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## Munificence

- ▶ [Dāna \(Buddhism\)](#)

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## Mystic

- ▶ [Mysticism \(Buddhism\)](#)

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## Mystical Experience

- ▶ [Mysticism \(Buddhism\)](#)

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## Mysticism (Buddhism)

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## Synonyms

[Cessation](#); [Emptiness](#); [Enlightenment](#); [Esoteric](#); [Ineffable](#); [Meditation](#); [Mystic](#); [Mystical](#)

[experience](#); [Non-dualistic](#); [Occultism](#); [Philosophy](#); [Revelation](#); [Secret](#); [Spiritualism](#); [Yoga](#)

## Definition

### Mysticism

Practices and systems of thought within a doctrinal and ritual context aimed at the spiritual apprehension of knowledge remote to the intellect, gained only through a mystical experience and/or intuition. Mysticism is seen as an intimate and disciplined search for salvation, union, or liberation with the absolute or God. It is considered a direct experience of this absolute or God through learned techniques that are an uneasy fit into traditional notions of religious belief [1, 2].

## Locating Mysticism in Indian Buddhism

### Mysticism

At the core of all religion, mysticism can be found. It is derived from a documented vivid personal experience and is usually established in religions through a founder who had such an experience. As long as participants of a religion continue to regard and believe in a transcendent reality, a religion's longevity is maintained past their origins. This gives members a way to communicate these beliefs as a translation of these direct experiences [1, 6]. Because mysticism is commonly associated with ineffability, linguistic formulation tends to be seen as inexact and a mystic's experience to be indescribable. Thus, secrecy of the mind is commonly referred to. The multiplicity of uses, experiences, and interpretations makes a single definition of the term ineffectual. "A desire for unity with God" is seen as the familiar definition applied to the concept trying to incapsulate its meaning, but this is misleading because not all mystics across traditions would summarize their pursuit in this way, e.g., Buddhism has no God to become unified with. There is the denial of a "self" existing in Buddhism making a unification between self and God (unio mystica) impossible and the term mysticism an anachronism [10]. To assist in understanding the

full scope of mysticism, scholars have tried to broaden some characteristics that run throughout. Beyond a unification of self with the One or God, it involves a uniting of vision and perception directly through objects with the One. Another characteristic concerns the development of an inner life in relation to the One, a striving for an ultimate truth of reality and the universe. It also offers the religious principle of the sacred, feelings of contentment, and euphoria which can be categorized under inexpressible or inarticulable feelings [5].

### Mystical Experience

In order to better understand the definition of mysticism, the mystical experience needs to be described. Mystical experiences are defined and contextualized in reflection of the doctrine practiced. As described above, the general activity of mystical experiences is the apprehension of a transcendent realm that is beyond or within the self. It is difficult to have a criterion that scholars, mystics, and practitioners of religion can agree to [3]. Examples of trying to establish a distinguishing criterion can be found in the work of R.C. Zaehner and Paul Griffiths. Zaehner and Griffiths each describe three types of the mystical experience, where if the presence of one of these markers is detected, it could be said to be a mystical experience. For R.C. Zaehner, it is the panenhenic, monistic, and theistic experience. The panenhenic experience puts the focus not on the unity with an inner self but about creating a comprehensive feeling of connection and accordance with the physical world around. The monistic represents the sublimation of space and time as an undifferentiated transcending experience. Lastly, theistic experience is defined as a duality within the experience of the subject that is having the experience and the experience itself [3, 12]. Griffiths' three types are hinged upon the state of consciousness: pure, unmediated, and nondualistic. A pure consciousness event has no phenomenological conditions, is not shaped by the surrounding culture or concepts, and may be both unmediated and nondualistic. In the unmediated, the emphasis is on the condition of separation from context and the experience, reducing

outside influence, whereas the nondualistic is founded on the inseparable subject from the object of experience. Under Griffiths attributes, pure, unmediated, and nondualistic are concomitant and can help make up the mystical experience through various configurations of the three [9].

### Mysticism in Buddhism

There is no corpus of mystical texts in Indian Buddhism or Buddhism in general for that matter. Mysticism tends to be seen not as a negligible or heretical aspect but as a thing that permeates its doctrine and practice since early Buddhism and its various adaptations throughout the world. It is difficult to maintain a singular definition as both relevant and all encompassing regarding both mysticism and the mystical experience. There is continued debate and scholarly work done on the linguistic, conceptual, and meaning of mysticism in the area of study of world religions. The etymological foundation of mysticism gives little clarity to the term's enduring ambiguous definition, experience, and practice [1, 6].

There is much debate whether Buddhism is inherently mystical or not. The concern being that if mysticism penetrates its teachings, the Buddha's sacred biography and related practice, how could it be considered mystical. Mysticism in this sense can be defined as a form of religious life originating in mystical experiences with the struggle of linguistically trying to interpret them. The practice of Buddhism is initiated through doctrinal teachings as a way to build upon what could be described as mystical experiences. If Buddhism is considered to be based in pure mysticism, then these mystical events are given little translation from their origin of experience into a doctrinal foundation. This creates uncertainty regarding the importance of a written doctrine when encountering mystical experiences [9].

There is no precise nature or equivalent form in human experience for these mystical experiences. It is the mythological concept of nirvana that expresses the intention of Buddhism and the penetration of mysticism in its doctrines. There are no absolute interpretations given, and any explanations only point toward the event or knowledge of mysticism which is left being deciphered through

intuition. Experience is given precedent over concept or theory and leaves faith as the principal element [4].

### Context for Mysticism

Parallel to the debate over Buddhism being essentially mystical, there are scholars that see early Buddhism as a philosophically minded position of disconcertion practicing a discipline of enlightenment. In time, this opposition and refusal became debased delivering Buddhism as a popular religion. Another viewpoint is that Buddhism was originally a popular religious movement following the Buddha's writings while a monastic elite diverted, transforming it into an ascetic practice. A third group states that in the earliest phase of the known history of Buddhism, it included both an ascetic and commoner ingredient while maintaining a confluence of philosophy and popular ideas [6, 7].

It has been difficult to estimate the place of mysticism in the present. The syncretistic practice of Buddhism and the adaption of various cultures have left the Buddhist tradition as being more locally self-defined. The process of acculturation began in the sixth century in India and continues to create distinct cultural forms of Buddhism. Symbols and specific rituals mark these practices in the cultures of China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. In India, royal and popular support in the northeast under the Pala dynasty from the eighth to the twelfth century gave Buddhism some prosperity but faced aggressive criticism [2].

### Experiences of Mysticism in Buddhism

From its beginning, the Buddhist tradition has incorporated a strain of mystical experiencing that has influenced its philosophy. There is no way of knowing exactly what the Buddha actually experienced but the earliest reports communicate a mystical experience that has been interpreted as a state of cessation and as an experience of emptiness. These are only two experiences of a multitude of interpretations and examples of the Buddha's teachings, practice of meditation, and form of mysticism in Buddhism.

### The Experience of Emptiness

Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika* offers the state of emptiness to describe the experience and the path to enlightenment in Buddhism. Giving Buddhism a mystical direction from its origins, faced with its negative terms – nonattainment, nonassertion, and nonreliance. Typically, the paths to emptiness vary; through the practice of confrontational paradoxical thoughts in instruction or as in Yogacara Buddhism, thoughts are seen as free of their subject and their subject is not dependent on these thoughts as objects. Rather than logic or metaphysics, emptiness is pursued in a factual attainment in Yogacara [1, 6].

Emptiness is more comparable to forgetting, a lack of response to the external world. In order to allow the mind to forget, mystics use meditation techniques to prime the mind. Mystics have revealed that forgetting embraces the forgetting of specific religious tradition. This leaves a cross-cultural phenomenon where the individual experience creates no distinction between subject and object. This is considered a pure consciousness event, where the content of this might contain characteristics of specific traditions, but the overall structure is inclusive.

### State of Cessation

Cessation is considered as an important element of nirvana. The state of cessation in Buddhism relates to the ending of thoughts and feeling, not an ending to vital organic functions such as organs or heat. It is usually associated with being in a trance, where sense perception and the formation of concepts have ceased. Some scholars see cessation not defined as a pure consciousness event like the experience of emptiness because it is assumed that the subject is considered to be in a "mindless" state, while others challenge this notion because it would be difficult to explain a subject's resuscitation from this condition where all mental activity has ended.

In Mahayana, this debate was addressed with the concept of "dlaya- vijfidna." Where when a person is experiencing a state of cessation, his or her consciousness, vijfidna, does not escape the body because dlayavijfidna (presence) remains.

It is difficult to decipher whether this is in direct relationship to an actual experience or is a theory. The early Mahayana was affected by mystical experience and saw its role as a component of wisdom that rises above language and ordinary variety of thought.

This experience of cessation tends to be described as ineffable where the mental representations are indescribable by the subject. If a person is free from mental activity, points of view, and concepts; there is a loss of perceived diverse forms since they have vanished with the subject's perception. Consciousness being empty of mental representations does not mean the subject is unconscious. In early Buddhism, practitioners had difficulty communicating these experiences linguistically. The principal objective of early Buddhism being this mystical experience of cessation, where a specific quality is uncertain, is closely tied to what came to be known as nirvana. The element of cessation became a fundamental part of nirvana though many writings stress an intellectual aspect which came to be the presiding characteristic [8, 10].

### Nirvana as Enlightenment and a Form of Mysticism

Nirvana is believed to be an enlightened view of the world. It is considered an ultimate reality and as a permanent state which is reached by an ineffable mystical experience where language and thinking is transcended. Through various interpretations of the experience, a meaning can be formed allowing a reception of a new understanding of a person's being-in-the-world [9].

By intuition, nirvana is to be understood; the doctrine and its ultimate reality are conceived as the mystical trend experienced in Buddhism [11]. Those that adopted doctrines (e.g., Sthiramati and Nagarjuna) in the history of Buddhism that this form of mysticism resides, believe that the ultimate

truth of the universe and of the Buddha cannot be known through the intellect but through unrecognized knowledge inherent within the truth itself. It is along the bodhisattva's path to Buddhahood that this knowledge is attained and handed down by the Buddha in the sutras. The sutras do not dictate the way but situate themselves as a preparation or guide to such revelations [8].

## Cross-References

► [God \(Buddhism\)](#)

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