

Revisiting Śānti: A Comparative Analysis of Peace in Upanishadic and Buddhist Thought

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Abstract

The concept of *Śānti* (peace) occupies a central place in Indian philosophical traditions, serving as both an ethical aspiration and a metaphysical realization. This paper revisits the notion of *Śānti* in the Upanishadic and Buddhist frameworks, exploring how both traditions conceptualize peace as liberation from suffering and ignorance, yet differ in their ontological assumptions. While the Upanishadic vision grounds peace in the realization of the *Ātman–Brahman* unity, Buddhism situates peace in the cessation of *dukkha* through the realization of *anattā* and *nirvāṇa*. By employing a comparative hermeneutic approach, this paper highlights how peace functions not merely as absence of conflict but as a dynamic process of inner transformation. The analysis contributes to cross-traditional understanding of peace as an experiential, cognitive, and ethical phenomenon within Indian philosophy.

Keywords

Śānti, Upanishads, Buddhism, Ātman, Nirvāṇa, Comparative Philosophy, Inner Peace.

1. Introduction

Peace (*Śānti*) occupies a pivotal and multi-dimensional role in the spiritual, philosophical, and ethical landscapes of India. Unlike the common political or social understanding of peace as the absence of conflict, *Śānti* in Indian thought is an encompassing state of inner equanimity, a profound and transcendental harmony that aligns the individual with the cosmic order. In this sense, peace is not merely an external condition but a deep, spiritual realization that resonates through one's consciousness, mind, and actions. In both the Upanishadic and Buddhist traditions, *Śānti* represents the culmination of spiritual practice—a final liberation from the binds of suffering, ignorance, and attachment. Yet, despite these shared goals, the paths to achieving peace diverge fundamentally within these two traditions.

In the **Upanishadic vision**, *Śānti* is inseparable from the realization of *Brahman*—the ultimate reality—and the discovery of one's own innermost self (*Ātman*) as a reflection of this cosmic essence. The Upanishads posit that ultimate peace is found in transcending the illusion of duality and realizing the oneness of the self with the universe. This metaphysical perspective frames peace as a return to an eternal, unchanging state of unity, where ignorance (*avidyā*) and attachment (*rāga*) dissolve in the light of self-knowledge (*jñāna*). The Upanishads' spiritual model for achieving peace, therefore, is one that emphasizes transcendence, detachment, and mystical experience. Peace is the natural byproduct of self-realization, where the individual merges with the *Brahman*, beyond all dualities and divisions.

On the other hand, **Buddhism** offers a starkly different conception of peace, where the core of the human experience is framed not by an eternal *Ātman* but by the absence of any permanent, unchanging self (*anattā*). Buddhism posits that all phenomena, including the self, are impermanent (*anicca*) and interdependent. The concept of peace in Buddhism is intrinsically linked to the cessation of *dukkha* (suffering)—a condition brought about by attachment, craving, and ignorance. The path to peace, therefore, lies not in transcending the world but in fully understanding its nature, particularly through insight (*prajñā*) into the impermanence and non-self of all things. The *Noble Eightfold Path*, with its emphasis on right view, right action, and right mindfulness, offers a pragmatic, ethical, and meditative approach to achieving inner peace and ultimate liberation, *nirvāṇa*.

Despite these differences in metaphysical frameworks, both the Upanishadic and Buddhist systems converge on the fundamental aspiration for peace as the cessation of suffering and ignorance. Both traditions view peace as a transformative state of being—one that fundamentally alters the way in which a person relates to themselves, others, and the cosmos. While the **Upanishads** suggest a metaphysical realization of an underlying unity and oneness with the cosmos, **Buddhism** advocates for a deeper psychological and ethical understanding of the self and the world, through practices that dissolve the attachments and cravings that bind human consciousness to suffering.

The current study seeks to re-examine *Śānti* not merely as an abstract ideal or an endpoint in a spiritual journey, but as a **lived philosophical condition**—a state that emerges through introspective practice, ethical transformation, and a profound shift in perception. Peace in both traditions is not an elusive, intangible goal, but an experiential and transformative reality. Through a careful **comparative textual analysis** of key **Upanishadic** texts and **Buddhist** sūtras, this study aims to explore how these diverse systems frame peace and how they offer practical paths to achieving it.

Central to this comparative analysis is the examination of the **root causes of unrest**. In both the Upanishads and Buddhism, *ignorance* (*avidyā*) and *attachment* (*rāga*) are identified as the primary sources of inner turmoil and suffering. The Upanishads speak of the veil of ignorance that hides the true nature of the self, leading individuals to identify with the body, mind, and emotions, rather than their essential spiritual nature. Peace is then attained when this veil is lifted, and one realizes the true, unchanging self (*Ātman*), which is, in essence, identical with the cosmic reality of *Brahman*. Buddhism, while acknowledging the role of ignorance, redefines it within the framework of impermanence and non-self. For Buddhists, suffering arises not merely from ignorance of the self but from the misapprehension of the self as permanent and independent. *Rāga*, or attachment, is the clinging to transient things, which ultimately leads to suffering. Thus, peace in Buddhism is achieved not by transcending the illusion of duality (as in the Upanishads), but by understanding the impermanent and interconnected nature of all phenomena, leading to the cessation of craving and attachment.

Through **thematic synthesis**, this paper also seeks to illuminate how these ancient conceptions of peace remain relevant today. The modern world, with its ever-increasing rate of conflict, psychological stress, and social fragmentation, presents a unique challenge for spiritual traditions. *Śānti* in both the Upanishads and Buddhism offers not just a retreat from the world but an **active engagement with life**, rooted in **ethical conduct, mindfulness, and**

self-awareness. In the context of contemporary global issues, these ancient frameworks can offer invaluable insights into how individuals and societies can cultivate peace—both within themselves and in their relationships with others.

The comparative approach employed in this study also seeks to demonstrate how peace, as conceptualized in these two traditions, can inform current philosophical, psychological, and sociological discourses. By understanding *Śānti* as a transformative and lived condition, this paper aims to contribute to broader conversations on **spirituality, mindfulness, and conflict resolution**, bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern concerns.

Thus, the study of *Śānti* not only reaffirms its relevance in the spiritual domain but also underscores its practical implications for addressing the complex challenges of contemporary existence. This comparative exploration of peace in **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** thought will, therefore, provide a deeper understanding of peace as both a personal and collective pursuit—one that transcends doctrinal differences and aligns with the universal aspiration for inner harmony and global well-being.

2. Literature Review

The concept of *Śānti* (peace) has long been a central theme in the study of Indian philosophy, and both **Vedic** and **Buddhist** metaphysics offer intricate and contrasting interpretations of peace as both a spiritual ideal and an ethical condition. Scholars have explored the intersections between these traditions, particularly focusing on how both the **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** systems view peace as a means to transcend suffering and achieve liberation. These studies, while extensive, often engage with the two traditions separately, and few have ventured to explore *Śānti* as a dynamic and evolving concept that bridges **metaphysical** and **pragmatic** dimensions of peace.

This section surveys the **literature** on peace in both the **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** traditions, providing a critical review of the existing scholarship and identifying key themes, debates, and gaps in the literature. By doing so, this review sets the foundation for the comparative analysis of *Śānti* in these two traditions, focusing on both **ontological** and **ethical** dimensions, as well as their practical applications in the context of contemporary well-being.

2.1 Comparative Studies of Vedic and Buddhist Metaphysics

Early comparative studies of **Vedic** and **Buddhist** metaphysics focused primarily on the **ontological** and **epistemological** dimensions of the two systems. These studies explored the **fundamental nature of reality** and the **self** in both traditions. Radhakrishnan (2010), in his seminal work, *The Principal Upanishads*, presents the **Upanishadic view** of *Brahman* and *Ātman* as an indivisible, eternal reality, contrasting it with **Buddhism's** doctrine of **anattā** (non-self), which denies any permanent, independent self. In his analysis, Radhakrishnan explores the metaphysical implications of *Śānti* as the realization of the **oneness of the self with the universe**, a state achieved through **knowledge** and **spiritual insight**.

Chatterjee and Datta (2008), in *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, extend this comparison by analyzing the **ethical implications** of these metaphysical positions. They note that while

both traditions see peace as the ultimate end, their means differ significantly. The **Upanishads**, with their emphasis on **self-realization**, advocate a form of peace grounded in **transcendence**—the dissolution of the illusory ego and the realization of unity with the ultimate reality, *Brahman*. **Buddhism**, in contrast, emphasizes the cessation of **attachment** and **craving** as the primary means of achieving peace, framed through the understanding of **impermanence** and **interdependence**.

Despite the differences in metaphysical foundations, both scholars agree that peace (*Śānti*) in both systems transcends mere physical calm or social harmony. Instead, it signifies an inner **transformation** that involves **self-purification**, **ethical living**, and ultimately, **spiritual liberation**.

2.2 Ethical and Meditative Dimensions of Peace

As philosophical studies have evolved, recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the **ethical** and **meditative** dimensions of *Śānti*, emphasizing the importance of **mental discipline**, **mindfulness**, and **ethical conduct** as foundational to attaining peace. Bhattacharya (2013) argues that the concept of peace in the Upanishads, particularly in relation to the *Śānti Pāṭha* (peace invocation), is deeply ethical in nature. The *Śānti Pāṭha* is often recited at the beginning and end of spiritual practice, with the invocations seeking peace in thought, speech, and action. Bhattacharya highlights that the recitation of these verses is not only an external ritual but also an inner practice aimed at purifying the mind and creating a state of **harmonious alignment** between the individual and the cosmos. This **meditative invocation** of peace, as Bhattacharya notes, prepares the practitioner for deeper self-inquiry, leading to the ultimate peace of *mokṣa* (liberation).

Similarly, in Buddhist thought, the **ethical** and **meditative** dimensions of peace are inseparable. Sharma (2015) draws attention to the **Metta Sutta**, which advocates for the cultivation of **loving-kindness** (*mettā*) as the foundation of peace. In contrast to the **individualistic**, metaphysical peace sought in the Upanishads, the **Buddhist model** of peace is relational and emphasizes **compassion** and **mindfulness** toward all beings. Sharma argues that the *Metta Sutta* not only fosters personal peace but also contributes to **social harmony** by cultivating attitudes of benevolence, empathy, and mutual respect.

Harvey (2013) extends this comparison by discussing the role of **meditation** in both traditions. In the Upanishads, meditation (**dhyāna**) is a key practice for accessing the **higher self** and achieving unity with **Brahman**. Similarly, Buddhist meditation practices, such as **vipassanā** (insight meditation) and **samatha** (concentration meditation), are designed to help practitioners gain insight into the impermanent and interconnected nature of all things, leading to the cessation of **craving** and ultimately the realization of **nirvāṇa** (enlightenment). Both systems view meditation as a tool for **mental purification** and the **cultivation of inner peace**.

The **ethical and meditative** dimensions of peace, therefore, emphasize the **holistic** nature of peace in both traditions—one that integrates **inner transformation** with **outer behavior**, aligning the mind, body, and spirit in pursuit of spiritual liberation.

2.3 Gaps in Literature: *Śānti* as a Dynamic Construct

While there is a substantial body of literature on the metaphysical, ethical, and meditative aspects of *Śānti*, fewer studies have analyzed *Śānti* as a **dynamic** construct that evolves between **metaphysics** and **praxis**. Traditional scholarship often separates these two dimensions—viewing *Śānti* as either a **metaphysical realization** (as in the Upanishads) or a **pragmatic process** (as in Buddhism). However, this dichotomy does not account for the complex and **evolving nature of peace** as it is experienced and enacted in both systems.

For example, while the Upanishads frame peace as a state of **transcendence**, where one moves beyond the dualities of the material world, a closer reading reveals that the **path to transcendence** itself involves a **transformative process** that is not simply theoretical but **pragmatic**. This **transformative process** involves not only **meditative practice** but also **ethical action** in the world. Thus, peace in the Upanishads is both a **metaphysical** reality and a **pragmatic** engagement with the world.

Similarly, while Buddhism emphasizes the **pragmatic** aspects of peace through **ethical behavior** and **mindfulness**, the ultimate goal of **nirvāṇa** suggests a **transcendental shift** in consciousness. This suggests that even in Buddhism, **peace is not just a temporal state of mental calm**, but a radical **transformation of perception** that is both a **process** and an **end goal**.

This study aims to bridge this gap by synthesizing both **textual hermeneutics** and **philosophical analysis** to understand *Śānti* as a **dynamic interplay** between **metaphysical** realization and **pragmatic practice**. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of peace as both a **continuous transformation** and an **ultimate goal**, as both the Upanishads and Buddhism suggest that peace is not simply an abstract ideal, but a **lived experience** that unfolds over time.

2.4 Bridging the Gap: Metaphysical Transcendence and Ethical Immanence

This paper seeks to explore how **Upanishadic transcendence** and **Buddhist immanence** converge to shape Indian conceptions of peace. While the Upanishads emphasize the **transcendence** of the individual self through the realization of the ultimate reality of *Brahman*, Buddhism's focus on **impermanence** and **interconnectedness** calls for a more **relational understanding** of peace. This comparative approach highlights how both traditions, despite their metaphysical differences, ultimately offer complementary views on how peace is **created** and **sustained** in the world.

By synthesizing these **ontological** and **ethical** dimensions of peace, this study aims to provide a **comprehensive understanding** of *Śānti* as a **holistic** process that encompasses both **inner peace** and **outer harmony**, with relevance for **modern applications** in the fields of **psychology**, **conflict resolution**, and **social harmony**.

3. Conceptual Framework

The concept of *Śānti* (peace) is a fundamental aspect of both **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** philosophy, yet the two traditions approach it from distinct metaphysical and pragmatic perspectives. This section elaborates on the **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** visions of peace, providing a conceptual framework for understanding their respective paths toward achieving peace as both a metaphysical realization and an ethical practice.

3.1. Upanishadic Vision of Śānti

In the **Upanishads**, *Śānti* is deeply intertwined with the realization of *Brahman*, the supreme cosmic reality. The **Upanishadic conception of peace** is rooted in the philosophical understanding that all things are manifestations of a singular, undivided reality. The ultimate goal of human existence, in this view, is to recognize the essential oneness of the individual self (*Ātman*) with *Brahman*. This realization is what leads to true peace. The **Mundaka Upanishad** succinctly captures this vision:

"He who knows that supreme Brahman becomes Brahman indeed; in his peace all desires are dissolved." (*Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.9)

Here, peace is the direct result of the realization that *Ātman* (the self) is fundamentally **non-different from Brahman** (the ultimate reality). This non-dualistic understanding, known as **Advaita Vedānta**, forms the philosophical basis for *Śānti* in the Upanishads. The realization of unity between the self and the cosmos dissolves all desires, attachments, and mental distractions that typically create agitation in the mind. Thus, peace is not merely the absence of external conflict or disturbance, but the internal **revelation** of the self's true nature, which is infinite, eternal, and beyond the limitations of time and space.

1. The Absence of Duality (Advaita) and Cessation of Mental Agitation

Central to the **Upanishadic** view of peace is the idea of **Advaita**—non-duality. According to **Advaita Vedānta**, the perception of separation between self and the universe, between *Ātman* and *Brahman*, is a result of **ignorance** (*avidyā*). This ignorance leads individuals to perceive themselves as separate from the rest of existence, creating the basis for **suffering** and **mental unrest**. Peace (*Śānti*) arises when this ignorance is dispelled through self-knowledge (*jñāna*). When one realizes that the true nature of the self is **non-different** from the ultimate reality, the illusion of duality collapses, and mental agitation ceases.

The cessation of mental agitation, referred to as **manonāśa**, is the result of direct experiential knowledge of the **unity of all things**. As the **Chandogya Upanishad** (6.2.1) states: "That which is the truth is *Ātman*, and that *Ātman* is identical to *Brahman*." Once this profound realization occurs, the individual is no longer subject to the pull of desires, emotions, or external disturbances. Instead, peace arises naturally as the **mind becomes still**, and the individual recognizes their identity with the **universe itself**.

2. The Role of the Śānti Pāṭha: Ritual and Philosophical Dimensions of Peace

The **Śānti Pāṭha**, or the *peace invocation*, is a ritualistic element that underscores the centrality of peace in **Upanishadic** thought. This invocation is often recited at the beginning and end of spiritual study or meditation and serves as both a **spiritual invocation** and a **psychological preparation**. It is recited to invoke peace at multiple levels—**peace in speech**, **peace in thought**, and **peace in action**. The *Śānti Pāṭha* expresses the aspiration for equilibrium between the self, the teacher, and the cosmos, establishing a harmonious relationship between all entities involved in the process of learning and self-realization. It symbolizes the **unity** of the **individual** with the **cosmic order**.

The peace invoked in the *Śānti Pāṭha* also serves as a reminder of the goal of self-realization—*mokṣa*—where the practitioner seeks to transcend the distractions of the world and attain the ultimate peace of unity with *Brahman*. In this sense, the **ritual recitation** of the *Śānti Pāṭha* is not merely an act of verbal repetition but an **inner commitment** to the **path of self-purification** and **spiritual discipline**, preparing the practitioner for the experience of peace that comes with the realization of their true nature.

3.2. Buddhist Perspective of Śānti

In contrast to the **Upanishadic** view of peace, which centers on metaphysical unity with the ultimate reality, **Buddhism** approaches *Śānti* as the **cessation of suffering** (*dukkha*). The **Buddhist** conception of peace is grounded in the **Four Noble Truths**, which diagnose the nature of human suffering and offer a practical path toward its cessation. The **Dhammapada**, one of the most widely read Buddhist texts, encapsulates the Buddhist vision of peace with the following proclamation:

“There is no happiness higher than peace.” (*Dhammapada*, 15.2)

Here, peace is framed not as a metaphysical union with an eternal reality, but as an **experiential state** that arises when the **causes of suffering** are understood and eliminated. Peace, in this sense, is **dynamic**—it is not simply the **end of conflict** but the cessation of the underlying causes of conflict, particularly **ignorance** (*avidyā*) and **attachment** (*rāga*).

1. Cessation of Suffering (*Dukkha-Nirodha*)

The central problem that Buddhism addresses is **suffering** (*dukkha*), which it defines as **existential dissatisfaction** or **dis-ease** inherent in the human condition. This suffering arises from attachment to **impermanent** things, including the attachment to an **illusory sense of self**. The **Buddha's** path to peace, therefore, is aimed at understanding the **impermanent nature of all things** and overcoming the **craving** that leads to **attachment**. The cessation of suffering—*dukkha-nirodha*—is the **peace** that results when the **causes of suffering** are eradicated through **insight** into the true nature of reality.

The Buddha's teachings are encapsulated in the **Noble Eightfold Path**, which serves as a guide to ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. The Eightfold Path is divided into

three broad categories: **śīla** (ethical conduct), **samādhi** (meditation), and **prajñā** (wisdom). Each of these elements plays a role in **cultivating peace**:

- **Śīla (Ethical Conduct)**: By following moral precepts, such as right speech, right action, and right livelihood, the practitioner cultivates inner harmony and social peace.
- **Samādhi (Meditation)**: Through meditation practices, particularly mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samatha*), the practitioner gains insight into the **nature of reality**—impermanence, suffering, and non-self.
- **Prajñā (Wisdom)**: The ultimate wisdom is the understanding of the **Three Marks of Existence**—**impermanence** (*anicca*), **suffering** (*dukkha*), and **non-self** (*anattā*). This understanding leads to the cessation of attachment and the **attainment of nirvāṇa**, the state of **complete peace** and liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra*).

2. Impermanence, Non-Self, and Interdependent Origination

The path to peace in Buddhism is built upon **three core insights** into the nature of existence:

- **Impermanence (Anicca)**: All things are in a constant state of flux. There is no permanent, unchanging reality in the world. The recognition of impermanence helps practitioners detach from the transient nature of life, leading to a peaceful mind free from clinging.
- **Non-Self (Anattā)**: There is no permanent, independent self. The notion of a fixed, unchanging self is an illusion, and peace arises when this illusion is dispelled. When one realizes that there is no eternal soul or self to defend or protect, the attachment to personal identity fades, resulting in greater peace.
- **Interdependent Origination (Paṭicca-samuppāda)**: All phenomena arise dependent on conditions and are interconnected. This insight into the interconnected nature of all things fosters compassion and reduces the ego-centered view that fuels suffering. Understanding this **interdependence** brings about peace both within oneself and in relation to others.

In Buddhism, peace is thus a **relational** and **processual** phenomenon. It is not achieved through the union with an eternal cosmic reality, as in the Upanishads, but through the gradual **elimination of suffering** by cultivating mindfulness, ethical behavior, and wisdom. Peace is the natural result of **understanding** the nature of existence and acting accordingly.

4. Comparative Analysis

The pursuit of *Śānti* (peace) in **Indian philosophy** unfolds through two complementary yet contrasting frameworks — the **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** traditions. Both traditions converge in their emphasis on **inner realization** as the source of lasting peace, but they diverge sharply in their **metaphysical assumptions** about the nature of reality, selfhood, and liberation.

While the **Upanishads** anchor peace in the realization of a **unitive metaphysics** (*Ātman* = *Brahman*), **Buddhism** builds its philosophy around the **negation of a permanent self** (*anattā*), positing peace as the experiential cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*). In essence, the Upanishadic vision of *Śānti* is **transcendental and ontological**, while the Buddhist vision is **phenomenological and ethical**.

4.1 Convergence: The Inner Path to Peace

Both traditions agree that **peace cannot be externally imposed**—it must arise through **inner transformation**. The Upanishadic seeker attains peace through *jñāna* (knowledge) that dissolves ignorance (*avidyā*), realizing the unity of self and ultimate reality. The Buddhist practitioner, on the other hand, achieves peace through insight (*vipassanā*) into impermanence and non-self, dissolving attachment and craving.

In both systems, **ignorance** is the root cause of **mental unrest**, and **self-realization or self-transcendence** is the key to peace. Both reject material or political definitions of peace, viewing it as a **psychospiritual state** that transforms perception, behavior, and consciousness.

Moreover, both philosophies emphasize **ethical conduct** as a prerequisite for peace. The Upanishadic emphasis on *śamatva* (equanimity) and *tyāga* (renunciation) parallels the Buddhist focus on *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness). Both recognize that **peace begins with ethical harmony** and culminates in **spiritual liberation**.

4.2 Divergence: Ontological and Epistemological Foundations

Despite their shared ethical and psychological insights, the **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** paths part ways at the level of metaphysics and ontology.

The **Upanishads** uphold a **permanent, unchanging reality**—*Brahman*—as the substratum of existence. Peace arises from recognizing the self (*Ātman*) as identical with this ultimate reality. Thus, *Śānti* represents the **dissolution of individuality into the Absolute**.

By contrast, **Buddhism** denies the existence of any eternal or unchanging entity. The doctrine of **anattā (non-self)** posits that all phenomena, including consciousness, are impermanent and dependently arisen. Here, peace is achieved not through union with a metaphysical principle, but through the **insightful relinquishment of all attachments** and the **realization of emptiness (śūnyatā)**.

In summary, while the **Upanishadic** path seeks peace through **affirmation** of an ultimate unity, the **Buddhist** path finds peace through **negation** of permanence and selfhood.

4.3 Comparative Dimensions of Śānti

The following table summarizes the key dimensions of *Śānti* in both traditions, highlighting their points of convergence and divergence:

Dimension	Upanishadic Thought	Buddhist Thought
Ontology	Non-dualism (Advaita) — <i>Ātman</i> and <i>Brahman</i> are identical; ultimate reality is one and unchanging.	Non-self (Anattā) — There is no permanent self; all phenomena are impermanent and interdependent.
Goal of Peace	Realization of unity with the ultimate reality (Brahman); transcendence of duality and ignorance.	Cessation of suffering (dukkha- <i>nirodha</i>) through the elimination of craving, ignorance, and attachment.
Means	Self-knowledge (Jñāna Yoga) leading to realization of the true Self.	The Noble Eightfold Path, integrating ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom.
Ethical Basis	Harmony and detachment; renunciation (<i>tyāga</i>) and equanimity (<i>śamadvā</i>) are emphasized.	Compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>) and mindfulness (<i>satī</i>); ethical living as a condition for inner peace.
Nature of Realization	Transcendental — realization of the eternal and unchanging reality beyond the empirical world.	Experiential and processual — realization of impermanence and interdependence within lived experience.

Table 1. Comparative Dimensions of Śānti in Upanishadic and Buddhist Thought

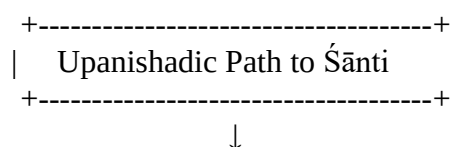
Interpretation of Table 1

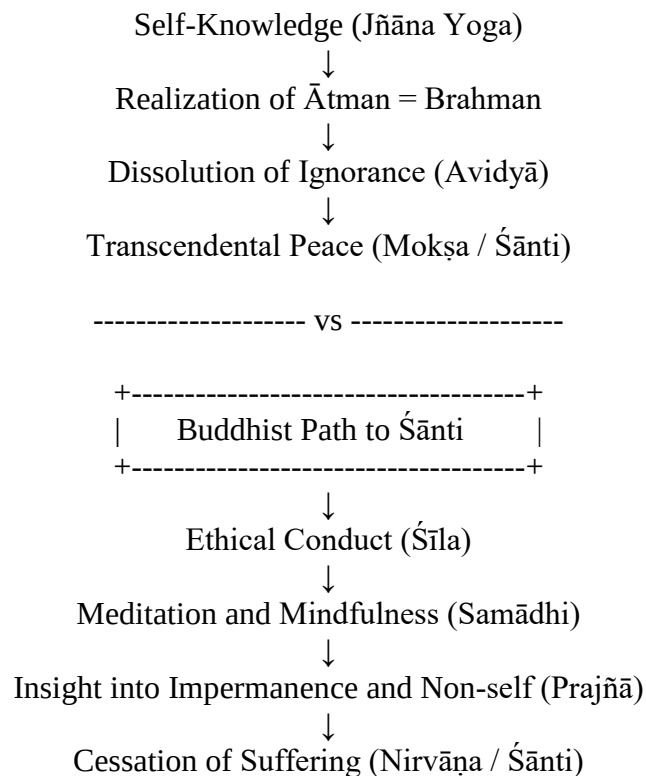
The **Upanishadic model** of peace is **cosmological**—it seeks to align the self with the ultimate order of reality. Peace is not something acquired, but **revealed** when ignorance dissolves. The **Buddhist model**, however, is **psychological and ethical**—peace is cultivated through deliberate practice, mindfulness, and insight into the impermanent and interconnected nature of existence.

Despite their doctrinal differences, both systems point toward **self-transformation** as the foundation of peace. They agree that **peace is not a state of inactivity** but a dynamic condition of awareness, balance, and moral clarity. The Upanishadic sage and the Buddhist monk both embody this inner stillness that radiates outward as compassion and harmony.

4.4 Graphical Representation of Comparative Framework

The following diagram conceptually illustrates the **pathways to Śānti** in both systems—one through *transcendental realization*, the other through *experiential cessation*.





This schematic comparison underscores how **both traditions, despite distinct metaphysical orientations, converge upon peace as a transformative process of liberation**—one through **affirmation of unity**, the other through **realization of emptiness**.

4.5 Synthesis: Toward a Unified Philosophy of Peace

From a comparative standpoint, *Śānti* in both traditions transcends external and temporal conditions. It is neither political nor social in the ordinary sense but a **state of existential harmony** rooted in **awareness and compassion**.

In modern contexts, these insights hold enduring relevance. The **Upanishadic model** offers a **metaphysical grounding** for holistic harmony, whereas the **Buddhist model** provides **psychological techniques** for cultivating mindfulness and empathy. Together, they form a **comprehensive philosophy of peace** that integrates the spiritual, ethical, and experiential dimensions of human existence.

Thus, the dialogue between **Upanishadic transcendence** and **Buddhist immanence** does not merely contrast two worldviews—it offers a **complementary framework** for understanding peace as both **inner realization** and **ethical action**.

5. Illustrative Model of Spiritual Progression

To synthesize the philosophical and practical insights from the **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** traditions, we may envision a **comparative schema of spiritual progression**, depicted metaphorically as two **concentric spirals**—one ascending and the other inwardly contracting.

This conceptual model, titled “*Pathways to Śānti: A Comparative Schema*,” represents the dynamic journey of the human spirit toward **inner peace (Śānti)** through distinct yet convergent pathways of realization.

Description of Figure 1: Pathways to Śānti — A Comparative Schema

Imagine two spirals sharing a common center. The **Upanishadic spiral** unfolds **upward and outward**, suggesting a **movement of ascent** toward the infinite—*Brahman*. The **Buddhist spiral**, by contrast, moves **inward and centripetally**, signifying the **dissolution of craving**, the **relinquishment of ego**, and the **attainment of nirvāṇa**. Both spirals, though opposite in motion, converge at a central point of luminous stillness—the **axis of Śānti**, the locus of ultimate harmony where transcendence and immanence meet.

5.1 The Upanishadic Ascent: Knowledge and Renunciation

In the **Upanishadic** vision, spiritual progress is symbolized by an **ascending spiral**, each loop representing a deeper layer of understanding and renunciation. The aspirant (*sādhaka*) begins with **intellectual inquiry (śravaṇa)**, listening to scriptural wisdom. This leads to **rational reflection (manana)**, followed by **contemplative assimilation (nididhyāsana)**. As the spiral rises, the seeker sheds layers of **ignorance (avidyā)** and **desire (kāma)**, transcending the material and psychological dimensions of existence.

At higher levels, the practitioner's awareness becomes increasingly **rarefied**—the mind turns inward, detaching from sensory entanglements and emotional turbulence. The final loop of the spiral culminates in **Self-realization (ātma-jñāna)**, where the individual recognizes their identity with the **universal Self (Ātman = Brahman)**. At this summit of consciousness, all dualities dissolve, and **Śānti** manifests as the **silence of unity**, a peace that transcends becoming and rests in pure being.

Thus, the **Upanishadic spiral** embodies a **movement of transcendence**—an ascent from the multiplicity of empirical existence to the oneness of metaphysical truth. Each turn represents liberation from a subtler form of bondage, culminating in the infinite expanse of Brahmanic awareness.

5.2 The Buddhist Inward Spiral: Mindfulness and Cessation

The **Buddhist** spiral, in contrast, proceeds **inward**, emphasizing a **path of introspection and purification**. The practitioner begins with **ethical discipline (śīla)**, cultivating harmlessness, compassion, and integrity as the foundation of peace. Progressing inward, one engages in **meditative concentration (samādhi)**—stilling the fluctuations of the mind through mindfulness (*sati*) and awareness of impermanence (*anicca*).

At the deeper coils of the spiral, **insight (prajñā)** dawns—the realization of **non-self (anattā)** and **interdependence (paṭicca-samuppāda)**. This insight does not lead upward to a transcendent principle but **inward to emptiness (śūnyatā)**—a serene recognition that all phenomena are **conditioned, transient, and without inherent essence**. As attachment and

aversion fade, the practitioner experiences the **cessation of craving (taṇhā)**, culminating in **nirvāṇa**, the extinguishing of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion.

The **Buddhist spiral**, therefore, represents a **movement of immanence**—a compassionate inward journey that dissolves the ego's boundaries until peace arises naturally as the cessation of grasping. Each inward turn marks a release, a deepening of calm, and an expansion of awareness through non-attachment.

5.3 The Convergence Point: Śānti as Unity of Transcendence and Immanence

At the intersection of the two spirals lies the **nucleus of Śānti**—the still point where **Upanishadic transcendence** and **Buddhist immanence** converge. This point symbolizes the **equilibrium of opposites**: the infinite and the finite, the self and non-self, the eternal and the momentary. It is not merely a philosophical midpoint but a **metaphysical synthesis**—a state of consciousness that reconciles **being** and **becoming**, **emptiness** and **fullness**, **awareness** and **non-clinging**.

At this center, peace is neither a distant goal nor a static condition. It is the **dynamic equilibrium of consciousness**, the silence that underlies both ascent and inward retreat. From the Upanishadic perspective, this is the realization of the **Self as All**; from the Buddhist perspective, it is the **realization of No-Self in All**. In both cases, the practitioner arrives at a **stillness beyond conceptual distinctions**—a living Śānti that radiates compassion, clarity, and unity.

5.4 Symbolic and Contemporary Significance

The **dual-spiral model** illustrates that the **journey to peace** can take multiple directions—through **knowledge and transcendence**, or through **insight and cessation**—yet both culminate in the same state of **inner harmony and universal empathy**. In a contemporary context, this model invites integration: the **Upanishadic affirmation** of unity can complement the **Buddhist mindfulness practice**, offering a holistic framework for cultivating peace amidst modern conflict and fragmentation.

In essence, **Śānti** is not a static endpoint but a **continuum of awareness**, accessible through the simultaneous deepening and expansion of consciousness. Whether one ascends toward the Absolute or dissolves inward toward Emptiness, the destination remains the same—**the still point of peace where all opposites are reconciled**.

6. Discussion

The Upanishadic and Buddhist interpretations of **Śānti** represent two profound yet complementary paradigms of peace. The **Upanishadic Śānti** situates peace in the realization of the eternal, unchanging Self—**Ātman as Brahman**—a transcendence beyond duality that dissolves conflict through knowledge (jñāna) and renunciation (tyāga). By contrast, the **Buddhist Śānti** locates peace within the insight of impermanence (**anicca**) and non-self

(**anattā**), where liberation arises from understanding the contingent nature of existence and the cessation of craving (**tanhā-nirodha**).

Despite their differing metaphysical foundations—the **Upanishadic being absolutist and monistic**, and the **Buddhist being phenomenological and process-oriented**—both traditions converge on the experiential core of inner tranquility. They envision peace not as an external condition but as an **inward equilibrium** achieved through **ethical conduct, meditative awareness, and cognitive clarity**.

In today's climate of psychological stress, environmental crisis, and social discord, these ancient insights hold enduring relevance. Practices derived from both—**Upanishadic self-inquiry (ātma-vichāra)** and **Buddhist mindfulness (sati)**—serve as pathways toward emotional regulation, empathy, and sustainable coexistence. Śānti, thus, transcends metaphysical abstraction to become an **active, lived harmony**—a dynamic equilibrium between thought, emotion, and ethical action within the flux of modern life.

7. Conclusion

Revisiting Śānti through the intertwined perspectives of the **Upanishadic** and **Buddhist** traditions illuminates peace as a profoundly multidimensional phenomenon—**ontological, psychological, and ethical**. The **Upanishads** envision peace as transcendence—an ascent toward unity with the ultimate reality, **Brahman**, wherein the dualities of existence are reconciled through knowledge and self-realization. In contrast, **Buddhism** roots peace in immanence—the here-and-now dissolution of suffering through mindfulness, compassion, and ethical restraint.

Despite these divergent metaphysical orientations, both traditions converge on the principle that **Śānti is not a passive state but an active realization**—a transformation of consciousness that harmonizes the individual with the cosmos. Peace, in this light, becomes not an external or political condition but an **inner ecology of awareness**, where clarity of thought, emotional balance, and moral integrity coalesce.

In a world marked by anxiety, alienation, and conflict, the combined wisdom of these traditions offers a timeless template for **integrated living**. By merging **Upanishadic transcendence** with **Buddhist mindfulness**, humanity can aspire toward a form of peace that is **simultaneously inward and relational**—a dynamic realization of harmony that dissolves ignorance and nurtures compassionate coexistence.

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