

which buddhist personality type are you?

Greedy, Aversive, or Deluded? Find out with this guide—and quiz!— from Amita Schmidt.

"You must be a Deluded type," said my retreat dishwashing partner. "I can tell by the way you've loaded the dish drainer."

I glanced at my dish drainer with its skewed plates, a glass perched on top of a pot, and serving spoons stuck at odd angles. It looked like a circus balancing act. Next to it was the dish drainer he had stacked before me. His dishes were meticulously in line from smallest to largest, glasses were in a particular place and order, and everything looked as if it could be hermetically sealed in plastic and sent as a compact UPS package.

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“And what type are you?” I asked, suspecting I already knew.

“Aversive.”

We weren't in the midst of some new dishwashing mindfulness practice. We were meditation students talking about the Buddhist personality types, a 1,600-year-old system of typology set forth in the *Visuddhimagga*, or “The Path of Purification,” which summarizes and interprets the teachings in the Pali canon. One of the principal noncanonical works, the *Visuddhimagga* was composed eight centuries after the Buddha's death and has been attributed to Buddhaghosa, the great fifth-century Theravada commentator. The discussion of

Buddhist personality types arises in the chapter on choosing a meditation object on which to focus during concentration practice; the types are described as part of Buddhaghosa's commentary on the canonical text that explains that a teacher should give instructions that “suit the temperament” of the student.

The *Visuddhimagga* offers descriptions of six personality temperaments: three unwholesome types and three wholesome types. The text suggests that the unwholesome and wholesome types “parallel” each other. The modern-day application of the personality-type system focuses primarily on the three unwholesome types and pairs them with their positive attributes. The three



buddhist personality quiz

Answer these 13 Questions to discover your Buddhist personality type.

01 When you go to a friend's house for the first time, what is the first thing you notice? (A) The handsome Sub-Zero fridge you'd love to have in your own kitchen; (B) The cluttered living room that would be much more welcoming if she got rid of a few chairs and rearranged the rest; (C) You don't notice much, and when you go home you can't remember a single piece of furniture.

02 When you go to the beach, what is the first thing you say? (A) “The water looks perfect”; (B) “Look at all the seaweed. There's no way I'm going in the water”; (C) “I can't believe I forgot my towel again.”

03 In the morning: (A) You like getting up early because it's a great time to get things done; (B) You get up grumbling, with reluctance (another day already!?) and a sense of obligation; (C) You have a Ph.D. in sleeping late, and when you do get up, you must contend with brain fog for several hours.

04 After watching a movie with your partner, you are mostly likely to comment: (A) “I love seeing movies by that

director. Let's get another one when we return this”; (B) “I can't believe how badly they butchered the story from the book. From now on it's only foreign films for me”; (C) “Why were they shooting at that one guy?”

05 You consider shopping: (A) A sport, and you're in the major leagues; (B) A necessary evil. You go in, get what you need, and get out again before someone pisses you off and you have to kill them; (C) A nightmare. With twenty brands of cereal on the shelves, how are you supposed to pick one? And let's not even talk about clothes shopping...

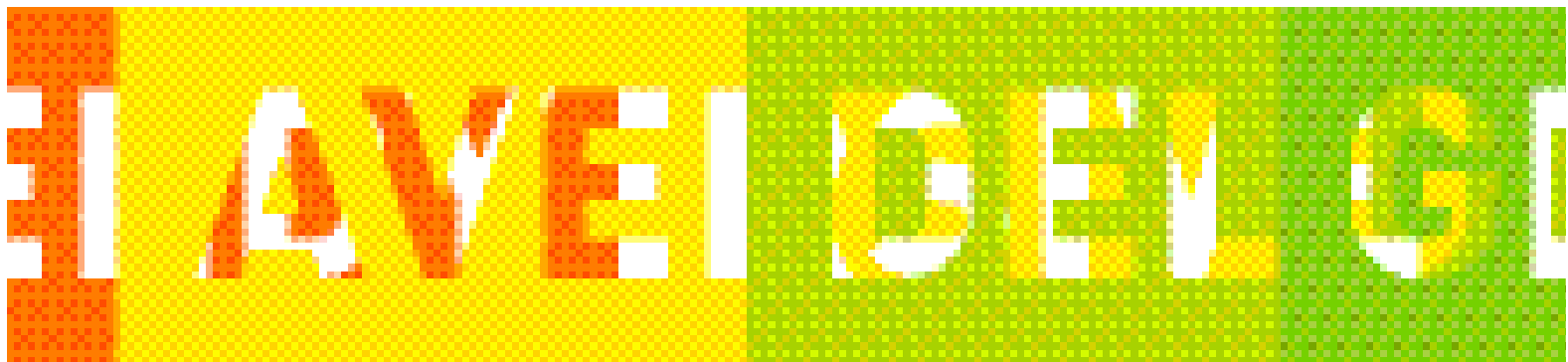
06 What do you have in your home? (A) Imported chocolate, an extensive DVD collection, and some fine art; (B) Extra blankets (the heat is so low sometimes guests complain), closet and office organizers, emergency flashlights; (C) A hodgepodge of furniture and small piles of papers and projects that you're going to get to one of these days.

07 In school, you were usually: (A) Chatting with your friends; (B) Correcting the teacher; (C) Doodling or daydreaming.

types of Buddhist personalities, paired with their positive tendencies, are Greed/Faith, Aversive/Discerning Wisdom, and Deluded/Speculative. The Greed/Faith personality type is characterized by craving and optimism, the Aversive/Discerning type by criticism and clarity, and the Deluded/Speculative type by doubt and equanimity. Each type has its neurotic tendencies and its awakened tendencies, and the spiritual task is to learn how to strengthen the awakened aspects. (See page 78 for descriptions of the spiritual tasks for each personality type.)

Buddhaghosa suggests that you can know your type by observing such basic things as your posture,

eating habits, actions, and moods. For example, the posture of the greedy temperament is confident and graceful, the aversive temperament is rigid, and the deluded temperament is slipshod. If all three were on a dance floor, the greedy type would float with ease, the aversive temperament would hold his partner stiffly, and a deluded personality type would have two left feet. The greedy temperament likes rich sweet food, eats unhurriedly savoring the various tastes, and enjoys gourmet treats. The aversive temperament likes sour tastes, eats hurriedly, and is critical of their food. The deluded temperament has no settled choice of foods. The *Visuddhimagga* continues



08 At dinnertime, you think: (A) “Wow, this looks great! I’ll have one of everything.” (B) “Uh, is it dairy-free, wheat-free, soy-free, and organic?” (C) “Dinner, already? Nice.”

09 As a kid, your nickname could have been: (A) Sparky; (B) Eeyore; (C) Space Cadet.

10 When you’re being honest with yourself, you’ll admit that you’re (A) Grandiose; (B) Obsessive compulsive; (C) Clueless.

11 When things aren’t going your way, your first thought is: (A) “No worries, it will improve soon”; (B) “It’s someone else’s fault, and I should help them see the error of their ways”; (C) “Hmm, I wonder if I did something wrong?”

12 When you are collaborating on a project, you mainly: (A) Have faith everything will work out; (B) Get concerned about the details being overlooked by your team members; (C) Act in a supportive role, letting others lead.

13 Your opinion of this Buddhist personality quiz is: (A) It was fun. I wish it had more questions; (B) Totally unscientific. *Tricycle* is turning into a Buddhist *Cosmopolitan*; (C) Seemed okay, but I wasn’t sure about my answers to some of the questions.

ANSWER KEY: If most of your answers were A, you fall into the Greed/Faith category. You probably think of yourself as sensual or passionate rather than “greedy.” If most of your answers were B, you fall into the Aversive/Discerning Wisdom category. Don’t despair; it’s said that you will reach enlightenment the soonest (because of the wisdom that will come of all your suffering). If most of your answers were C, you fall into the Deluded/Speculative category. You will doubt that this is the correct type for you and will believe you are probably something else.

You can also use this quiz to determine your subtype. See page 79 to learn more about subtypes.

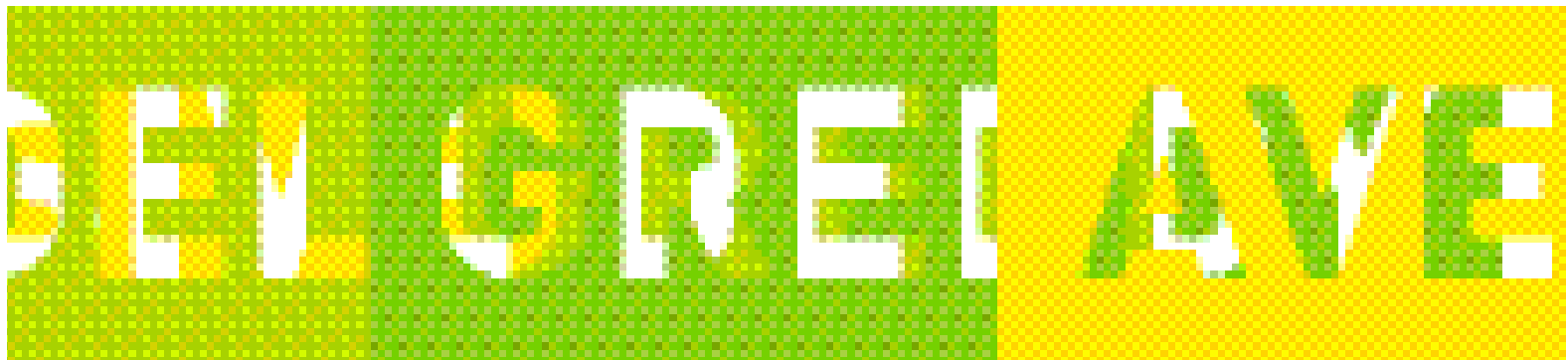
spiritual tasks: what's yours?

Each type has a spiritual task to accomplish. The spiritual task of the greedy type is to transform the desire for sense objects into a desire to know the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Greedy types need to balance their optimism with an awareness of suffering. Practices that can help the greedy type include: contemplation of old age, sickness, death, and impermanence, meditation on the 32 parts of the body; generosity; renunciation; noticing the ending of experiences; putting oneself in uncomfortable, unpleasant situations (in order to become disenchanted with sense pleasures); slowing down; and taking the Three Refuges.

The spiritual task of the aversive type is to transform the critical mind through wisdom and insight. Aversive types

need to learn to relax, question their beliefs about being “right,” and notice joy in addition to suffering. Practices for the aversive type are: lovingkindness, compassion, mindfulness of mind, humor, faith, patience, open awareness, and putting oneself in pleasant surroundings in order to soften the heart and connect with life.

The spiritual task of the deluded type is to transform spaciousness into a state of rooted equanimity. Deluded types need to learn how to reel in their minds. Practices useful for a deluded type include: noting (labeling); mindfulness of the hindrance of doubt; body awareness; somatic experiencing; qigong or yoga; precision; mindfulness of the earth element, and putting oneself in safe and pleasant surroundings to prevent dissociation.



with numerous references to the temperaments in examples of how a monk wears his robes, sweeps the floor, and makes his bed. In addition to these examples from the text, more contemporary questions can be asked to uncover your personality type. (To see which description fits you most consistently, take the quiz on page 76.)

Although there can be a natural tendency to use this, or any typology system, to judge or stereotype, the system was originally intended as a skillful means to support awakening. The actual word used in the *Visuddhimagga*, *cariya*, is closer to “temperament” than “type.” The Pali word comes from the verbal root *car*, “to walk,” which can (as here) refer to a way of acting. Since *cariya* is how you habitually behave, rather than who you “are,” the temperament system is most effective as a tool to hone the practice of mindfulness of mind and behavior. Rec-

ognizing the patterns associated with your temperament can help you release your habitual reactions and bring greater awareness and balance.

Even though it can be tempting to predict the type of a close friend or coworker, it's best to concentrate only on your own temperament. It's also important to take care with yourself and not use the system to justify further self-loathing. I've heard sangha members say, “I'm hopelessly aversive,” or “I can't know anything, I'm just deluded.” Instead of defining yourself critically, use your type to focus on specific behaviors that can bring greater mindfulness, such as “This is an aversive thought pattern” or “That was an example of being lost in delusion.” If you apply the personality types with curiosity to your own tendencies, you can develop an attitude of affectionate awareness in situations that would normally be irritating or overwhelming. When my retreat partner and I

fitting into more than one category

If you feel that you fit in more than one category, this may be the influence of a subtype personality. Essentially, all three types are operating in each of us, to varying degrees, in each moment. However, in most situations, you will have a temperament that tends to dominate (your primary type) and a temperament that is a strong runner-up (your subtype). Sometimes meditators will playfully compare the type-subtype system to astrological signs (“I’m Aversion with Greed rising”).

You can use the quiz on page 76 to determine your secondary type. Go back over the questions again and see if there is a second answer, or runner-up, which also fits you, but you didn’t pick it the first time because it wasn’t quite as prevalent. Add up these answers and see which type they fall into. It’s occasionally possible to be a perfect balance of all three types (we have all types operating at every moment), but gen-

erally you’ll find that two types will weigh more heavily in your character.

A common combination is Aversion primary/Greed secondary. An example of this type is a meditation student who is the chief financial officer in an international company. She is responsible for the details in her accounting practice, gets easily irritated with her coworkers, and often feels a low level of anger. A secondary issue for her is greed. She craves nice things, such as an \$800 espresso maker, and she finds herself shopping on the internet for no apparent reason.

Another common pair is Delusion primary/Aversion secondary. An example of this type is an easygoing, compassionate young man who is a bit of a loner, forgets things, and isn’t good with directions. However, his vagueness is tempered with an aversive clarity. He is an excellent copy editor who remembers the phone numbers and birthdates of all his clients, and he is painstakingly studying classical Tibetan.

were washing the dishes we were able to see how our personality types played out in different styles; therefore we didn’t have to blame each other or create a right or wrong way of doing the job.

Knowing your own type and those of others around you can come in handy in all sorts of situations, from traveling to matchmaking. The appreciation of greedy types for the material world makes them excellent hosts. I always enjoy visiting my friends in New Hampshire with greedy temperaments. They give me a room with a fantastic view in their million-dollar house, offer me lavish foods, and take me to concerts and poetry readings. Aversive types’ penchant for the facts make them excellent reference guides and teachers. You can bet that aversive types don’t get their information from Google like the rest of us. When I want the facts, I call a sangha member in

New Mexico who can answer knowledgeably about anything from esoteric Pali canon questions to the way to construct a solar dryer. Deluded types’ easygoing nature makes them good guests and traveling companions. A greedy-type dharma teacher told me that he enjoys traveling with a deluded colleague because “she doesn’t care about her sleeping accommodations or her airplane seat. This means I can have the best one without an argument!”

The typology system is presented in generalities here, so you’ll have to tailor it to your personal experience. If you bring awareness playfully to your particular temperament, you will strengthen your mindfulness practice. When applied with wisdom and compassion, the discovery of your type provides a useful way to see through the illusion of self and find freedom. ▼