

# What is our basic disposition to life?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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Just as these days it is almost impossible to walk into a cafe without some sort of background music (and sometimes not so background), there is within our psyche a background tune/s. It is enlightening to discover this basic disposition if you have not already discovered it. There have been many ways to categorise characters and personalities according to a basic disposition. The dominant categorisation from ancient to modern times, was the notion of the Four Humours or Temperaments, connected to season, age, organ which we also used to diagnose the cause of illnesses. (See Diagram below courtesy of Wikipedia) The four fundamental personality types were: sanguine—enthusiastic, active, and social—optimistic and over-enthusiastic choleric— independent, decisive, goal oriented, but also aversive and reactive melancholic— analytical, detail oriented, deep thinker and feeler, but also sad, shy phlegmatic— relaxed, peaceful, quiet, but also lethargic and unconcerned (Wikipedia – italics additions are mine) We pass through such states multiple times during a day, but there usually one which sits as background motif – an attitude we have developed towards life. There are other typologies such as the Myers-Briggs. One that you might think worth exploring if you have not come across it is the Enneagram, which was a great discovery for me and I found it very helpful. In Buddhism, it was only in later commentaries that such personality types were developed. You will not be surprised at their categorisation. Yes, you've guessed! The Greedy, the Aversive and the Deluded character. Their opposites might seem a little strange: Faithful, Intelligent and Speculative. The one, with Dhamma practice moves towards the other. Greed seeks to gratify itself, whereas Faith, better translated as Confidence, also desires to get, to achieve, but what is virtuous. We would normally think of Generosity as the opposite, but here we see how close Greed and Confidence are. Aversion holds objects at a distance but condemning them, whereas Discernment also sees objectively, but is judicious. Again we would normally see the opposite as Love, but here again we see how anger distorts our perception. Delusion is a state of confusion, whereas speculation thinks itself undeluded, but gets lost in all sorts of 'thinking'. It looks as though the Commentaries have given no hope to the Deluded! But obviously as delusion is undermined, wisdom arises. So since we are all, save the Arahants, deluded to some extent or another, we need to question our thinking, but we can still live in hope of illumination. We can tell which one we are if we catch the way we think about things, the way we do things. If we detect a fundamental disposition, it is good to ask – is it wise, is it beneficial. If it isn't, then we need to counteract it. For instance, if a basic attitude is an amorphous feeling of guilt (Aversive / Melancholic), then we undermine this by remembering any unethical actions we have committed. Either apologise for it or make amends. If that's not possible, then to accept whatever consequences may arise. Then don't obsess over it! Instead we bring to mind all the virtuous things we have done and congratulate ourselves. If it is beneficial, then we need to warn ourselves that there is often an over play. An optimistic

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joy (Greedy / Sanguine) can lead to over expectation and disappointment. Should we experience disappointment, then that becomes a warning signal to us to make reality checks. Amita Schmidt does a good introductory job on the Four Temperaments with a quiz: <https://amitaschmidt.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/personality-types.pdf> For a more detailed exposition of the Personality Types in Early Buddhism: <http://aukana.org.uk/books.html>: Buddhist Character Analysis Robert Mann & Rose Youd For those of you, who have a copy of the Visuddhimagga by Buddhaghosa, you will find the Temperaments on Page 102 para 74 Wikipedia, as usual, does a good introductory job on: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram\\_of\\_Personality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram_of_Personality) There is even an Institute - <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humorism>

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