

Paper Three: Why Meditate?

Version 0.1

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(Dated: October 29, 2019)

Keywords: neuroplasticity

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Target Audience

Vipassana for Hackers, Paper One: Curious Mechanics was written with the explicit intention of avoiding a discussion about specific outcomes or consequences of meditation in detail. The focus of that paper was only the internal mechanics of Vipassana meditation, to pique the interest of potential meditators who had heard of Vipassana elsewhere. Outcomes are discussed only so far as they assist the reader in understanding what is written earlier in the paper regarding the senses. *Paper Two: The Brain* goes further into the internal mechanics as they pertain to the hub of the nervous system. Here, outcomes are discussed as they pertain to neuroplasticity. Neither paper directly discusses why an individual might choose to try this particular technique of meditation.

As before, the “Hacker” of *Vipassana for Hackers* is not meant to identify computer programmers. Instead, it is meant as a label for a culture of curious and creative people who enjoy exploring, learning, and creating.

Paper Three: Why Meditate? is written for anyone who has ever asked themselves that very question or asked this question of their friends who meditate. It is for both those who are curious about the practice of Vipassana specifically and those who are curious about meditation in general. It is for people who have meditated in other traditions and are curious about the benefits of Vipassana. It is also for people who have never meditated in their entire lives. It is intended for anyone who keeps hearing about Vipassana meditation — in the media, in books, and from friends — and wants to learn what all the fuss is about.

The reader need not have read *Paper One* or *Paper Two*. In fact, it is the intention of this paper to be the most accessible of the series and readers with only a faint interest in the topic of meditation should start here.

Before we get to a discussion about why meditation is valuable, some basic understanding of what meditation is (and isn’t) is required.

The technique of Vipassana is based on a single underlying principle:

Every experience which emerges in the mind, whether a thought, emotion, or contact of the five senses, always surfaces with a corresponding sensation on the body.

It is important to understand this point as it underpins all other aspects of the technique of Vipassana. Someone who is learning Vipassana need not accept this principle as fact. Rather, a 10-day Vipassana course is a sort of laboratory where the principle can be tested and experienced for oneself.



Figure 1: The sense doors and bodily sensation. [1]

Vipassana Basics

The totality of human experience can be categorized according to the “sense doors” listed in Figure 1: The five external sense doors of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch are listed at the top. The internal sense door of

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“mind” is broken down into thought and emotion, second to the bottom. At the very bottom of the diagram is bodily sensation, the object of meditation in Vipassana.

Once these eight experiences are listed, there is no experience left undescribed. All human experience from the mundane (imagination, daydreaming, physical pleasures, physical discomforts, etc.) to the supramundane (out-of-body experiences, hallucinations, etc.) are subsets of these seven sense doors and their reflection in bodily sensation, the eighth.

Mapping all of sensory experience to these eight categories begs the question of attention, of awareness: Where does the meditator try to fasten her awareness? Where is awareness normally? For the average person, awareness jumps around across these eight categories. Even when one tries to focus on a difficult intellectual problem, the discomforts of back pain and hunger or the distraction of an irritating sound would draw attention away from thought, the desired object of attention. Vipassana meditation asks the meditator to use bodily sensation as a gateway to the other seven sense experiences. Rather than focusing on sound, focus on the sensation generated in the body by the ear sense door. Rather than focusing on a thought or emotion, focus on the sensation in the body generated by that thought or emotion. This is extremely difficult to do, which is why (for lay people, in most cases) a 10-day silent residential course [2] is necessary to learn the technique.

The Mundane and The Supramundane

Reasons for meditating will be broken down into two categories. *The Mundane* in this context refers not to the tedious but to the earthly, the material. Most people will begin meditating for reasons in the mundane field simply because most people have never experienced the supramundane. *The Supramundane* in this context refers not to spirituality or religion but experiences which transcend the material, physical world.

Because supramundane experiences tend to occur only in deep meditative states, the reasons for meditating listed will predominantly fall in the mundane category. Whether or not the meditator experiences supramundane states in deep meditation, these altered states of mind are never the goal of meditation. The goal of meditation is to change the meditator’s mental habits, to move away from unhealthy mental patterns which cause harmful behaviours toward healthy mental patterns which encourage productive behaviour. Obviously this change is only visible in the mundane world, outside of meditation.

Meditation vs. Naps

While staying at a friend’s house, I excused myself in the evening to meditate. He sincerely asked, “Is meditating for an hour really more valuable than using that time for a good nap?”

- posture
- sleep
- health (activation / motivation)
- ethics (activation / motivation)
- your children: a. knowing how to meditate, b. cross-legged posture
- emotion (i.e. anger)
- mundane sphere / productivity (21 lessons, sein-feld)
- reset frame of reference outside oneself, outside one’s own lifetime: “trees for god” and obvious karma (sidu/booga smoking)
- unlearning obsessive / repetitive thought, enhancing creativity
- controlling unbounded sexuality without repression
- clarity: in thought, work, planning
- clarification: “isn’t that what makes us human?” (emotions) — rather, what makes us animal
- Die Standing Up
- Time: Nat Friedman’s blog post?

[1] 5 Senses by Daniel Falk from the Noun Project <https://thenounproject.com/daniel2021/collection/human-body-senses/> Thought by Nociconist from the Noun Project <https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=thought&i=2025873> Heart by Rafael Garcia Motta from the Noun Project <https://>

thenounproject.com/search/?q=heart&i=807960 Body by Makarenko Andrey from the Noun Project <https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=body&i=789989> *The Noun Project*.

[2] Vipassana International Academy <https://www.dhamma.org> *Vipassana Meditation Website*