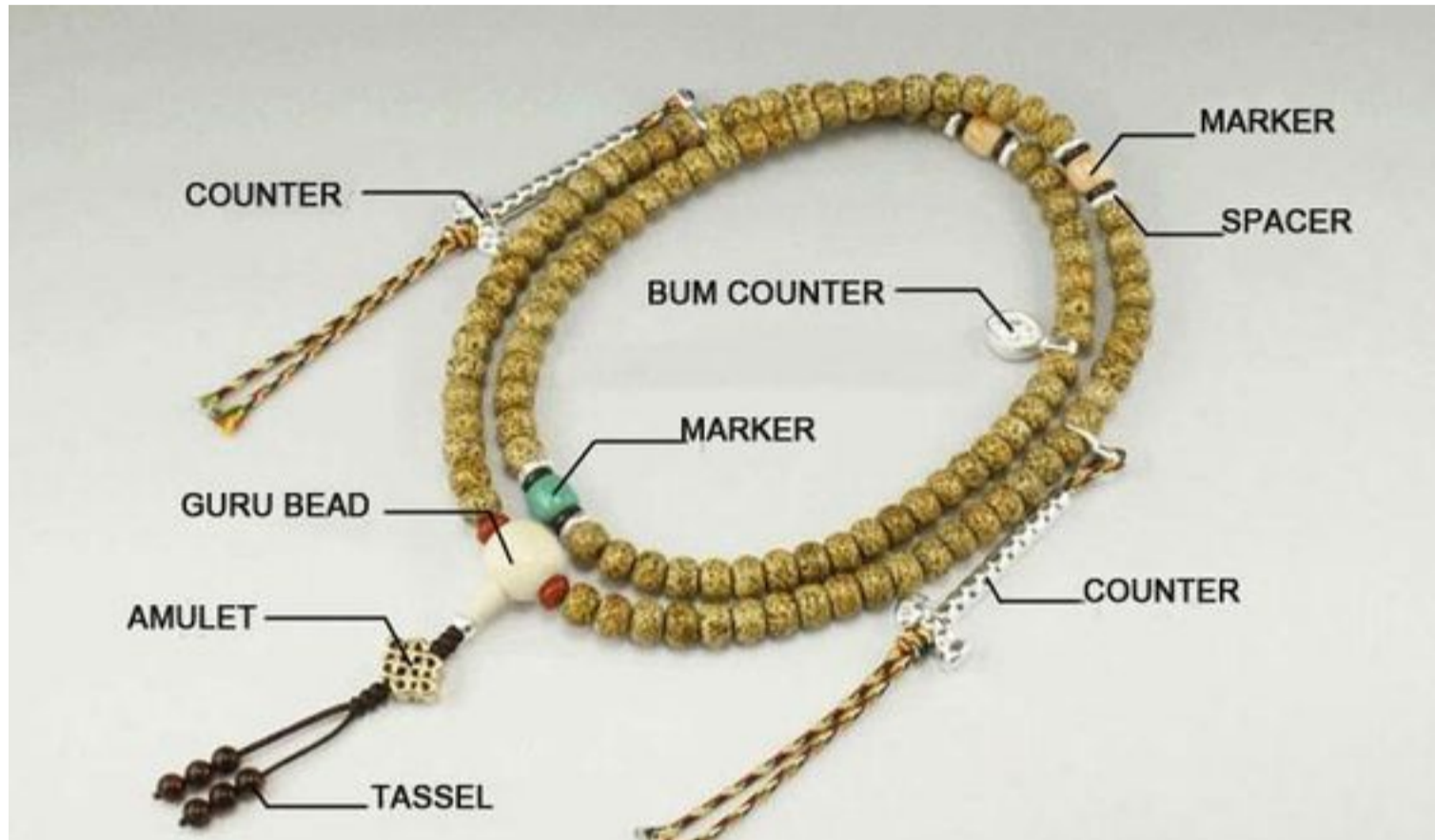
- 6.) Right Effort
- 7.) Right Mindfulness
- 8.) Right Concentration

When the Buddha gave his first sermon in the Deer Park, he began the 'Turning of the Dharma Wheel'. He chose the beautiful symbol of the wheel with its eight spokes to represent the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha's teaching goes round and round like a great wheel that never stops, leading to the central point of the wheel, the only point which is fixed, Nirvana. The eight spokes on the wheel represent the eight parts of the Noble Eightfold Path. Just as every spoke is needed for the wheel to keep turning, we need to follow each step of the path.

1. Right View. The right way to think about life is to see the world through the eyes of the Buddha--with wisdom and compassion.
2. Right Thought. We are what we think. Clear and kind thoughts build good, strong characters.
3. Right Speech. By speaking kind and helpful words, we are respected and trusted by everyone.
4. Right Conduct. No matter what we say, others know us from the way we behave. Before we criticize others, we should first see what we do ourselves.
5. Right Livelihood. This means choosing a job that does not hurt others. The Buddha said, "Do not earn your living by harming others. Do not seek happiness by making others unhappy."
6. Right Effort. A worthwhile life means doing our best at all times and having good will toward others. This also means not wasting effort on things that harm ourselves and others.
7. Right Mindfulness. This means being aware of our thoughts, words, and deeds.
8. Right Concentration. Focus on one thought or object at a time. By doing this, we can be quiet and attain true peace of mind.

Following the Noble Eightfold Path can be compared to cultivating a garden, but in Buddhism one cultivates one's wisdom. The mind is the ground and thoughts are seeds. Deeds are ways one cares for the garden. Our faults are weeds. Pulling them out is like weeding a garden. The harvest is real and lasting happiness.

The use of Malas



Mala translates in Sanskrit to “Garland”. The word for Mala in Tibetan is Akshamala. For Buddhist practitioners its considered an essential spiritual tool for their personal practice.

A Mala is traditionally 108 - 111 beads strung together with one larger bead that is known as the Guru bead. The Guru bead also serves to let the practitioner know when they have completed a full set of their mantra recitations. The Mala beads are pulled individually towards the practitioner during each mantra recitation. Once you reach the Guru bead you do not cross over the Guru or in case of deity yoga “Buddha” bead you dedicate the virtue of your mantra recitations, flip the Mala and continue chanting your mantras as before. In many traditions only 100 of the mantras are recorded or counted towards the accumulation. The extra 8-11 are not counted due to errors that may of occurred during the mantra recitation and practice.

In Tibetan Buddhism the Mala has more profound qualities. The Mala on Tibetan Buddhism symbolizes the “Form and Speech of the Deity” It can be viewed as a Principle Enlightened Deity or an entire assembly or mandala of that particular Buddha.

A great example is if one is doing Chenrezig practice. Where you recite the six-syllable mantra:

OM MANI PADME HUNG

The Guru Bead in this practice on the Mala represents Chenrezig and the other beads represents his retinue. If we look at our Mala in this way it supports our practice and becomes a source of refuge for the practitioner.

Mantra Meditation is recognized as being especially good for the mind. It has positive effects of relaxation, bringing focused attention and enhanced self awareness.

It many religions its used as a counter to keep track of Mantra recitations. Malas can be made of any material though there are some materials that add certain qualities to the prayers accumulated with the Mala. The Mala is held in the left hand and usually during practice of deity Yoga is held around the heart center.

MEDITATION IN ACTION

Meditation is an action. It may have qualities of peace, clarity and calm but it also takes training, skill and preparation.

When you embark on a journey it's common for us to have a path and map planned out to reach your destination. Likewise when you begin your spiritual path you want to take the best route to achieve your spiritual goals. In every branch of Buddhism there are certain qualities that a practitioner wants to perfect themselves on the stages of the path.

Most of us have a basic understanding of morality and virtuous or altruistic deeds. We naturally as intellectuals have an understanding or even vague acceptance of the law of cause and effect called Karma. We therefore strive to accumulate merit with our actions of Body Speech and Mind.

We have a common understanding that as Meditation Practitioners our positive or negative deeds throughout the day will be present with you during your meditation sessions. If you have a day where you're positive, kind, compassionate, joyful and moral then when you sit on your meditation cushion, chair, bench, in any meditative setting and your mind is more at ease. Likewise if you have a day where you were angry, hateful, stressed or engaged in any negative deeds your mind will harbor that turmoil when you Meditate. This is why it's imperative to be mindful of your actions and conduct at all times.

Several times a day you should ask yourself: **“What is the state of my Mind?”** Then take a moment to become aware of your breathing. Take your breath off autopilot, inhale, exhale and observe without attachment, aversion or ignorance. This will help bring your focus inwardly and back to the present moment. It also allows you to develop awareness and get to know your mind and its numerous states throughout the day. The more your mind is at ease the easier it is for your mind to have clarity. Meditation is a skill that is very much like a muscle. The more you meditate the easier it gets. Likewise you can't simply get muscle strength without proper motivations, nutrition and exercise.

There are five basic guidelines for Buddhist Meditation Practitioners and these five most inherently good people find universal in most religions or philosophies. These are known as the Five Precepts.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

- 1) To abstain from taking life.
- 2) To abstain from taking what is not given
- 3) To abstain from sensuous misconduct
- 4) To abstain from false speech
- 5) To abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind.

These are universally understood as the moral ethics (shila) and qualities of a spiritual person. These Five Precepts are the foundations that support your meditation practice and path to meditative accomplishment. Naturally being aware of these basic vows (precepts), we're able to understand their benefits or consequences.

All beings are equal in wanting happiness and freedom from suffering. Likewise all beings wish to live. Therefore instead of taking life help preserve it. Instead of stealing practice generosity. Be mindful of your body and engage in behavior that is consensual and respectful to others. Instead of being dishonest be truthful. Instead of over indulgence in chemicals or intoxicants that can cloud your judgment or cause physical harm to your self or others be mindful.

Now let's return to the subject of Cause and Effect (Karma). What are the results of killing, stealing, intimate misconduct, lying and the abuse of intoxicants. In Buddhism it's very simple. The result of Killing shortens one's life span. The result of stealing is poverty. The result of sensual misconduct is an absence of meaningful and loving relationships with others. The results of abusing drugs are the increasing of afflictive emotions such as ignorance, attachment, anger, jealousy or hatred. It also harms the body and creates the conditions for harming others as well.

You can become an accomplished meditation practitioner in brief by simply cultivating the goodness in your heart and others. By following basic principles of kindness and non-violence your mind will be at ease. You will accumulate merit and wisdom. Your suffering will decrease and stability in the mind will result.

THE SIX PERFECTIONS OR PARAMITAS

The Sanskrit word *pāramitā* means to cross over to the other shore. *Pāramitā* may also be translated as perfection, perfect realization, or reaching beyond limitation.

Through the practice of these six *pāramitās*, we cross over the sea of suffering (*saṃsāra*) to the shore of happiness and awakening (**nirvāṇa**); we cross over from ignorance and delusion to enlightenment.

Each of the six *pāramitās* is an enlightened quality of the heart, a glorious virtue or attribute – the innate seed of perfect realization within us.

The *pāramitās* are the very essence of our true nature. However, since these enlightened qualities of the heart have become obscured by delusion, selfishness, and other karmic tendencies, we must develop these potential qualities and bring them into expression. In this way, the six *pāramitās* are an inner cultivation, a daily practice for wise, compassionate, loving, and enlightened living.

The *pāramitās* are the six kinds of virtuous practice required for skillfully serving the welfare of others and for the attainment of awakening.

We must understand that bringing these virtuous qualities of our true nature into expression requires discipline, practice, and sincere cultivation.

This is the path of the Bodhisattva – one who is dedicated to serving the highest welfare of all living beings with the awakened heart of unconditional love, skillful wisdom, and all-embracing compassion.

In *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the *Prajñapāramitā sūtras*, the *Lotus Sūtra* and a large number of other texts list the six perfections:

1. *Dāna pāramitā*: **generosity**, giving of oneself (-Greed)
2. *Śīla pāramitā*: **morality**, discipline, virtue, proper conduct (-Bad Karma)
3. *Kṣānti pāramitā*: **patience**, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance (-Anger)
4. *Vīrya pāramitā*: **diligence**, energy, vigor, effort (Laziness)
5. *Dhyāna pāramitā*: **Meditation** one-pointed concentration, (-Scattered Mind)
6. *Prajñā pāramitā*: **Wisdom**, insight (-Ignorance)

The Six Paramitas purify: 1) Greed, 2) Negative Karma, 3) Anger, 4) Laziness 5) Scattered Mind 6) Ignorance

Stages of Shamatha Meditation

In order to reach enlightenment one needs to master the mind. At all times one should practice mindfulness and lead the mind without force towards stability. This meditative stabilization is how we reach Samadhi which is single pointed concentration. The mind free of distractions or in laymen terms discursive thoughts. When one begins to meditate their minds are overwhelmed with distractions. There is a constant loss of focus. We need to strengthen our meditation by using an object for focus in beginning like the breath, a mantra or even a grain of rice your vision is anchored to. Then eventually we habitualize ourselves through rigorous meditation practice to accomplish all the phases and nine stages that lead to the perfection of Shamatha meditation. In the beginning it's compared to a waterfall of thoughts ceaselessly flowing without space or end. After this the flow of thoughts are like a river flowing through a gorge. It flows not as strong as the waterfall or originating source but it encounters obstacles on its path. The third phase of Meditative accomplishment is compared to a river flowing through a valley. Here there is less resistance or obstacles that can interrupt its flow and the peace of the river of thoughts is much easier to navigate. The fourth phase is compared to an ocean without waves. The mind in this stage may still have distractions but your meditative progress has reached a state where you can easily return to stillness of the mind. The final phase is where the mind is perfectly still, at ease and at peace without effort. This then allows you to have fully accomplished meditative concentration or Shamatha and progress with this to further trainings for example the Ten Bhumis (or grounds) of the Bodhisattva that lead to perfect and complete Buddhahood.

PHASE 1: Flow of Involuntary Thoughts Are Like A Cascading Waterfall

PHASE 2: Flow of Thoughts Are Like A River Quickly Flowing Through a Gorge

PHASE 3: Flow of Thoughts Are Like A River Slowly Flowing Through A Valley

PHASE 4: The Mind Is Calm Like an Ocean Unmoved by Waves

PHASE 5: The Mind Is Perfectly Still

Flow of Involuntary Thoughts Are Like A Cascading Waterfall

1) Learning the Instructions & Placement of the Mind (Directed Attention)

At this stage the practitioner hears the instructions and becomes familiar with the meditative posture. The practitioner is able to place his attention on the object of meditation (for example the tactile sensations of the rise and fall of the breath felt

Nine Stages of Shamatha and Ten Bhumis

within the body), but is unable to maintain that attention for very long. Distractions, dullness of mind and other hindrances are common. You can usually maintain your attention on the meditation object for 5 – 30 seconds. In this stage your thoughts, distractions and the overall irrelevant mental delusions of mind that you experience when you try and meditate is occasionally interrupted by meditation itself.

2) Continuous Attention

The practitioner experiences moments of continuous attention on the object before becoming distracted. This is when you can maintain your attention on the meditation object for about 1 – 5 minutes. But most of the time you're off target. In this stage your thoughts, distractions and the overall clouds of conceptualized thoughts of the mind that you experience when you practice is a little more frequently interrupted by meditation.

3) Repeated Attention

The practitioner's attention is mostly fixed on the object for the majority of the practice session and she or he is able to immediately realize when she or he has lost their mental hold on the object and is able to restore that attention quickly. A Tibetan Buddhist Master suggests that being able to maintain attention for 108 breaths is a good benchmark for when we have reached this stage. This is when you can maintain your attention on the meditation object for about 5-15 minutes. In this stage you're really starting to get the hang of it. Now at this point meditation is occasionally interrupted by the discursive thoughts of the mind.

The Flow of Thoughts Are Like A River Quickly Flowing Through a Gorge

4) Close Attention

The practitioner is able to maintain his attention throughout the entire meditation session (an hour or more) without losing their mental hold on the meditation object at all. In this stage the practitioner achieves the power of mindfulness. Nevertheless, this stage still contains subtle forms of excitation and dullness or laxity.

5) Tamed Attention

By this stage the practitioner achieves deep tranquility of mind, but must be watchful for subtle forms of laxity or dullness, peaceful states of mind which can be confused for calm abiding. By focusing on the future benefits of gaining Shamatha, the practitioner can uplift his mind and become more focused and clear.

The Flow of Thoughts Are Like A River Slowly Flowing Through A Valley

6) Pacified Attention

This is the stage during which subtle mental dullness or laxity is no longer a great difficulty, but now the practitioner is prone to subtle excitements which arise at the periphery of meditative attention. According to accomplished meditation masters, this stage is achieved only after thousands of hours of rigorous training.

7) Fully Pacified Attention

Although the practitioner may still experience subtle excitement or dullness, these are rare and he or she can easily recognize and pacify them.

The Mind Is Calm Like an Ocean Unmoved by Waves

8) Single-Pointed Attention

In this stage the practitioner can reach high levels of concentration with only a slight effort and without being interrupted even by subtle laxity or excitement during the entire meditation session.

The Mind Is Perfectly Still

9) Attentional Balance

The meditator now effortlessly reaches absorbed concentration and can maintain it for about four hours without any single interruption. Full Achievement of Meditation
(Shamatha)

Ten Bhumis of a Bodhisattva Simplified or Stages to Enlightenment

1. ***The first bhūmi, the Very Joyous.*** (Skt. *pramuditā*), in which one rejoices at realizing a partial aspect of the truth;
2. ***The second bhūmi, the Stainless.*** (Skt. *vimalā*), in which one is free from all defilement;
3. ***The third bhūmi, the Light-Maker.*** (Skt. *prabhākarī*), in which one radiates the light of wisdom;
4. ***The fourth bhūmi, the Radiant Intellect.*** (Skt. *arciṣmatī*), in which the radiant flame of wisdom burns away earthly desires;
5. ***The fifth bhūmi, the Difficult to Master.*** (Skt. *sudurjayā*), in which one surmounts the illusions of darkness, or ignorance as the [Middle Way](#);
6. ***The sixth bhūmi, the Manifest.*** (Skt. *abhimukhī*) in which supreme wisdom begins to manifest;
7. ***The seventh bhūmi, the Gone Afar.*** (Skt. *dūraṅgamā*), in which one rises above the states of the [Two vehicles](#);
8. ***The eighth bhūmi, the Immovable.*** (Skt. *acalā*), in which one dwells firmly in the truth of the [Middle Way](#) and cannot be perturbed by anything;
9. ***The ninth bhūmi, the Good Intelligence.*** (Skt. *sādhumatī*), in which one preaches the Law freely and without restriction;
10. ***The tenth bhūmi, the Cloud of Doctrine.*** (Skt. *dharmameghā*), in which one benefits all [sentient beings](#) with the Law ([Dharma](#)), just as a cloud sends down rain impartially on all things.