

For this reflection paper, I have chosen to practice the Buddhist tradition of meditation. Merriam-Webster's definition of meditation is "to engage in mental exercise (such as concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness." (Meditate). The Buddha was a supporter of this meditation "which enables practitioners to identify, understand, and eliminate patterns of thought that perpetuate desire and suffering. In fact, it is sometimes said that the full implication of the Buddha's teaching cannot be understood without devoting oneself to meditative practice." (Brodd pg. 174). There are two disciplines of Buddhist meditation: shamatha, and vipassana. First shamatha meditation,

"...cultivates the ability to focus awareness upon a single object of concentration. This focal point is often the breath, but any object or sensation is appropriate, as it is concentration upon *something* that matters, not the nature of the thing itself. Focused awareness stabilizes the mind, making it less easily disturbed by the disruptive influences of thoughts and feelings." (Brodd pg. 175).

Next vipassana meditation,

"vipassana meditation, often called 'mindfulness meditation' or 'insight meditation', is awareness itself. Typically, the practitioner begins with a focus on the breath, which brings focused concentration and a stable mind. These make it possible to move beyond the thoughts, feelings, daydreams, and other concerns that normally occupy the attention of the mind...In doing so, the practitioner gains insight into the workings of compulsive and restless thought and the ability to move past the suffering they cause." (Brodd pg. 175).

For my purposes, I practiced shamatha meditation as I wish to attempt to settle my mind in order to become able to focus more on my relationship with God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says this about meditation: "Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain." (Catechism of the Catholic Church). I was able to combine shamatha meditation with prayer to help with the required attentiveness in order to achieve a stronger connection with God.

On day one, I decided to try to meditate using a Crucifix as the object of concentration. It was still difficult to completely quiet all my thoughts and concentrate only on the Crucifix. My mind wanted to wander to my stray thoughts I would have about events that were happening in my life. I spent about thirty minutes trying to focus on the Crucifix and towards the end my mind was somewhat clear, with the occasional stray thought every few minutes. During this time, I was also trying to contemplate on Jesus' crucifixion, as the Crucifix was my object of concentration. After I had finished I felt as if I had been meditating for much longer than the thirty minutes I had actually meditated and felt as if my mind was a little less troubled with my daily struggles.

On the second day, I decided to use a candle as my center of focus. I seemed to be able to get my mind to settle a little quicker this time but the intervals of stray thoughts seemed to stay the same. Every few minutes I would realize I was chasing a stray thought and have to refocus on the candle in front of me. At the end of the thirty minutes, I felt again as if it had been longer and my mind settled once again.

On the final day, I used a Rosary as a tactile and visual focus. I thought that using two senses would allow me to focus more than the previous days. Doing this did allow me to focus more but it seemed that the time it took to settle my mind was about the same. I did notice that the stray thoughts came a little less infrequently and I was able to refocus quicker than with a visual focus alone. By the end of the session, I did feel more grounded than the previous attempts as well. This time also seemed to last longer than the previous days.

In conclusion, I believe that meditation is a great tool to use to settle our mind in order to help focus on what God wants for our lives. I am now able to see how it would be very difficult to master and why Buddhists use it every day. I would recommend to others this practice and I believe I will continue to meditate often.

## References

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- Catechism of the Catholic Church - Expressions of prayer,  
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