

Introduction

The word *samatha* means ‘calm’ or ‘tranquil,’ but the term generally refers to the actual methods of generating tranquillity and of developing a deeply concentrated mind. The purpose of *samatha* is to attain the meditative absorptions (*jhāna*).^{*} In *samatha* practice one fixes one’s mind on an object (*ārammaṇa*) until the mind is one-pointed, which in Pali is called *samādhi* (concentration). When concentration is properly established the mind enters one of the *jhānas*. In the four fine-material *jhānas* (*rūpa-jhāna* or simply *jhāna*) one uses aspects of materiality as the object of attention. More refined than these are the four formless *jhānas* (*arūpa-jhāna*), in which one uses immaterial objects as the object of attention. Together these *jhānas* are called the eight ‘attainments’ (*samāpatti*).

^{*}*jhāna*: meditative absorption; concentrative absorption. See Appendix 1.

In *jhāna* the mind is happy, peaceful and bright; there is no dullness or disturbance; the mind is free from the hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*).[†] For the duration of *jhāna*, one is said to be free from the mental defilements (*kilesa*). The defilements return, however, when one exits *jhāna*. The terms ‘cessation as suppression’ (*vikkhambhana-nirodha*) and ‘liberation as suppression’ (*vikkhambhana-vimutti*) are used for this suppression of defilement by concentration. Possible fruits of *jhāna* are the five special powers (*abhiññā*): psychic power, telepathy, recollection of past lives, divine ear, and divine eye.[‡]

[†] The five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*): sensual desire (*kāma-chanda*), ill-will (*byāpāda*), sloth & torpor (*thīna-middha*), restlessness & worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*).

[‡] The term *abhiññā* is used in different contexts. In general it means ‘higher knowledge,’ ‘supreme knowledge.’ There are six kinds of supreme knowledge. The first five (listed above) are mundane forms of knowledge; the sixth kind—knowledge of the destruction of the taints (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*)—is transcendent. In this chapter, when referring to the first five kinds I use the terms ‘special power,’ ‘supernormal power,’ ‘supreme power,’ or ‘higher psychic attainments; in reference to all six kinds I use the terms ‘supreme knowledge,’ ‘supreme attainment,’ or ‘direct knowledge.’

The word *samatha* often refers specifically to concentration (*samādhi*). Equating *samatha* with *samādhi* is in accord with both the Abhidhamma and the suttas, for no matter which special powers or attainments a person reaches, the essence of tranquillity meditation is concentration.¹ {427}

Vipassanā means ‘clear insight.’ The term also refers to methods of cultivating wisdom in order to see the truth, to see things clearly as they are, not as one

¹ The Abhidhamma, e.g.: Dhs. 61, 64, 68. The suttas, e.g.: A. I. 61 (explained at AA. II. 119). At A. III. 373, in reference to the five spiritual faculties (*indriya*), *samatha* replaces *samādhi*, and *vipassanā* replaces *paññā*.

imagines them to be with a vision distorted by desire and aversion. This insight deepens until ignorance and attachment are uprooted, at which point one's impressions, perceptions and attitudes are transformed.

The knowledge that gradually increases during this practice of insight is called *ñāṇa*, of which there are many levels. The final and highest knowledge is called *vijjā*, which completely eradicates ignorance. A mind endowed with such knowledge is joyous, peaceful and free. It escapes the clutches of defilements, which corrupt people's thoughts and actions. An awakened person is not afflicted by defilements and need not struggle against them. This knowledge is the aim of insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and it leads to true and lasting liberation. This absolute liberation is called 'cessation as severance' (*samuccheda-nirodha*) or 'liberation as severance' (*samuccheda-vimutti*).²

The goal of tranquillity meditation is *jhāna*; the goal of insight meditation is *ñāṇa*.³ People can practise solely *samatha* meditation, wishing to enjoy the fruits of such practice: the *jhānas* and the supreme powers (*abhiññā*). They may stop here, not concerning themselves with insight meditation and the development of wisdom. But a person practising insight meditation must rely on some level of concentration. They may attain *jhāna* first and use *jhāna* as a basis for insight, they may practise insight first and then tranquillity, or they may practise both forms of meditation simultaneously. Those who are called 'practitioners of pure insight' (*suddha-vipassanā-yānika*) do not practise tranquillity in a 'direct' or 'exclusive' way—they do not attain *jhāna* before developing insight—but they still depend on tranquillity in a broad sense: they still depend on concentration. The initial concentration of someone practising insight may be 'temporary' (*khaṇika-samādhi*). But at the point of attaining path and fruit (*magga-phala*), concentration is firmly established ('attainment concentration'—*appanā-samādhi*), reaching at least the first *jhāna*.

However extraordinary the *jhānas* or psychic powers may be, if they result exclusively from tranquillity meditation they are still 'mundane': they lie within the domain of unawakened beings.⁴ Examples of such accomplishments are the psychic powers of Venerable Devadatta,⁵ the temporary emancipation of Venerable

² [Translator: *samuccheda*: 'cutting off,' 'destroying.']

³ Although *samatha* can lead to the five *abhiññā*, which are levels of *ñāṇa*, this attainment must be preceded by *jhāna*. The mind that is suitably endowed with *samādhi* then uses the power of *jhāna* to attain this next stage of knowledge. Strictly speaking, *samatha* ends at *jhāna*; it does not go beyond *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-ñāṇa* (see: *VismṬ*: *Paññābhāvanānisamsa-niddesa-vaṇṇanā*, *Nirodhasamāpatti-kathā-vaṇṇanā*).

⁴ E.g.: *Vism.* 370-72.

⁵ *Vin.* II. 184-5; *J.* IV. 200.

Godhika,⁶ and the stories in the texts of monks, rishis and laypeople who attained jhāna.⁷ {428}

Concentrative attainments and supernormal powers resulting from tranquillity meditation were accessible before the Buddha's time.⁸ Those individuals who achieved these attainments came from other religious traditions and preceded the Buddha, for example Ālāra Kālāma who reached the third formless jhāna and Uddaka Rāmaputta who attained the fourth formless jhāna.⁹ These attainments are not the goal of Buddhism since they do not bring about true deliverance from suffering and defilement. There were monks of other traditions who having attained the four jhānas maintained wrong view and claimed that abiding in these jhānas is equivalent to Nibbāna, a claim the Buddha repudiated.¹⁰

The true purpose of tranquillity meditation in Buddhism is to generate concentration to use as a basis for insight.¹¹ A cultivation of this insight supported by concentration leads to the final goal of Buddhism. Someone with the special quality of reaching this highest goal and being endowed with the exceptional fruits of tranquillity meditation will be admired and revered. But someone who has attained only the fruits of insight is still superior to someone who has attained jhānas and psychic powers yet remains unawakened. The concentration of non-returners who have not achieved the eight jhānas or the five supreme powers (*abhiññā*) is still considered 'complete.' It is secure and steadfast since no defilements exist to erode or disturb it. This is not true of those who attain jhāna or psychic powers but do not cultivate insight or attain path and fruit (*magga-phala*). Although their level of concentration may be exceptional, there is no guarantee of its stability. They are still susceptible to being overwhelmed by defilement. Even the

⁶ S. I. 120-21.

⁷ E.g.: Vism. 689; J. II. 274; SnA. I. 70; [1/87].

⁸ MA. IV 165.

⁹ M. I. 164-6, 240.

¹⁰ D. I. 36-7.

¹¹ The supreme concentration is that which aids wisdom in dispelling the defilements and facilitates awakening. Technically speaking it is a factor in the Path (*magga-samādhi*). This concentration has a special name: *ānantarika-samādhi* (also spelled *anantarika*, *anantariya* or *ānantariya*), translated as 'following immediately'—it produces immediate *ariya-phala*, without interference. The Buddha said this concentration is peerless (Kh. 4; Sn. 40). Even if this concentration is of a lower level, it is still superior to other forms of fine-material and immaterial jhānas. (KhA. 182; SnA. I. 277). *Ānantarika-samādhi* is mentioned in other contexts, both in the Canon and the commentaries; see: D. III. 273; A. II. 150; Ps1. 2, 94; DA. III. 1056; AA. III. 139; PsA. I. 37; VismṬ.: *Ñāṇadassanavisuddhi-niddesa-vaṇṇanā*, *Sotāpannapuggala-kathā-vaṇṇanā*; ThīgA. 99.

concentration of stream-enterers and once-returners can be disturbed and weakened by sensual lust. Their *samādhi* is therefore still considered ‘incomplete.’¹²

This subject of calm and insight is connected to the deliverance by wisdom and deliverance of mind discussed below.

¹² Non-returners have ‘complete’ *samādhi*, e.g.: A. I. 232; A. IV. 380; cf. Vism. 704; VismT.: Paññābhāvanānisaṃsa-niddesa-vaṇṇanā, Nirodhasamāpatti-kathā-vaṇṇanā. The Abhidhamma states that after death non-returners reappear in the Pure Abodes (Suddhāvāsā) and classifies the Pure Abodes as a realm of the fourth jhāna (Vbh. 425; Comp.: Vīthimuttaparicchedo, Kammacatukkaṃ; Comp.: Vīthimutta-paricchedo, Bhūmicatukkaṃ). CompT.: Vīthimuttapariccheda-vaṇṇanā, Kammacatukka-vaṇṇanā, however, explains that non-returners will appear in a realm corresponding to their particular level of jhāna; the only fixed rule is that the Pure Abodes are exclusively for non-returners. This raises the doubt as to how the non-returners (e.g. those mentioned at Vism. 702 and VismT.: Paññābhāvanānisaṃsa-niddesa-vaṇṇanā, Nirodhasamāpatti-kathā-vaṇṇanā) who are pure insight practitioners (*suddha-vipassanā-yānika* or *sukkha-vipassaka*) and do not attain the fourth jhāna can appear in the Pure Abodes. The Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha Tīkā responds to this doubt by saying: *Although those non-returners are pure insight practitioners, at the time of death they invariably generate the attainments (samāpatti) because they have developed concentration completely* (CompT.: Vīthimuttapariccheda-vaṇṇanā, Kammacatukka-vaṇṇanā). In any case, suttas of the Pali Canon confirm that non-returners who have reached any of the first four jhānas all reappear in the Pure Abodes (A. II. 128, 130). Here too the commentaries explain that these non-returners attain the fourth jhāna before reappearing in the Pure Abodes (AA. III. 126).