

Early Buddhist Practice of Meditation

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Abstract

The practice of meditation is an essential part of the Buddhist path leading to emancipation. This brief essay outlines the fundamentals of meditation, as understood by the Theravada tradition, in its two aspects: samatha (calming) and vipassanā (insight). The discussion is based exclusively on Pāli texts with little input from the author himself.

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The Purpose and Function of Meditation

The Buddha realized that human existence, from birth to death, is suffering and unsatisfactory. In early Vedic teachings we find that the seers were looking for a lasting solution to the problem of death. They thought of a state of immortality (*amata*) or deathlessness, but missed the point that death was the inevitable outcome of birth. It was indeed the Buddha's insight that we die because we are born! He understood that if we could only stop birth (*jāti*), death would also be stopped. While the Buddha's focus is on the cause (*birth = jāti*), as opposed to the effect (*death = maraṇa*), his vision included both ends of the spectrum—"birthlessness" (*ajātam*) as well as deathlessness (*amatam*). He clearly saw the causal link, namely that deathlessness is achieved only through birthlessness.

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In Brāhmanic thought, immortality or deathlessness is achieved through union with the Brahman, the creator God who is identified as the cosmic principle (*jagad ātman*). The end of sorrow is considered to be this unification of the individual soul with that of the cosmic.¹ The Buddha, however, maintains that the gods, including Brahma, the Creator,

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are subject to impermanence, and that, consequently, union is not the solution, as we are born again and again, bound by the fetters of *saṃsāra*.

Meditation is the technique by which one works him or herself out of this cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). Referring to practices purporting to lead to deathlessness, the Buddha says that they are a kind of external treatment. In the *Brāhmaṇa Vagga* of the *Dhammpada*, we find that some ascetics and brāhmaṇas treat the cause externally as opposed to internally.² The Buddha sees that the external treatment of an internal problem is not the solution. Internally we are not sound (*abbhantaram te gahanam*, Dh. 394). The Buddha thus devised a scheme of introspection by which one may look into and investigate one's own mind, which leads to liberation. This investigation involves understanding the real nature of phenomena.

The Centrality of Meditation in the Buddhist Path

The practice of meditation as a means of mental purification was not unknown in India during the time of the Buddha. It was emphasized by most recluses as well as Brahmins. It was considered to be an essential part of Indian religions. The term *yoga*—literally translated as “yoking” or joining, and generally associated with the union of the mind to divinity or supreme reality—was one of the popular terms for meditation. It does not, however, occur in Buddhist texts in the sense of *meditation*. Instead, the Buddha uses the term *bhāvanā*, in the sense of mental development.³

According to early Buddhist scriptures, there were ascetics and brahmins (*samaṇabrāhmaṇā*) who practiced meditation during the time of the Buddha. In the Ariyapariyesana Sutta⁴ the Buddha relates how, prior to his Enlightenment, he sought out two teachers who claimed to practice the highest form of meditation. Ālāra Kālāma taught the third stage of “non-form meditation” (*arūpa jhāna*), namely, “the state of emptiness” (*ākincaṇṇāyatana*). Uddaka Rāmaputta taught the fourth stage, namely, “the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (*nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana*). The Buddha, of course, saw both of them as falling short of the liberation he sought.

In the course of a dialogue with the Jain Saccaka, the Buddha discusses a method of physical and mental training (*kāyabhāvanā* and *cittabhāvanā*) practiced by earlier teachers.⁵ The Brahmajala Sutta in the Dīgha Nikaya refers to a *cetosamādhi* “mental concentration,” a form of meditation practiced by some ascetics and brahmins for the development of concentration of mind that, through exertion and application of effort

and right attention, produces supernatural results, such as the capacity for recollection of past existences (*pubbenivāsānussati*).⁶

It is clear from this short survey that during the sixth century BCE, the practice of meditation was well established and highly recognized by Indian religious teachers. The Buddha had a good background with which to formulate an extremely advanced type of meditation that can be distinguished from the practices of other teachers, incorporating aspects such as *samatha bhāvanā* (tranquility or calming meditation).⁷

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya provides a lucid explanation of the application of *vipassanā* or insight meditation, especially the practice of *ānāpāṇa sati*, establishing mindfulness of breathing in and out. This Sutta also teaches one how to develop insight into one's own body (*kāya*) in order to overcome the wrong view of the body and one's attachment to it.

The Buddhist path of purification is generally called a "gradual practice" (*anupubba sikkhā*), "gradual doing" (*anupubba kiriyā*), and "gradual path" (*anupubba paṭipadā*).⁸

It is clear that the Buddha holds that one cannot attain wisdom at the very beginning of the practice. Meditation, therefore, needs to be seen as a necessary component of the Buddhist gradual path.

Samatha and Vipassanā: Two Types

The Buddha practiced two methods of meditation: *samatha* (calming) and *vipassanā* (insight). The former was already in practice, as shown by the two teachers he had sought out. It is, however, in the conviction that the defilements cannot be totally removed by following the *samatha* practice that he left them. By this practice of calmness of mind, the practitioner is only able to suppress defilements, but is not able to eliminate them.

The second insight (*vipassanā*) method, which is the Buddha's own innovation, is intended to remove all of the defilements, leaving no residue. Through insight (*vipassanā*) practice, the meditator realizes the truth of phenomena as really they are. This is the only way to realize *nibbāna*.

The tranquility meditation (*samatha*) is capable of achieving only the *jhānic* level of experiences. The residue of the unwholesome is not completely destroyed, but remains in a latent state. This means that they can arise again if the meditator is heedless. It is only by combining *samatha* with *vipassanā* that one successfully attains to Arahant hood, thus acquiring knowledge and wisdom. These Arahants are called *paradhammakusala*, or *ubhatobhāgavimutta*, "emancipated through

mind and wisdom” (*cetovimutta* and *paññāvimutta*) in the sense that they are, like the Buddha, capable of giving instructions to others. This category of Arahants is also called *pañsambhidāpatta*, depicting those who have attained the mastership in analysis. Additionally, there are those who become Arahants solely through the practice of insight, without the tranquility method. Such individuals are called *sadhammakusala*, or *paññāvimutta* translated as “emancipated through wisdom.” They are also called *sukkavipassaka*, or “one who has exhausted defilements through insight.”

Morality (*sīla*) and the Practice of Meditation

Sīla (“morality or virtue”) plays an important role in the practice of meditation. The Buddha’s way of teaching was very systematic. He adopted a step-by-step method (*ānupubbīkathā*). When addressing the average person, for example, he usually began by explaining the advantages of *dāna* (“giving or liberality”) as a way of overcoming attachments, i.e., the desire for clinging to or grasping our possessions, a very strong human impulse that hinders spiritual progress. Next, he spoke about morality (*sīla kathā*), the foundation for the spiritual practice. This moral foundation helps to overcome the psychological problems one encounters, such as sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīnamiddha*), restlessness and agitation (*uddhacca kukkuccha*), and skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*).⁹ Morality, therefore, comes to be called, in Buddhist texts, the foundation of concentration.¹⁰ Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (“The Path of Purification”), the classical exposition of the Buddhist practice leading to emancipation in Theravada Buddhism, emphasizes that “the wise man, having well established in the morality while developing the mind and wisdom, ...disentangles this entanglement” (*sīle patinñāya naro sapañño, cittaṃ paññañca bhāvayaṃ...so imaṃ vijaṇṭhe jaṇaṃ*,¹¹ namely, the Saṃsāric existence.

In the first thirteen Suttas of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (as above), *sīla* is divided into three grades (1) “small virtue” (*cūla sīla*), (2) “middle virtue” (*majjhima sīla*) and (3) “great virtue” (*mahā sīla*).¹² Additionally, the practice of *sīla* has three aspects: (1) refraining (2) forsaking, and (3) developing.¹³ The first refers to refraining from vices such as those listed under the Five Precepts— killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxicants. To forsake is to get rid of whatever weapons used for killing beings in violation of the precepts. The developing aspect is spreading loving kindness and compassion towards humans, animals, property, and the environment.

We find a new way of explaining *sīla* in the *Visuddhimagga* (above), elucidated in a twofold way: (1) refraining or abstaining from harmful actions (*vāritta sīla*), and (2) practicing or doing good things (*cāritta sīla*).¹⁴ The first relates to refraining from what is morally unskillful and harmful to individuals, including the doer and society as a whole. The second includes the practice of the *brahmavihāra* “noble abidings”—*mettā* (“loving kindness”), *karuṇā* (“compassion”), *muditā* (“sympathetic joy”) and *upekkhā* (“equanimity”). For the ordained, mundane activities such as sweeping and cleaning of the monastery also fall into this category.

Elsewhere in the *Visuddhimagga*,¹⁵ now in relation to the ordained *saṅgha*, Buddhaghosa divides *sīla* into four Moral Disciplines: *pātimokkha* restraint (*pātimokkha saṃvara sīla*)¹⁶, sense restraint (*indriya saṃvara sīla*), purity of livelihood (*ājīva pārisuddhi sīla*), and of use of requisites (*paccaya sannissita sīla*).

The “moral discipline of restraint according to the Pātimokkha” is the scrupulous observance of the 227 precepts (*sikkhā*) of the Pātimokkha, intended for the ordained *saṅgha* for their training and discipline. These rules can be regarded as the backbone of monastic discipline.

The “moral discipline of sense restraint” refers to the exercise of restraint over the sense faculties when contacting external and internal objects with the respective sense faculties, or the “doors” (*dvāra*) of sense faculties. Just as anyone can enter a house when the doors are open, any object can enter one’s mind and contaminate it when the sense faculties are open. The Buddha advises his disciples not to apprehend signs or particulars on seeing a visible object with the eye. If the eye faculty was left unguarded, unprofitable states of covetousness and grief might invade. By guarding his or her sense doors, the meditator stops conceptualizing and pondering over the object; instead, he or she simply takes it in as a mere object. The same, of course, applies to other sense faculties, such as the auditory, the gustatory, etc.

The “moral discipline of purity of livelihood” is the avoidance of wrong means of living. The *saṅgha* (to whom the 227 precepts apply) are not to engage in such things as divination, astrology, the practice of medicine, political talk, and so forth. One is to be perpetually honest in every way regarding one’s living and practice.

The “moral discipline concerning the use of the requisites” (including food, robes, shelter and medicine) calls upon the *saṅgha* to reflect upon such requisites as being solely for sustenance, and not for worldly benefits. When eating food, one should thus reflect that this food is “not for sport, not for energy, not for an attractive body, nor for a better complexion,” (*neva davāya na madāya na maṇḍanāya na*

vibhūsanāya), but is only for survival and spiritual advancement. Likewise, the robes and clothes are not for the purpose of “beautifying the body, not for attraction,” but only for “guarding the body from flies, mosquitoes, cold...” (*yāvadeva sītassa paṭighātāya, uñhassa paṭighātāya, dāmsamakāsavātātapsirīṃsapasamphassānaṃ paṭighātāya, yāvadeva hiri kopīnapaticchādanatthaṃ...*)¹⁷

Necessity of a Teacher or a Friend

It is extremely important to have a teacher or friend¹⁸ as an instructor from whom one may obtain an appropriate object of meditation fitting the temperament of the meditator, receive instruction in the methods of developing it, and to guide one along the path. The practice of meditation leading to *jhāna* (“absorptions”) as well as *vipassanā* (“insight”) is an arduous course. Therefore, meticulous care has to be taken. Precise techniques and skillfulness are necessary to overcome the pitfalls one may face in the course of the practice. It is for this reason that an experienced teacher, instructor, or at least a friend, is needed to consult from time to time when the need arises, as well as to pass on his or her store of accumulated knowledge and experience.

A Place for Meditation

After receiving instruction from a teacher or friend and arriving at a suitable subject of meditation appropriate to one’s character (temperament), the selection of a suitable place for meditation has to be performed carefully as well. In early Buddhist texts we find references to secluded places like mountains, cemeteries, caves, forests, and under trees as appropriate for meditation. The *Anguttara Nikāya* lists the following five characteristics of such a place:

1. It should not be too far from or too near a village that can be relied on as an alms resort and should have a clear path.
2. It should be quiet and secluded and be free from inclemency of weather and from harmful insects and animals.
3. It should be close to an alms-resort (*gocaraḡāma*) to obtain the four requisites robes (*cīvara*), food (*piṇḍapāta*), shelter (*senāsana*), and medicine (*gilānapaccaya*) while dwelling there.
4. It should have an easy and ready access to learned elders and spiritual friends who can consult when problems arise regarding meditation.
5. ?

Getting Rid of Impediments

The impediments (*paḷibodha*) are a problem too for the practice of meditation. These are mainly related to the four requisites, namely robes, an alms bowl, dwelling place and medicine, though not exclusively so. The *Visuddhimagga* lists ten such impediments in the way of meditation:

1. Impediment of dwelling (*āvāsa-paḷibodha*),
2. Impediment of family (*kula-paḷibodha*),
3. Impediment of gain (*lābha-paḷibodha*),
4. Impediment of community (*gaṇa-paḷibodha*),
5. Impediment of work (*kamma-paḷibodha*),
6. Impediment of travel (*addhāna-paḷibodha*),
7. Impediment of relatives (*ñāti-paḷibodha*),
8. Impediment of sickness (*ābādha-paḷibodha*),
9. Impediment of study (*gantha-paḷibodha*) and
10. Impediments of supernormal powers (*iddhi-paḷibodha*).

Getting rid of Hindrances

Hindrances are a serious impediment in meditation. In the Pāli Nikāya texts regarding the first *jhāna* there is a formula which says, “...secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states of mind, he enters and dwells in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by applied thought and sustained thought with rapture and happiness born of seclusion.” (*So vivicce’va kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkam savicāram vivekajam pītisukham paṭhamajjhānam upasampajja viharati.*)¹⁹ In this formula, the sensual pleasures and unwholesome states of mind refer to the hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*). There are, to repeat (see above), five hindrances (*pañcanīvaraṇa*): sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīnamiddha*), restlessness and worry (or worry and flurry) (*uddhaccakukkucca*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*).²⁰ These five hindrances not only obstruct the *jhānic* meditation, but also the whole process of emancipation. Referring to them, the Buddha says that these are obstructions, hindrances, corruptions of the mind, and weakeners of wisdom. Furthermore, these five hindrances are causes of blindness and loss of vision, unknowing and opposed to wisdom, aligned with vexation, and leading away from Nibbāna.²¹

The first hindrance, sensual desire, is explained in terms of the five sensual pleasures: desire for agreeable forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tangibles. These are desirable, lovely, pleasing, sensuous and

stimulative of lust. The hindrance ill-will, or hatred, is the aversion directed towards disagreeable persons or things. Sloth and torpor is the dullness or the very laziness that obstructs the motivation for meditation. In the *Dhammasaṅgini*, the first book of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, “sloth” is explained as dullness and mental inertia, and “torpor” as indolence. “Restlessness and worry” is explained as two states, even though they are taken together. Thus the “restlessness” (*uddhacca*) is the excitement, agitation and disquietude. Worry (*kukkucca*) is the sense of guilt aroused by moral transgressions. Doubt (*vicikicchā*) is the uncertainty regarding the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha and the training.

When these hindrances are eliminated, a sense of exultation arises in the mind of the meditator. With that exultation, joy is born. With this joy, the body becomes serene and calm, and it gives rise to happiness. With this background, the mind becomes well concentrated. This is the beginning of *samādhi* (concentration).

The Process

The function of meditation is salvific and its purpose, from a Buddhist point of view, is to bring an end to birth. To be destroyed in this process are the following ten fetters, literally “binding factors” (*saṃyojana*):

1. Wrong view of personality or soul (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*)
2. Baseless doubt (*vicikicchā*)
3. Clinging to rites and rituals (*sīlabbata parāmāsa*)
4. Sensual desire (*kāmarāga*)
5. Ill will or hatred (*vyāpāda*)
6. Lust for fine material existence (*rūparāga*)
7. Lust for immaterial existence (*arūparāga*)
8. Conceit (*māna*)
9. Restlessness (*uddhacca*)
10. Ignorance (*avijjā*)²²

Fetters are divided into two categories. The first five: wrong view, doubt, clinging to rites and rituals, sensual desire, and ill will, relate to the lower plane. The last five: lust for fine material existence, lust for immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness and ignorance, relate to the upper plane. By the practice of meditation the fetters are destroyed and the practitioner transcends, step by step; thus he comes to be freed from fetters.

There are four levels in removing the fetters. At the first level of realization, namely, “stream entrant” (*sotāpanna*), the first three fetters

are destroyed completely without residue. At the second level, “once-returned” (*sakadāgāmi*), fetters four and five are subdued to a greater degree, to be eliminated completely at the third level, or “non-returned” (*anāgāmi*). The last five fetters are completely destroyed only at the fourth level of realization (*arahant*).

The Subjects of Meditation

The systematized list of subjects of meditation is comprised of forty for *samatha* (calming) practice and three for *vipassanā* (insight) meditation. These are called *kammaṭṭhāna*, literally meaning “a place of work”—*kamma* “work” + *ṭhāna* “place.” The term *ārammaṇa*, “object of meditation,” is also found occurring in the Nikāya texts to convey the same meaning.

Kammaṭṭhānas:

The forty subjects of meditation prescribed for the *samatha* method are classified in the *Visuddhimagga*²³ under the following seven categories:

1. Ten *kaṣiṇas* (devices): (1) earth, (2) water, (3) fire, (4) air, (5) blue, (6) yellow, (7) red, (8) white, (9) space and (10) consciousness. These are used as supports of concentration.
2. Ten foulnesses (*asubha*), all relating to a dead body: (1) swollen or bloated corpse (*uddhumātaka*), (2) livid or discolored corpse (*vinīlaka*), (3) festering corpse (*vipubbaka*), (4) fissured or cut up corpse (*vicchedaka*), (5) mangled or gnawed corpse (*vikkhāyitaka*), (6) scattered or dismembered corpse (*vikkhittaka*), (7) hacked and scattered corpse (*hatavikkhittaka*) (8) blood-stained corpse (*lohitaka*), (9) worm-infested corpse (*pulavaka*) and (10) a skeleton (*atthika*).
3. Ten recollections (*amussati*): (1) recollection of the Buddha, (2) recollection of the Dhamma, (3) recollection of the Saṅgha, (4) recollection of morality, (5) recollection of liberality, (6) recollection of gods (*deva*), (7) mindfulness of the body, (8) mindfulness of breathing, (9) mindfulness of death and (10) mindfulness of tranquility.
4. Four divine abidings (*brahma vihāra*): (1) loving-kindness (*mettā*), (2) compassion (*karuṇā*), (3) sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and (4) equanimity (*upekkhā*). These are called the four “immeasurables” (*appamaññā*) because they should be

developed towards all sentient beings without qualification, and limitlessly.

5. Four immaterial states: (1) the base of boundless space, (2) the base of boundless consciousness, (3) the base of nothingness and (4) the base of neither perception nor non-perception. These correspond to the four immaterial *jhānas* called *ārūpa* or *arūpajjhāna* (no-form absorptions).
6. The perception of repulsiveness of food (*āhāre paṭikkūla saññā*).
7. The four elements: earth, water, fire and air (*catudhātu vavatthāna*), being the analysis of the physical body into four great elements.

There are, however, at least four such lists in the Pāli Nikāya texts, commentaries and later works. As listed by Vajiranana in his *Buddhist Meditation*, they are: (1) the methods found in the Nikāyas, (2) the methods found in the Abhidhamma, (3) the methods found in the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa, and (4) the methods found in the later works.²⁴

The forty kammaṭṭhānas, or objects of meditation, have two functions according to commentarial interpretation. One is their ability to induce different levels of concentration, and the other their suitability for different temperaments.

One important factor regarding these meditational objects is that those recommended for *insight* practice are also found in the *tranquility* (*samatha*) method. This is most likely the result of combining the two methods into one single practice starting with *samatha* and culminating in *vipassanā*, leading to the realization of Nibbāna.

Taking to meditation

Once the prerequisites for meditation, namely eliminating the hindrances and other material problems that may inhibit the practice, exultation or joy (*pīti*) arises. With the experience of this joy, the body becomes serene and calm (*sukha*). This is the foundation of happiness. With the feeling of happiness, the mind mounts to concentration. This is called the beginning of *samādhi* (concentration i.e. *saṃ+ā+dhā* = putting together, to concentrate). In its technical sense, it signifies both the state of mind and the method designed to induce that state. In the Majjhima Nikāya, *samādhi* is explained as a state of mind and a method of mental training.

Having selected an appropriate object fitting to one's temperament with the help of the teacher or instructor, the meditator

goes to a secluded place and starts the practice. First he or she sits cross-legged, keeping the object of meditation, *kasīṇa* (above), up-front and meditates with a one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*) on the object. In the process of the (meditation) practice, the first *jhāna* (absorption) is reached.

The First, *jhāna* is explained in the Suttas in the following manner:

Having become free from sense-desire (*kāma*) and unwholesome thoughts, he attains and abides in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by reasoning (*vitakka*), investigation (*vicāra*), zest (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*).

In this *jhāna*, for the first time, the meditator experiences joy and happiness and he suffuses, permeates, fills and pervades his body with the joy and happiness arising from it.

The First *jhāna* is reached along with the expulsion of five hindrances (above): “free from sense desire (*kāma*) and unwholesome thoughts (*akusaladhammā*).” With the joy and happiness of attaining the first *jhāna*, the meditator continues his practice with the determination of attaining the second *jhāna*, reaching it with the elimination of “reasoning” and “investigation” (*vitakka*, *vicāra*). By this second *jhāna* there remains only three factors: zest, happiness and one-pointedness. In the Nikāya texts, this second *jhāna* is generally characterized as being “born of *samādhi* (concentration) of the first *jhāna*.” Like in the first *jhāna*, the meditator suffuses, fills, permeates and pervades his body with zest and happiness. With continued Practice, and now with the cessation of zest, he remains in equanimity, mindful and self-possessed, experiencing bodily happiness. Thus he attains and abides in the third *jhāna*. There now remain only two factors: happiness and one-pointedness. He suffuses, fills, permeates and pervades his entire body with happiness.

Next, by eliminating the sense of happiness, the meditator attains to the Fourth *jhāna*, the last level of the Plane of Form (*rūpāvacara*), where there is neither happiness nor pain, but with the characteristic of equanimity and pureness of mindfulness.

In the Abhidhamma and commentarial traditions, a mention is made of a fifth *jhāna*²⁵ that is not found in the early Nikāya teaching. This is no doubt a later development in the Theravada tradition. In the first *jhāna* we saw five *jhānic* factors: reasoning, investigation, zest, happiness and one-pointedness. When we reach the second, reasoning and investigation are eliminated, but in the third and fourth, only one

factor is eliminated at a time. The *Ābhidhammikas* might have thought that this way of eliminating the *jhānic* factors is not compatible. Therefore, they may have created the fifth *jhāna* to make the process more balanced. For, according to this Abhidhamma explanation, at the first Jhānic level, only “reasoning” (*vitakka*) is eliminated.

Now the meditator, after attaining the first four *jhāna*, finds that they have their own limitations in that they are still of the material plane, and thus connected with gross matter and coarser than the next level of immaterial attainments (*arūpajjhāna*).

According to Nikāya teaching, there are four formless or immaterial *jhāna*, resulting as they do by severing all contact with the objective world and developing the idea of emptiness (or nothingness—*suññatā* [Sanskrit: *sūnyatāi*]) regarding the phenomenal world. With practice, the meditator attains to the Base of Boundless Space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*). This has only the characteristic of one-pointedness common to all *jhāna*. According to Sutta teachings, when the meditator achieves this level, he removes the perception of matter (*rūpasaññā*), the perception of resistance (*paṭighasaññā*), the perception of variety (*nānattasaññā*) and develops the idea of infinite space.

The second immaterial absorption, The Base of Boundless Consciousness (*viññānañcāyatana*) is achieved by the meditator seeing the two defects of the Base of Boundless Space. It is still close to the fourth *material* absorption and is not as yet peaceful enough. The Pali Nikāya phrase related to this *jhāna* is as follows: “By completely surmounting the base consisting of boundless space with the awareness of unbounded consciousness, he enters upon and dwells in the Base of Boundless Consciousness.” The object of this *jhāna* is consciousness.

The third formless *jhāna* is called the Base of Nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*). In order to achieve this level, the meditator should see the two defects of the second immaterial *jhāna*: too close to the Base of Boundless Space, and gross compared to the Base of Nothingness. At this level of realization, he has the understanding of nothingness—everything is void.

The fourth level of formless absorption is characterized as Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). This is an extremely subtle level of realization compared to other levels, and is hence called the Peak of Perception (*saññaggā*).

Along with the attainment of these *jhāna*, the meditator acquires fivefold special or super knowledges (*pañca+abhiññā*). These special knowledges are as follows:

1. Psychokinesis (*iddhividha*): the power or special ability to perform miraculous activities like walking on water without sinking,

traversing through the air, manifold manifestations of oneself, and so forth.

2. Clairvoyance or divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*): the practitioner can see things not only within the sphere of the normal eye faculty but also things beyond the normal.
3. Clairaudience or divine ear (*dibbasota*): the meditator is able to hear sounds and words far beyond the range of ordinary ear faculty.
4. Telepathy or the ability to penetrate into the minds of others (*paracittavijānana*): the ability to read other people's minds.
5. Retrocognition (*pubbenivāsānussati*): the meditator can look into his own past existences as well as that of others.

The method of meditation described thus far is of the *samatha*, or tranquility type. The basic process, as well as the outcome, is one of rendering the mind tranquil and calm. This method, however, is not sufficient for achieving full emancipation, as the residues of unwholesome cannot be removed completely by that practice. It is for this reason that the Buddha developed the second method.

The objects of this latter method are Impermanence (*anicca*), Suffering (*dukkha*) and No-Soul (*anatta*). When the meditator completes this method, and realizes Nibbāna, he acquires the sixth special knowledge called the Knowledge of the Extinction of Cankers (*āsvakkhayañāna*) in him.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, it can be said that meditation is an essential part of the Buddhist practice leading towards Nibbānic realization. The Buddha realized, in the process of his early practice of self-mortification, the uselessness of external practices. Purificatory rituals are external and cannot do anything regarding the removal of mental taints. Only the practice of meditation, insight going beyond calming, can remove all banes without residue and ensure Nibbāna.

¹ Radhakrishnan, S., *The Principal Upanishads*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1969, p. 117.

² “*Kiṃ te jaṭāhi dummedha kiṃ te aṇinasātiyā abbhantaraṃ te gahanaṃ bāhiraṃ parimajjasi.*” *Dhammapada*, 394

³ It was the Sāṃkhya School of philosophy that developed the system of Yoga practices (Vajiranana, Paravaheera, *Buddhist Meditation*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1975, p. 1).

⁴ Majjhima Nikāya, Vol. I. p. 163ff

⁵ "kiṃ te jaṭāhi dummedhā, kiṃ te aḷinasāṭṭiyā abbhantaram te gahaṇaṃ bāhiraṃ parimajjasi." Dhammapada, 394

This practice may be similar to Yogic practice of meditation systematized by Patañjali.

⁶ "Idha bjikkhave ekacco samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā ātappaṃ anvāya padhānaṃ anvāya amuyogaṃ anvāya appamādaṃ anvāya sammā mansikāraṃ anvāya tathārūpaṃ cetosamādhiṃ phusati, yathā samāhite citte anekavihiṭaṃ pubbenivāsaṃ anussarati." *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. I. p. 15

⁷ See the first thirteen discourses of the *Dīgha Nikāya* for a detailed description of the Buddhist practice of meditation.

⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya*, Vol. I. pp. 479-480

⁹ *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Vol. V. p. 94

¹⁰ *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Vol. I. p. 13

¹¹ *Visuddhimagga*, p. 1, 4; *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Vol. I. p.13

¹² *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. I. pgs 63-69. (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, and *Brahmajāla Sutta*)

¹³ *Pānātipātāṃ pahāya pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti nihitadaṇḍo nihiṭasattho lajjī dayāpanno sabbapāṇabhutesu hitānukampī viharati mettāsahagatena cetasā.*

Dīgha Nikāya, Vol. I. p.63

¹⁴ *Visuddhimagga*, p. 10

¹⁵ *Visuddhimagga*, p. 11 and pages 16-31

¹⁶ See next for an elaboration of this and the next three.

¹⁷ *Catubhāṇavāra Pāli* (Sinhala edition), p. 15

¹⁸ The importance of a "good friend" (*kalyāṇamitta*) is emphasized by the Buddha in the practice of Noble Eightfold Path. *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Vol. I. p.88

¹⁹ *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. I. p. 73 (*Sāmaññaphala sutta*)

²⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. I. p. 71

²¹ *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. I. p. 71

²² *Anguttara Nikāya*, Vol. I. p. 233

²³ *Visuddhimagga*, ps. 170-310

²⁴ Vajiranana, Paravahera, *Buddhist Meditation*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1975, p. 66

²⁵ *Visuddhimagga*, ps. 169-170 Buddhaghosa explains how to develop a *Fifth Jhāna* in his *Visuddhimagga Dhammasaṅgini*, 160-175

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