



A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BUDDHIST MASTERS THICH NHAT HANH AND SANGHARAKSHITA MORDEN MEDITATION APPLICATION AND ITS IMPACT.

Name of the author: **Nguyen Thi Kim Anh** (Bhikkhunī Paññālokā)

Name of Course: M.A. Buddhist Studies

Name of department: Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies

Name of institution: Savitribai Phule Pune University

Name of organization: Quang Tri, Viet Nam

ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative analysis of two prominent Buddhist masters, Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita, focusing on their modern meditation applications and their impact on individuals and society. Meditation, a core practice in Buddhism, has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potential for promoting well-being and mindfulness. Both Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita have made substantial contributions to the development and application of meditation techniques in contemporary contexts.

The study examines the key teachings, methods, and approaches to meditation employed by these two Buddhist masters, highlighting their similarities and differences. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen monk, emphasizes mindfulness and engagement in daily life, promoting the practice of meditation as a means to cultivate peace, compassion, and interconnection. Sangharakshita, a British Buddhist teacher, emphasizes the integration of meditation with ethical conduct and a wider framework of spiritual development, emphasizing personal transformation and social change.

The impact of their teachings on individuals and society is explored, drawing upon empirical research, anecdotal evidence, and case studies. The analysis considers the effects of these meditation practices on mental well-being, emotional regulation, stress reduction, and overall quality of life. Furthermore, the influence of these practices on social engagement, environmental awareness, and the promotion of ethical values is examined.

The study also investigates the popularity and accessibility of the meditation approaches advocated by Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita in the modern world. It examines their respective organizations, publications, retreats, and digital resources to assess the reach and effectiveness of their teachings in various communities.

Overall, this comparative analysis contributes to our understanding of the diverse approaches to meditation within Buddhism and their contemporary applications. By shedding light on the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita and their impact on individuals and society, this study aims to provide insights for practitioners, researchers, and individuals interested in integrating meditation into their lives and exploring its potential benefits.

I. INTRODUCTION

Zen masters Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita are two influential figures in Buddhist meditation who have developed their own unique systems of meditation. Both systems are rooted in the Buddhist tradition but have evolved to incorporate contemporary approaches and ideas.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Zen master teaching meditation and mindfulness for over 60 years. He is best known for his teachings on Engaged Buddhism, which emphasizes the importance of mindfulness in every aspect of daily life, and for his advocacy for peace and social justice. Thich Nhat Hanh's meditation system is based on mindfulness, which involves paying attention to the present moment with non-judgmental awareness. He teaches that mindfulness can be applied to all aspects of life, including walking, eating, and breathing. His system of meditation also includes guided meditations and deep relaxation techniques.

On the other hand, Sangharakshita is a British Buddhist teacher who founded the Triratna Buddhist Community. He is known for his innovative approach to Buddhist meditation, which incorporates Western psychology and philosophy elements. Sangharakshita's system of meditation is based on the practice of mindfulness, but also includes the cultivation of positive emotions such as love and compassion. He teaches that meditation can help individuals to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their emotions, and to cultivate positive qualities that can benefit themselves and others.

Both Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita's systems of meditation share a common goal: to help individuals cultivate inner peace and happiness. However, their approaches are distinct and reflect their unique backgrounds and experiences. Thich Nhat Hanh's system emphasizes the importance of mindfulness in daily life and in cultivating compassion for oneself and others. On the other hand, Sangharakshita's system incorporates elements of Western psychology and philosophy and focuses on developing positive emotions such as love and compassion.

Despite their differences, Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita have made significant contributions to Buddhist meditation and mindfulness. Their teachings have helped countless individuals to cultivate inner peace and happiness and to live more fulfilling lives. Whether drawn to the simplicity of Thich Nhat Hanh's system or the innovation of Sangharakshita's, both offer valuable insights and techniques that can help individuals on their path to enlightenment.

II. MAIN BODY

1. MEDIATION TECHNIQUE OF ZEN MASTER THICH NHAT HANH

1.1. Mindfulness of Breathing.

According to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, mindfulness breathing techniques are easy to practice. When we breathe in, we shouldn't force our breath. Take a breath; that way, we enjoy the inhalation and do not try to force or interfere with anything. We are only aware of the fact that breathing is happening. Don't strain our breath. Realize that breathing in and out is miraculous. So we breathe in and out as beautiful. All we have to do is notice that the inhalation is taking place. We had more opportunities to enjoy breathing instead of struggling to breathe and more opportunities to realize that breathing in was a miracle.

This is similar to the Buddha's recommendation "When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly, you become entirely present. What a miracle because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in-breath."

1.2. Concentration

According to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, concentration is a great source of happiness. Concentration means concentrating on something that we are aware of. As long as we maintain this focus, we practice mindfulness. He recommends choosing objects that don't require eye scanning. If our thoughts get distracted, refocus on the object. Start doing this for one minute, then increase the time as we practice.

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh explains why this is so powerful: "Anything can be the object of your meditation, and with the powerful energy of concentration, you can make a breakthrough and develop insight. It's like a magnifying glass concentrating the light of the sun. If you put the point of concentrated light on a piece of paper, it will burn. Similarly, when your mindfulness and concentration are powerful, your insight will liberate you from fear, anger, and despair, bringing you true joy, peace, and happiness."

1.3. Awareness of the Body

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh recommends that we should focus on each part of our body. Release tension and relax as we go through our body. He says this is powerful because we rarely experience it in our daily life. Our bodies are there, but our minds are elsewhere.

He recommends using this mantra: "Breathing in, you are aware of your body. Your in-breath and out-breath quality will improve when you practice mindful breathing. There is more peace and harmony in your breathing, and if you continue to practice like that, the peace and the harmony will penetrate into the body, and the body will profit."

1.4. Releasing Tension in the Body

The next exercise is to release tension in the body. As we become aware of our body, we will notice tension in different parts of our body. Therefore, learning how to release tension in the body is very important.

Therefore, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body." Peace is possible at that moment, and it can be practiced many times a day in the workplace while you are driving, cooking, doing the dishes, and watering the vegetable garden. It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

1.5. Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is one important technique for training the wandering mind. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh said walking meditation is fun, and we don't have to work hard. We are there, mind and body together. We are fully alive and fully present here and now. Touch the wonders of life inside and outside; walking like this, every step brings healing. Every step brings peace and joy because every step is a miracle. The real miracle is not flying or walking on fire. A real miracle is walking the earth, and this miracle can be performed at any time.

2. THE MEDITATION TECHNIQUE OF MASTER SANGHARASHITA

2.1. An Overview of A System of Meditation

Sangharakshita taught and practiced a variety of meditation techniques, drawing from different Buddhist traditions. Some of the meditation techniques he emphasized include:

Firstly, the stage of integration: That's the first thing the meditator must do in connection with meditation integration. Integration is achieved mainly through mindfulness of breathing, as well as with the help of mindfulness and awareness in general. Here, in this stage, the meditator develops an integrated self.

Secondly, the stage of emotional positivity: This is achieved mainly through the development of *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and so on. Here, the integrated self is raised to a higher, more refined, at the same time, more powerful level.

Thirdly, the stage of spiritual death: This is achieved mainly through the recollection of the six Elements, as well as through the recollection of impermanence, death, and so on, as well as the *suññatā* meditations. Here that refined self is destroyed or is seen through, and we experience *sunyata*.

Fourthly, the spiritual rebirth stage: This is achieved through the visualization and mantra recitation practice; abstract visualization, as we may call it, also helps; that is to say, the visualization of geometric forms and letters.

Sangharakshita believed that meditation was a key aspect of Buddhist practice and could help individuals to develop greater awareness, clarity of mind, and compassion toward themselves and others. He encouraged his students to experiment with different meditation techniques to find the one that worked best for them and to establish a regular meditation practice.

2.2. Steps of Mindfulness on Breath

The mindfulness of breathing meditation taught by Sangharakshita is a classic Buddhist meditation technique that involves focusing on the breath as it flows in and out of the body. The practice helps to develop concentration, awareness, and relaxation. Here is a step-by-step guide to practicing mindfulness of breathing as taught by Sangharakshita:

- Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit. You can sit cross-legged on a cushion or on a chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Close your eyes or gaze softly downward, and bring your attention to your breath. Notice the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the body.
- Take a few deep breaths to help relax your body and mind. Begin to count your breaths, starting with one on the inhalation and two on the exhalation. Count up to ten, then start again at one.
- If you become distracted, notice the distraction without judgment and gently bring your attention back to the breath and counting.
- As you continue to count, you may notice that your breath becomes more relaxed and natural. Allow this to happen without trying to control or change your breath.
- When you are ready to end the meditation, take a few deep breaths and slowly open your eyes.

Sangharakshita taught that mindfulness of breathing could be practiced at any time throughout the day, even for just a few moments. With regular practice, this meditation can help to develop greater mindfulness, calmness, and clarity of mind.

2.3. Mindfulness of Breath by Counting Method¹

2.3.1. Counting Breath

Master Sangharakshita stated that: In the mindfulness of breathing, counting the stages sometimes helps to visualize the figures from one to ten. The meditator can make the numbers different colors according to your taste or temperament. Meditators can imagine it is like having a block calendar with one date for each day, and you tear them off, one to ten, one by one. The meditator says, 'In out one' and sees this red-figure one flashing against a white background. Then, 'in out two,' the one disappears, and you see two. This can undoubtedly help improve concentration.

2.3.2. Continue Counting Number

The second stage is to continue to count the number of breaths, not after breathing out, but before breathing in. There may not be much difference between the first two stages, but the second stage quietly sharpens concentration from the beginning of each breath. So meditators are aware before something happens, not just after it happens.

¹ Sangharakshita, *The Principle and Practice of Buddhist Meditation*. Ledbury: Ibis Publications, 2012, p. 122-123.

2.3.3. *The Support of the Counting*

The third stage is for the mediator to abandon its counting support and move to a general and continuous awareness of the respiratory process and all associated sensations. Again, the meditator does not do any specific investigation, analysis, or anything about the breath but gently turns attention toward a more detailed investigation. As concentration increases, it becomes easier to maintain this commitment, and the overall experience of breathing becomes more and more enjoyable.

2.3.4. *Pay Attention to a Single Point*

In the fourth stage, the meditator focuses on one point² while breathing to increase concentration. The meditator should also focus on the subtle sensations of breathing in and out through the nostrils. Our attention here should be refined, quiet, very calm, and focused on maintaining constant contact with the ever-changing sensations of your breath. The practice concludes by re-expanding awareness to include the whole breath and body experience. Then slowly finish the meditation and open your eyes.

2.4. *Mindfulness of Loving Kindness (Metta bhāvana)*

Sangharakshita also emphasizes mindfulness of loving-kindness, also known as the Metta bhāvana practice, is a meditation technique that aims to cultivate positive emotions and develop a compassionate attitude toward oneself and others. It is a traditional Buddhist practice that involves systematically directing positive thoughts and feelings toward oneself and others. According to sangharakshita, the Metta bhāvana practice is typically done in five stages, each of which involves directing positive emotions towards specific groups of people. The first stage involves cultivating loving-kindness towards oneself, the second towards a loved one or someone for whom we have positive feelings, the third towards a neutral person, the fourth towards someone with difficulty, and the fifth towards all beings. They are generally interpreted as follows:

2.4.1. *Cultivating loving-kindness towards oneself*

In this stage, the practitioner directs positive emotions towards oneself by repeating phrases such as "May I be happy, may I be peaceful, may I be healthy, may I be free from suffering."³

2.4.2. *Cultivating loving-kindness toward a loved one*

In this stage, the practitioner directs positive emotions towards a loved one or someone for whom they have positive feelings. The phrases used maybe something like "May [name of loved one] be happy, may [name of loved one] be peaceful, may [name of loved one] be healthy, may [name of loved one] be free from suffering."⁴

2.4.3. *Cultivating loving-kindness toward a neutral person*

In this stage, the practitioner directs positive emotions toward a neutral person, such as a stranger or acquaintance. The phrases used may be similar to those used in the second stage.⁵

² Sangharashita(2012:137): Sangharakshita: "The reason for focusing the attention on the point where the in-and-out breath enters the body, and making that your object of concentration, rather than the in-and-out breath itself, is that it's a very fine point, just that sensation, so the concentration that you achieve at that stage is quite refined. In some traditions, one concentrates on the rise and fall of the abdomen, but that's a much larger object of concentration! The sensation at the tip of the nose made by the breath coming and going is a much finer point, so you achieve better concentration by concentrating on that. It's not so much the nose/mouth area; it is just that sensation at the tip of the nostrils made by the breath coming in and going out."

³ See detailed explanation at *The Principle and Practice of Buddhist Meditation* of Sangharakshita, 2012, p. 231-240.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 241-249.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 250-251.

2.4.4. Cultivating loving-kindness toward a difficult person

In this stage, the practitioner directs positive emotions towards someone with whom they have difficulty or conflict. This stage can be challenging, and the phrases used may require more effort and intention. For example, one may say "May [name of difficult person] be happy, may [name of difficult person] be peaceful, may [name of difficult person] be healthy, may [name of difficult person] be free from suffering."⁶

2.4.5. Cultivating loving-kindness toward all beings

In the final stage, the practitioner directs positive emotions towards all beings, without exception. The phrases used may be more general and inclusive, such as "May all beings be happy, may all beings be peaceful, may all beings be healthy, may all beings be free from suffering."⁷

Table: Summary Sangharakshita's A System of Meditation

| Stage | Awareness & Integration | Positive Emotion | Spiritual Death | Spiritual Rebirth |
|----------|--------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Practice | Mindfulness of Breathing | <i>mettabhavana</i> <i>karunabhavana</i> <i>muditabhavana</i> <i>upeksabhavana</i> | Recollection of the Six Elements Recollection of Impermanence Recollection of Death Contemplating Conditionality: the 24 nidana chain Reflection on <i>suññatā</i> | Visualisation & mantra recitation |

4. A Comparison of Meditation Technique Between Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita

| Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh | Sangharakshita |
|--|--|
| 1. Mindfulness of breathing Focus on breathing in the present moment and enjoy it instead of struggling to breathe, | 1.Mindfulness of breathing focusing on the breath, and bringing the mind into the present moment. |
| 2.Concentration Focus on objects, but don't require eye scanning | 2.Metta bhāvana Towards oneself and others by silently reciting phrases of well-wishing and generating positive emotions. |
| 3.Awareness of the body Focus on each part of body | 3.Visualization Visualizing particular images, symbols or figures in the mind's eye. |
| 4.Releasing Tension of the Body Note tension in different parts of our body | 4.Reflective Meditation Contemplation on a particular theme or subject, such as impermanence, non-self, or compassion. |
| 5.Walking Meditation Enjoy walking step by step, don't try to walk hard. | |

⁶ ibid. p. 258-276.⁷ ibid. p. 277- 291.

III. CONCLUSION

Zen Masters Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita are prominent Buddhist teachers who have developed their own meditation techniques. While both share the goal of cultivating mindfulness and developing inner peace, their approaches differ in some ways.

The meditation technique of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes mindfulness and being fully present at the moment. His meditation technique, mindful breathing, involves focusing on the breath to anchor oneself in the present moment and cultivate awareness. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh also teaches walking meditation, where practitioners focus on the sensations of each step and the surrounding environment.

On the other hand, the meditation technique of Sangharakshita emphasizes mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana, which combines mindfulness of the breath with the cultivation of loving-kindness or compassion towards oneself and others. In Sangharakshita's mindfulness of breathing technique, practitioners focus on the sensation of the breath moving in and out of the body while also noticing any thoughts, feelings, or sensations that arise without judgment. The metta bhavana practice involves cultivating positive emotions and wishing oneself and others well-being and happiness.

In summary, while both Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangharakshita emphasize mindfulness and present-moment awareness in their meditation techniques, they differ in the specific practices they teach. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh's mindful breathing and walking meditation focus primarily on the breath and the present moment. In contrast, Sangharakshita's mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana technique incorporates the cultivation of positive emotions and loving-kindness towards oneself and others.

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