

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammâ Sambuddhassa!

A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH¹

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The mental state of a person is something that can constantly change due to various internal and external factors. At times these factors are capable of overwhelming and de-stabilising the mind if not properly dealt with. It is up to the individual to ensure that they can effectively function in society while maintaining their inner peace and stability, thus ensuring that they are capable of making a positive contribution to their own life, to those close to them as well as to wider society.

There are various external factors in everyday life that can negatively impact on an individual's mental stability. Pressures from the work place, the family home, friends and relatives and other areas of their life, can all negatively impact the mind. The factors are wide and varied, but the end result is the arising of various negative forces within the mind that are capable of de-stabilizing it and even affecting the sanity of the individual in some instances. It is very important to understand however, that all forces within the mind are actually *self-created in response to external events from the outside world, as well as in response to internal events from within oneself.*

It is an individual's *inability to understand* (delusion or *moha* in the *Pali* language) and *skilfully* deal with external and internal pressures that cause them to lose their mental equilibrium.² Most Buddhists unsuccessfully attempt to seek answers to their problems outside of the *Dhamma* (Lord Buddha's teachings) without knowing that the Lord Buddha equipped his followers with *all* the necessary 'tools' to effectively combat life's pressures. It is up to the individual to *know* and *diligently apply* these teachings in their life to gain the necessary results as 'Lord Buddhas only show the way.'

There can be no inner peace nor stability for one who has no control over his/her mind.³ The Lord Buddha emphasised the importance of self-control as *the foundation* for inner peace, harmony and happiness. He also showed the ultimate way to gain this self-control in the *Noble Eightfold Path*.⁴ The *Noble Eightfold Path* comprising *sîla* (morality), *samâdhi* (concentration) and *pañña* (wisdom); leads one to greater *understanding* (*pañña* - wisdom) of oneself and the external world, inner peace, stability, happiness and to the lasting peace of *Nibbâna* (realization).⁵

Treading the *Noble Eightfold Path* is no mean task, especially for those who have had no prior exposure to such forms of self-discipline and training. Therefore it is important for such individuals to take to the training gradually, so as to not cause any additional pressures to arise from it. It is also wise to seek the guidance of an experienced spiritual teacher to help and advice them in their endeavours. One can never underestimate the importance of good spiritual friends to guide, encourage and help one along the path. In the absence of such guidance one needs to rely on oneself while utilizing resources such as the Internet, including its online Buddhist community comprising learned and wise monks and lay disciples for guidance.

Many pressures are *unskilfully self-created* within the mind *in response* to various internal and external events, which are the product of *unclear understanding* and *thinking* (delusion or *moha* in *Pali*). The Lord Buddha emphasised the importance of self-control as *the corner stone* of happiness and mental stability and showed that the *most skilful* way of gaining this self-control is by treading the *Noble Eightfold Path*, comprising *sîla* (morality), *samâdhi* (concentration) and *pañña* (wisdom), which leads one to inner peace, happiness and to the lasting peace of *Nibbâna*. It is essential for beginners to start along this path gradually and to seek the guidance of good spiritual teachers as well as good friends, while utilizing resources such as the Internet and its online Buddhist community for guidance where required. The more one endeavours along the *Noble Eightfold Path*, the more one will be at peace.

May you attain the lasting peace of *Nibbâna*!

Notes

1. This article was written for the *Ehipassiko* Buddhist journal to cover the theme of 'Buddhist Meditation and Mental Health.' The latest version of this document can be found in **PDF** format here <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=mentalhealthpdf>
2. This is no mean feat however and can require years of self-training and self-discipline in line with the Lord Buddha's teachings.
3. Until one attains *Nibbâna* (enlightenment) one cannot expect to have full and perfect self-control over oneself. It is important to understand and bear this in mind and to not be 'too hard' on oneself during one's journey there.
4. See the *Noble Eightfold Path* here <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=noblepath>
5. One may find it easier to *start out* by first becoming established in *dâna* (giving), *sîla* (virtue) and *bhâvanâ* (meditation) and then slowly progressing onto the *Noble Eightfold Path*. It is also important to know of and become established in guidelines enumerated in discourses such *Sigalovada Sutta* by the Lord Buddha especially for lay people. See the *Sigalovada Sutta* here <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html> and here <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.ksw0.html>

Related Articles

1. *Daily Dâna* - On giving and generosity, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=dailydana>
2. *Five Precepts* - Developing virtue through the five precepts, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=pansil>
3. *Metta Meditation* - Easy to follow instructions for doing the meditation on loving-kindness, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=mettamed>
4. *Work Stress* - An analysis of stress in the work-place, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=workstress>
5. *Fault Finding & Resentment* - Dealing with fault finding and resentment, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=faultfind>
6. *Equanimity* - Dealing with the vicissitudes of life, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=equanimity>
7. *Buddhist Positive Thinking* - Positive thinking from a Buddhist perspective, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=postthink>
8. *Mental Purity* - Five ways for subduing mental defilements, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=vitakkasantana>
9. *Noble Eightfold Path* - The path for ending stress and suffering, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=noblepath>

Related Suttas (Discourses)

1. DN 31, *Sigalovada Sutta, The Discourse to Sigala, The Layperson's Code of Discipline*, see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>
2. MN 20, *Vitakkasanthana Sutta, The Removal of Distracting Thoughts*, see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.020.soma.html>

Online Resources

1. *AccessToInsight.org* here <http://www.accesstoinsight.org>
2. *Mettanet.org* here <http://www.mettanet.org>
3. *What-Buddha-Said.net* here <http://what-buddha-said.net>
4. *What-Buddha-Taught.net* here <http://what-buddha-taught.net>
5. *SuttaReadings.net* here <http://www.suttareadings.net>
6. *Buddhanet.net* here <http://www.buddhanet.net>