



**Culadasa:** Welcome to Meditation Illuminated, a Tricycle online retreat. We’re coming to you today from Dharma Treasure Retreat Center located in the mountains of southeast Arizona. The retreat we’re going to present to you over the next four weeks is based on my recently published book, *The Mind Illuminated*. My name is Culadasa, also known as John Yates. And with me here today is...

**Matthew Immergut:** Matthew Immergut. I’m a student of Culadasa. I’ll be assisting and teaching on the retreat as well. I’m also the second author of *The Mind Illuminated*.

**Culadasa:** So the method that we’re going to describe to you is called “*samatha vipassana*,” which we have divided up into ten stages. The ten stages are divided up by four milestone achievements.

In the first segment, stages one to three, these are the stages of a novice. Once the meditator has overcome forgetting, mind wandering, and falling asleep, then they become skilled meditators.

Stages four to six are the stages of a skilled meditator. During these stages the meditator completely overcomes distraction and dullness. Next is stage seven. That’s a transition stage between being a skilled meditator and an adept mediator.

Stages eight through ten are the stages of an adept, where the skills that have been developed previously are now put to work in a way that leads to the completion of *samatha* and an experience of insight.

The final milestone is stage ten. This is where the *samatha* that has been achieved while sitting carries over into our daily life, allowing us to practice *vipassana*, or insight, much more effectively throughout our daily life. For the adept meditator who has mastered stage ten, the state of *samatha* often persists from the end of one sitting to the beginning of the next. At each



stage there are different obstacles that you must overcome and there are different techniques for overcoming them.

As you progress through the ten stages, your skills increase and you eventually achieve a state of *samatha*, which I'll explain in a moment. In the process, you are very likely to experience insight or *vipassana*. That's why this method is referred to as *samatha vipassana*.

The division of a meditation practice into a series of progressive stages goes back all the way to the Buddha. In *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the Buddha describes this meditation process, in a series of 16 verses or quatrains. They're very brief—they don't contain a lot of information. It was elaborated on and revised eight centuries later by Master Asaṅga, who divided the whole process into nine stages.

We have based our ten stages off of Asaṅga's nine stages with some slight modifications to suit a modern audience. What we discovered through our meditation is that the mind has many parts to it. We don't have just one mind. We have the conscious mind and then we have many unconscious minds that are often in conflict with each other. “Unification of mind” refers to one of the results of meditation, particularly the result of developing stability of attention. This is when the mind becomes unified around a single intention, maintaining stable attention on whatever object is chosen, with powerful mindfulness.

Now, I'm going to go back to defining a few terms. First of all, *sati* and *samadhi*, terms that are familiar to most people that have done any meditation. *Samadhi* is what I'm calling stability of attention. *Samadhi* is often translated as concentration, but we find that the connotations of the word concentration, as they're usually used in English, aren't an adequate representation of what the word “samadhi” means. As a matter of fact, “unification of mind” is closer to what it means. *Samadhi* means the drawing together of the mental faculties. But what we found through experience is that the best way to describe *samadhi* is “stability of attention.”



This means that an ordinary person’s attention tends to move wherever it will, often scanning for something more interesting than what you’re paying attention to now. Every meditator experiences that. Or sometimes the attention is captured by something. There are many causes for the attention to move spontaneously. But the stability of attention we’re talking about is where there are no longer any spontaneous movements of attention, and that attention follows intention. Whatever you intend to pay attention to, that’s what attention goes to, and it stays there as briefly or for as long as necessary for you to investigate that object.

The word *sati*, often translated as mindfulness, refers to the ability to have a larger understanding of the context of what you were doing, thinking, saying, feeling at any given time, and of what’s going on around you. When we meditate—and this is true of just about any meditation system that I’ve ever encountered, whether or not it’s acknowledged in that particular system—you are simultaneously developing *samadhi* and *sati*—stability of attention and mindfulness. Some meditation techniques emphasize more of one than the other, but you are using both.

*Samadhi* and *sati* develop together and give rise to *samatha* and *vipassana*. These are two more terms that I want to explain to you. *Samatha* is a particular state of mind that has been cultivated through developing these specific skills in meditation, and then having developed those skills, having moved forward as an adept meditator and having developed certain qualities of mind that are highly conducive to the experience of insight and awakening.

Five qualities characterize *samatha*. The first two I’ve already mentioned: stable attention and sustained powerful mindfulness. But with the adept meditator, through their practice, they will develop joy, an intense state of joy that also brings pleasure and happiness. This joy, as it matures, gives rise to a very powerful tranquility. This tranquility, in turn, matures into a very powerful equanimity. And so *samatha* is characterized by stable attention, powerful sustained mindfulness, joy, tranquility and equanimity. This is what *samatha* is.



What is *vipassana*? *Vipassana* means insight. It means, in particular, profound insight into the fundamental nature of things. It means profound insight into who we are, what we are, and our relationship to the world. These insights completely transform who we are and how we interact and respond to the world. These insights, matured and combined with equanimity, lead to awakening.

You'll notice I said the insights combined with equanimity. This is very important point that's not always appreciated. For awakening to occur, there must be both *samatha* and *vipassana*, the insight. *Samatha* consists, as I said, of these five factors of stable attention, powerful mindfulness, joy, tranquility and equanimity. These are five of what are known as the seven factors of enlightenment. What are the other two? One of them is energetic diligence brought to the process of the second, which is investigation.

These other two factors of enlightenment, in addition to the five that *samatha* gives us, are factors of diligent investigation. These are the factors that give rise to insight. Now, the insights that we're talking about here, there are actually five of them, although most commonly the ones that you will have heard about are what are referred to as the three characteristics. But when I say five, I'm adding to those three characteristics.

First, there is the general principle of dependent co-arising, which means everything—without exception—is causally interconnected. The first of the five insights that lead to awakening is the realization of the causal interconnectedness of everything. As this particular insight matures, it allows the other insights to arise more easily, to be more comprehensible, and eventually the result is a transformed way of viewing the world, reality, and yourself in relationship to it.

The second insight would be insight into impermanence. This is one of the three characteristics. By impermanence, what we mean is that ultimately there are no things. There's only process. At first we see things arising and passing away, but as our meditation skills develop, we begin to have insight into the fact that there really are no things, that there is only process, and the arising



and passing away really become indistinguishable. Every arising immediately is the beginning of the passing away, and every passing away is setting the state for the next arising. So this is impermanence. There are no things. Everything is constantly changing. There is only change. It's all process.

The third insight of the five is insight into emptiness. The insight into emptiness is one that was identified quite a few centuries after the Buddha, and was developed very clearly by a master named Nagarjuna. Emptiness means insight into the fact that all we ever know are the fabrications of our own mind—that we don't actually have direct access to the reality beyond our individual minds. What our minds do is create a model of that reality, based on the sensory experiences that we have, based on whatever information we glean in the course of living our lives and the variety of experiences we have. We create a view of reality, and that view of reality is a reality in which we are a separate self and the world is made up a lot of a lot of separate objects. The interaction between the individual self and this world of other objects is the source of our happiness and unhappiness.

The insight into emptiness is part of what helps us to understand that nothing is as it appears to us, that this separate self we think we are is just another mental fabrication we create to explain the experience we have. This world of objects is likewise just a collection of fabrications, a model of reality, so that we can make enough sense of it to survive. It's not accurate; it's not true. Emptiness helps us to understand that things are not the way we think they are, and to let go of those notions.

The next insight is insight into *dukkha*, often translated as suffering, but means unsatisfactoriness, dissatisfactoriness, unpleasantness—the state of dissatisfaction. When we have insight into *dukkha*, what we realize is that as long as we don't realize the truths of interconnectedness, of impermanence, and of emptiness, the assumptions we make about the world can only cause suffering. If we cling to things as real and substantial and self-existent—if we believe that the representations we hold in our mind are accurate representations, the reality



around us, the people around us, the environment we live in—then we are doomed to suffer. If we believe that our happiness and unhappiness come from our interactions with these other things, we’re doomed to suffer.

Now, these four insights prepare the ground for the fifth insight, which is the culminating insight that leads to awakening. When the other insights become fully mature, then insight into no-self begins to develop. This is from the point of view of interconnectedness. This is the realization that we are not separate entities, that we are totally interconnected with everything and everyone around us. It is a product of the insight into impermanence. We realize that we are a process, part of a larger process. Even the apparent distinctiveness of an individual person as a separate process is actually a fabrication of our mind, an artificial separation of one process out of a larger process.

Insight into emptiness makes this very, very clear. It allows us to understand that we ourselves are not only a part of everything else, we ourselves are not only a process, but the whole notion of being a separate self is an illusion and a delusion. It’s a delusion that lives at the root of all of our problems, which is what gives rise to the *dukkha* that we experience.

When we can see the emptiness of the self, when we recognize that there is no self, when we cease to cling to this sense of being a separate self, there occurs awakening. So that’s what happens when we have all five insights. Interconnectedness, impermanence, emptiness, *dukkha* or suffering, and no-self. When all five of these insights have matured, and when there is sufficient equanimity present, then awakening occurs. In other words, there is a conjunction of insight and equanimity. As we said before, *samatha* really culminates in a state of tranquility and equanimity.

Now you can see the relationship between *samatha* and *vipassana*. We develop *samatha*. We have a mind that is the perfect instrument for investigating the true nature of reality. So then

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using that mind, we investigate with diligence, and that gives rise to insight. When the insight matures, the result is awakening.