

AN AWARENESS OF THE PRGMATIC SENSE OF BHĀVANĀ: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Misinterpretations and misconceptions regarding ‘bhāvanā’ prevail among many people in the contemporary society. The word ‘meditation’ is a very poor substitute for the original term bhāvana which means mind development. According to the Early Buddhist discourses, bhāvanā, in its pragmatic sense as a whole, is arising, association, application and development of wholesome thoughts (kusalacitta). Hence, this research article exposes in analysis the central and overall theme of bhāvanā in order to dispel its misconceptions for a practical initiation of mental development in quotidian life.

Introduction

Prior to engagement in Buddhist meditation, it is of utmost significance to clarify Buddhist meditation in its true aspect as reflected in Theravāda Buddhism since multifarious misconceptions and misinterpretations of meditation even with regard to the term ‘meditation’ prevail in the contemporary society.

According to the etymology, the English word ‘meditate’ is derived from Latin *meditat* ‘contemplate’, from the verb *meditari* from a base meaning ‘measure’; related to ‘mete’ – mid 16th Century.¹ Encyclopedia of Buddhism also shows that the English word meditate is derived from the Latin *meditari* which connotes deep, continued reflection of a concentrated dwelling in thought. It further mentions that the Oxford English Dictionary defines the word meditation thus, “Continuous thought or musing upon one subject or series of subjects; serious and sustained reflection or mental contemplation”²

The English word for the Pāli word *bhāvanā* is “meditation”. The definition of the word “meditation” given in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary indicates, “The

¹Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, New 8thed.

²Malasekara, G.P., (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. VI. 1996. p. 660.

practice of thinking deeply in silence especially for religious reasons or in order to make your mind calm”³ The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary says that meditation is the act of giving one’s attention to only one thing, either as a religious activity or as a way of becoming calm and relaxed.⁴

According to the New Encyclopaedia Britannica defines meditation thus, “meditation, Buddhist, the practice of mental concentration leading ultimately through a succession of stages to the final goal of spiritual freedom, Nirvāna. Meditation occupies a central place in Buddhism and combines in its highest stages the discipline of progressively increased introversion with the insight brought about by wisdom.”⁵

The definitions given to the English term ‘Meditation’ are different and not unanimous. Prof. P.D. Premasiri says that the above connotations of the English word for meditation are compatible with the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.⁶ As a whole, the English translation for ‘*bhāvanā*’ is ‘meditation’⁷ which means concentration of mind. Although concentration is an integral characteristic of *bhāvanā*, the English word “meditation” does not adequately convey the wider and deeper meaning of the Pāli term ‘*bhāvanā*.’ He further says in this regard, “The English term ‘meditation’ is often used with reference to Buddhism as the equivalent of the Pali term *bhāvanā*. Therefore, in any discussion of Buddhist meditation it is considered appropriate to clarify the Buddhist concept of *bhāvanā*. It is important to point out some significant differences between the connotations of the English term ‘meditation’ and the Buddhist term *bhāvanā* in order to clarify the unique features of the Buddhist theory and practice of mental culture. Despite the widespread belief that meditation and *bhāvanā* are the same, from the Buddhist point of view, meditation is rather a partial requisite of *bhāvanā* than its exact equivalent. Most contemporary writers on Buddhist meditation, however, do not recognize any such distinction. Greater clarity regarding this issue can be gained by a closer examination of the family of Buddhist concepts usually associated with the Buddhist theory of mental culture, placing it in the context of the general Indian contemplative traditions of mental or spiritual development.”⁸

According to Ven. Walpola Rahula, “The word meditation is a very poor substitute for the original term *bhāvana*, which means ‘culture’ or ‘development’, i.e., mental culture or mental development. The Buddhist term *bhāvanā*, properly speaking, is mental culture in the full sense of the term. It aims at cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as lustful desires, hatred, ill-will, indolence, worries and restlessness, skeptical doubts, and cultivating such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will, energy, the analytical faculty, confidence, joy, tranquility, leading finally to the attainment of highest

³Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, New 8thed.

⁴Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Third ed.

⁵ Benton, Helen Hemingway, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. VI. 15th ed. 1973 – 1974, p. 750.

⁶Malasekara, G.P., (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. VI. 1996. p. 660.

⁷Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Seventh ed. p. 954.

⁸Malasekara, G.P., (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. VI. 1996, p. 660.

wisdom which sees the nature of things as they are, and realizes the Ultimate Truth, Nirvāṇa.”⁹

The Pāli word ‘*bhāvanā*’ connotes in a nutshell mental development or mental culture. The Buddhist Dictionary - Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines by Ven. Nyanatiloka defines ‘*bhāvanā*’ as “mental development.”¹⁰ The PTS Pāli –English Dictionary by Rhys Davids says *bhāvanā* means “producing, dwelling on something, putting one’s thoughts to, application, developing by means of thought or meditation, cultivation by mind, culture.” A Glossary of Pali and Buddhist Terms edited by John T. Bullitt defines *bhāvanā* as “Mental cultivation or development; meditation.” According to “A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism” by Christmas Humphreys, “*bhāvanā* means a ‘making-to-become’, self-development by any means, but especially by the method of mind-control, concentration and meditation”¹¹ Encyclopedia of Religion mentions, “Meditation is usually rumination on a particular religious subject, while contemplation is a direct intuitive seeing using spiritual faculties beyond discursive thought and ratiocination.”¹²

The book, Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice by Ven. Paravahera Vajirañāna Mahāthera indicates *bhāvanā* means “cultivation” or “development” of mind.¹³ “Meditation by means of mind development is called “*bhāvanā*.” Unlike other technical terms, “*bhāvanā*” is used to denote only the practical methods of mental training. It embraces in its vast connotation the whole system, together with the practices that have been developed from it.”¹⁴ “From the commentarial definitions and its use in the Canon, it can be seen that the word “*bhāvanā*” has a meaning that is stronger and more active than that of the English word meditation. The word has various renderings, such as “producing”, “acquiring”, “mastering”, “developing”, “cultivating”, “reflection”, and “meditation”¹⁵ Godwin Samararatne, a veteran meditation teacher at the Nilambe Meditation Centre, says in a talk on ‘Why We Should Meditate’ on 6th October, 1997 that the word meditation translates the Pali word *bhāvanā* which means cultivating the mind, developing the mind, mental culture. He also cites the idea of meditation expressed by a writer in these terms: Knowing the mind, shaping the mind, and freeing the mind.

As Prof. P. D. Premasiri emphasizes; “The term *bhāvanā* has a wider connotation than meditation and signifies all aspects of personality development or cultivation. The development or cultivation envisaged is not confined to the development of the mind or the intellect, but to all aspects of personality development including speech and bodily actions. *Bhāvanā* involves an active, willful, and deliberate exercise that seeks to alter the unreflective and mechanical flow of mental, verbal and bodily behaviour. According to the Buddhist theory of human behaviour, causal inter-connections can be observed between the mental, verbal and bodily processes of personality. Inner mental states and processes

⁹Rahula, Walpola, *What The Buddha Taught*, ed. 2006, Buddhist Cultural Centre. p. 68.

¹⁰Nyanatiloka, Buddhist Dictionary, Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines, 1988, BPS. p. 67.

¹¹ Humphreys, Christmas, *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*. Buddhist Society. London, revised ed. p. 25.

¹² Simon & Schuster, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol.9. Macmillan. New York. 1995, p. 325.

¹³Vajirañāna Mahāthera, Paravahera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, BMS. Third ed. p. 21.

¹⁴Op. cit. p. 25.

¹⁵Op. cit. p. 26.

determine overt verbal and bodily activity and overt bodily and verbal activity in turn condition inner mental states and processes. ¹⁶”

ArahantNāgasenaThera explains the characteristics of meditation to king Milinda by means of illustrations and citations from the Buddha thus;“Being the leader, O king. All good qualities have meditation as their chief, they incline to it, lead up towards it, are as so many slopes up the side of the mountain of meditation.”“As all the rafters of the roof of a house, O king, go up to the apex, slope towards it, are joined on together at it, and the apex is acknowledged to be the top of all; so is the habit of meditation in its relation to other good qualities.” ¹⁷“It is like a king, your Majesty, when he goes down to battle with his army in its fourfold array. The whole army – elephants, cavalry, warchariots, and bowmen – would have him as their chief, their lines would incline towards him, lead up to him, they would be so many mountain slopes, one above another, with him as their summit, round him they would all be ranged. And it has been said, O king, by the Blessed One: “Cultivate in yourself, O Bhikkhus, the habit of meditation. He who is established therein knows things as they really are.”¹⁸

The Seeker’s Glossary of Buddhism says,“The Western reader is liable to misunderstand what the Buddhist means by meditation, and to imagine that it implies a ‘relaxed’ or ‘inactive’ state. But in the Buddhist view, meditation is an activity in which one is engaged in subduing discursive thought, destroying or discouraging unwholesome mental states, and initiating or nourishing wholesome mental states.”¹⁹

The MahānidānaSutta²⁰ says that all the actions of person are based on mind. Development of mind is the development of person. According to the MahātaṇhāsankyaSutta,²¹ a conclusion can be drawn that meditation is the development of mind through the destruction of craving. According to the Suttas like Sāmaññaphala²², Mahāli²³ of the DīghaNikāya, Sabbāsava²⁴Kandaraka²⁵, Ariyapariyesana²⁶, Atthakanāgara²⁷, JhānaSaṃyuttaya of the SaṃyuttaNikāya, the Mahā-SatipaṭṭhānaSutta²⁸ and the SatipaṭṭhānaSutta²⁹, also Dhammasaṅgani and Vibhaṅga of the AbhidhammaPiṭaka and Commentaries like Visuddhimagga, Atthasālinī, the basic meaning of *bhāvanā*, as a whole, can be rendered as **the development of spiritual qualities or wholesome potentialities or development of wholesome doctrines**

¹⁶Malasekara, G.P., (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. VI. 1996, p. 661.

¹⁷Davids, Rhys, T.W., *Questions of King Milinda, Book II*. Ch. I. Oxford: The Clarendon Press. 1890, p. 116.

¹⁸Davids, Rhys, T.W., *Questions of King Milinda, Book II*. Ch. I. Oxford: The Clarendon Press. 1890, p. 117.

¹⁹ The Van Hien Study Group, *The Seeker’s Glossary of Buddhism*, Third ed. 2003, pp. 418 – 419.

²⁰The Long Discourses of the Buddha (DN), 15. Wisdom Publication, Boston. p. 223.

²¹The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN), 38. Buddhist Publication Society. p. 361.

²²The Dialogues of the Buddha (DN), 2. Vol. II. Pali Text Society. p. 66.

²³Op. cit. p. 198.

²⁴The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN), 2. Buddhist Publication Society. p. 96.

²⁵Op. cit. 51. p. 444.

²⁶Op. cit. 26. p. 260.

²⁷Op. cit. 52. p. 454.

²⁸The Long Discourses of the Buddha. 22. Wisdom Publication, Boston. p. 355.

²⁹The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN), 10. BPS. p. 145.

Bhāvetikusaladhammevaḍḍhetītibhāvanā.³⁰ According to the SabbāsavaSutta,³¹ *bhāvanā* means the development of spiritual qualities or wholesome potentialities (*sattabodhyaṅga*). *Bhāvanā* as defined in Suttas and Commentaries in its profundity is found only in the practice of Buddhism.

The sub-commentary, *AbhidhammāvatāraPurāṇaṭīkā* mentions “*Bhāvetikusaladhammeāsevativāḍḍhetītiyātibhāvanā*.” *Bhāvanā*, according to this statement, means development, association and application of wholesome doctrines. When taking all the above factors in a nut shell, *bhāvanā* means development of skillful qualities in the mind.

The form of meditation found in other religious traditions such as Brahmanism and Jainism is based on Eternalism (*Sāsvatavāda*) and Annihilationism (*Ucchedavāda*) respectively. In other words, the form of meditation or mental concentration in other religious philosophies is totally based either on Self–Indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*) or Self–mortification (*Attakilamatānuyoga*), the Two Extremes refused in the DhammacakkappavattanaSutta. The Buddhist Meditation is based on The Middle Path (*MajjhimāPaṭipadā*) which leads to self-enlightenment, the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Path of Moderation or *MajjhimāPaṭipadā* that avoids the Two Extremes is none other than The Noble Eightfold Path which constitutes The Threefold Training or The Three Groups (*TividhāSikkhā* or *TayoKhandhā*) Morality, Concentration and Wisdom (*Sīla, Samādhi, Paññā*). Hence, Buddhist meditation can be practised by a person who wishes to lessen worldly desires avoiding gratification in sense pleasures and by one who avoids fanatic ascetic practices or extreme asceticism. Buddhist meditation is mainly of two aspects: *Samādhi - bhāvanā* (*samatha –bhāvanā*) and *Vipassanā – bhāvanā* (*vidarsanā–bhāvanā*).

According to the Suttas like *Mahāparinibbāṇa*,³² *Gaṇakamoggallāna*,³³ *Cūlahatthipadopama*³⁴, *Rathavinīta*³⁵, *Sīla* or morality lays the foundation for both *samathabhāvanā* and *vipassanābhāvanā*. Thus, morality is the leading prerequisite for Buddhist meditation.

The **Right Mindfulness** and the **Right Effort** in the Noble Eightfold Path are the two main prerequisites that lay the foundation for the entire field of meditation common to both systems –*Samatha* and *Vipassanā*.

The *SāmaññaphalaSutta*³⁶ introduces the Threefold training with *Sīla* as the preliminary phase, the practice of *Samādhi* as the second and *Paññā* as the means of attaining ultimate release from *Āsavās* (mental taints). *Paññā* is developed by Insight. The *SabbāsavaSutta*³⁷ deals with seven ways of eradicating defilements that cause mental and physical problems. Among them, the first method is *dassanā* –understanding and the last method is ‘*bhāvanā*’. The highest stage of understanding is wisdom which is the realization of all the mental and physical phenomena.

³⁰ Galmangoda, Sumanapala, *BuddhaBhāvanākramaSahaManochikithsāva*, 2006, p. 17.

³¹ The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN), 2.BPS.p. 91.

³² The Long Discourses of the Buddha, 16. Wisdom Publication, Boston. p. 234./ DB, 16. PTS.p. 85.

³³ The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN), 107. BPS.p. 874.

³⁴ Op. cit. 27.p. 273.

³⁵ Op. cit. 24.p. 240.

³⁶ The Long Discourses the Buddha, 2. Wisdom Publication, Boston. p. 99 – 100.

³⁷ The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, 2.Buddhist Publication Society.p. 91.

Ascetic Gautama, before the attainment of the Buddhahood or Enlightenment, developed supra normal skills based on yogic practices. This type of meditation is known as *Samatha* because one's mind reaches supra normal states or *dhyāna* by calming down one's thoughts and by cultivating the power of concentration. Thus, *Samatha* meditation is derived from the pre-Buddhist practices. What actually led Ascetic Gautama to the Buddhahood was his own experimentation in meditation. This new meditation is known as *Vipassanā* which means insight or penetration into reality. It is through *Vipassanā* that one can attain *Nibbāna*, the goal of Buddhism. Even the one who has mastered *Samatha* does not attain *Nibbāna*; he has to develop *Vipassanā* in order to attain *Nibbāna*. An essential step of *Vipassanā* is *satipaṭṭhāna* (i.e. mindfulness or awareness). Through *satipaṭṭhāna*, the meditator becomes aware of the present moment of life, each and every movement of his or her physical and mental existence. That kind of awareness is essential to have penetrating insight into the physical and mental phenomena which encompass the whole world. Being aware of one's own feelings is traditionally known as *vedanānupassanāsatipaṭṭhāna*. When the process of feeling is seen clearly with *satipaṭṭhāna*, the feeler disappears. In the absence of the feeler, observant, or ego, the meditator becomes in touch with the flux of life or the stream of existence. Normally one does not notice details in one's activities. Only when one becomes mindful, one sees the minute details of one's activities. Similarly in being fully attentive, one can take note of all the movements taking place in daily living. A step beyond the physical movements is thought. The meditator begins to see his or her thoughts, he or she begins to recognize the rising, continuing, and the fall of each thought. Thus, characteristics like impermanence of the physical and mental entities become revealed to the meditator. Seeing these characteristics is *vipassanā*. This way *satipaṭṭhāna* leads to *vipassanā*. One's progress towards enlightenment depends on *vipassanā* meditation.

Two kinds of meditation designated in Buddhism are development of tranquility (*samatha* – *bhāvanā*), i.e. concentration (*samādhi*) and development of insight (*vipassanā* – *bhāvanā*), i.e. wisdom (*paññā*).³⁸ A sound knowledge of *samatha* and *vipassanā* is an essential prerequisite for successful initiation of Buddhist meditation with understanding. Ven. Walpola Rahula says, "There are two forms of meditation. One is the development of mental concentration (*samatha* or *samādhi*), of one-pointedness of mind (*cittakaggatā*, Skt. *cittaikāgratā*),.....He therefore discovered the other form of 'meditation' known as *vipassanā* (Skt. *vipaśyanā* or *vidarśanā*),"³⁹

Bhikkhu Bodhi in the introduction to the third edition of the translation of the Middle Length discourses of the Buddha (*Majjhima Nikāya*) says that the methods of meditation taught by the Buddha in the Pali Canon fall into two broad systems. One is the development of serenity (*samatha*), which aims at concentration (*samādhi*); the other is the development of insight (*vipassanā*), which aims at understanding or wisdom (*paññā*). According to the Buddhist system of mental training (*bhāvanā*), the role of serenity is subordinate to that of insight because insight is the crucial instrument to eradicate the ignorance.⁴⁰

³⁸Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary, Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, 1988, BPS. p. 67.

³⁹Rahula, Walpola, *What The Buddha Taught*, ed. 2006, BCC. p. 68.

⁴⁰The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha (MN).WP.p. 38.

In the DasuttaraSutta,⁴¹ Ven. Sāriputta says there are two states which are true dhammas, real phenomena which have to be developed. In Pāli, it is *dvedhammābhāvetabbā*, which is translated as “the two *dhammas* to be developed.” They are *samathacavipassanāca* – tranquility and insight. This development is called cultivation, *bhāvanā* for which we often use the term meditation. The MahāvaccagottaSuttasays that the two *dhammas* – tranquility and insight should be developed or cultivated. When these two *dhammas* – tranquility and insight are developed further, they will lead to the penetration of many elements.⁴² “*dvedhammāuttaribhāvitā– samathocavipassanāca – anekadhātupaṭivedhāyasamvattissanti*”.

Samādhi is derived from the root “*saṃ-ā-dhā*” which means ‘to put together’, ‘to concentrate.’ *Samatha* or *samādhībhāvanā* is the method of meditation that leads to a tranquility which is the concentrated, unshaken, peaceful state of mind in which mental agitation, wandering and distraction is absent. Ven. Nyatiloka mentions in his Buddhist Dictionary Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines that according to Sankhepavaṇṇanā, the Commentary to the Abhidhammatṭhasangaha, the concentration of mind bestows a favorable rebirth, present happy life and purity of mind devoid of the five mental defilements – the Five Hindrances (*pañcanīvaraṇa*).⁴³ Therefore, concentration is the obligatory basis and prerequisite for insight. He cites here, “May you develop concentration, O monks; for who is mentally concentrated, sees things according to reality. (S.XXII.5).”⁴⁴

Bhikkhu Bodhi says regarding serenity (*samatha*) thus, “The attainments possible through serenity meditation were known to Indian contemplatives long before the advent of the Buddha. The Buddha himself mastered the two highest stages under his early teachers but found that, on their own, they led to higher planes of rebirth, not to genuine enlightenment (MN 26.15 -16). However, because of the unification of mind induced by the practice of concentration contributes to clear understanding, the Buddha incorporated the techniques of serenity meditation and the resulting levels of absorption into his own system, treating them as a foundation and preparation for insight and as a “pleasant abiding here and now.”⁴⁵

According to Ven. WalpolaRahula, *samatha* or *samādhībhāvanā* is the development of mental concentration of one-pointedness of mind by various methods prescribed in the texts, leading up to the highest mystic states such as the Sphere of Nothingness or the Sphere of Neither-Perception-nor Non-Perception.⁴⁶ According to Ven. Narada, *samādhī* is one-pointedness of the mind. It is the concentration of the mind on a one object to entire exclusion of all else.⁴⁷ Tranquility meditation (*samathabhāvanā*) is the concentration of the tranquil and peaceful mind. It involves the very controlled or mindful action of holding the mind to an object, and does not allow the mind to wander. The mind remains completely still, like a stilled candle, neither flickering nor fluttering. This is the

⁴¹The Long Discourses of the Buddha (DN), 34.WP.p. 512.

⁴²The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha (MN),73. WP.p. 600.

⁴³Sensuous desire, ill-will, torpor and sloth, restlessness and mental worry and skeptical doubts.

⁴⁴Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary, Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, 1988, BPS. p. 68.

⁴⁵The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN).WP. p. 38 – 39.

⁴⁶Rahula, Walpola, *What The Buddha Taught*, ed. 2006, BCC. p. 68.

⁴⁷Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 2008, JaicoPublishing House. p. 519.

nature of tranquility meditation. When this happens, the mind becomes very peaceful and powerful because it is a concentration of pure states of mind.

Samathabhāvanā is based on the Right Concentration which is in its widest sense is the mental concentration present in every wholesome state of consciousness (*kusala-citta*), and this is the reason why The Path of Purification (*Visuddhimagga*) mentions it as *kusala-citta-ekaggatā*. The culmination of Right Concentration is the profitable unification of mind or one-pointedness of mind (*cittaekaggatā*) which is the agreement of consciousness and its concomitants in focusing evenly (*samaṃ*) and rightly (*sammā*) on a single object.⁴⁸ This state of mind is manifested as non-wavering, non-distraction and non-agitation, steadiness and steadfastness of mind or unscattered mentality which establishes inward tranquility or calmness.⁴⁹

The attainments reached by the practice of *samathabhāvanā* (serenity meditation) are the eight absorptions – the *jhānas* and the four immaterial states. *Samathabhāvanā* develops a concentrated and unified state of mind in which all the mental power is converged towards one point and concentrated on one object developing one-pointedness in mind. This helps to calm the mind, control and reduce the arising of mental impurities and to gain absorptions (*jhāna*), the high stages of concentration. When the mind is calmed and strengthened through *samatha*, there occurs certain mental purification which can influence the mind to attain certain psychic powers over natural phenomena. However, the attainment of calmness or tranquility of mind is not the ultimate realization. The tranquility of mind is a precondition or prerequisite for developing insight. For instance, the highest mental states like the Sphere of Nothingness or the Sphere of Neither-Perception-nor Non-Perception are mind created mystic states, conditioned states (*saṅkhata*), and they do not provide insight into the ultimate reality. As Ven. Walapola Rahula says, the Buddha considered these mystic mental states as ‘happy living’ in the existence (*diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra*) or ‘peaceful living’ (*sāntavihāra*).⁵⁰ Ven. Narada says in his book, “When the *Jhānas* are developed by temporarily inhibiting the Hindrances (*Nīvaraṇa*), the mind is so purified that it resembles a polished mirror, where everything is clearly reflected in true perspective. Still there is not complete freedom from unwholesome thoughts, for by concentration the evil tendencies are only temporary inhibited. They may rise to the surface at quite unexpected moments.”⁵¹

According to tradition, Prince Siddhārtha, at the age of five, entered the first *jhāna*. The ascetic Gotama practised attaining *jhānas* under the famous religious teachers in India. He practised *ĀkiṇcaññāyatanaCitta* and *Nevaśaṇṇā-n’asaṇṇāyatanaCitta* under Ālārakālāma and Uḍakārāmaputta respectively. These *jhānic* attainments were taken as permanent. Buddhism also accepted these *jhānic* attainments but not as the final permanent attainment. For instance, (i) *ĀkāśānañcāyatanaCitta*—the state of the infiniteness of space, (ii) *Viññāṇañcāyatana*—the state of limitlessness of consciousness, (iii)

⁴⁸The Path of Purification (*Visuddhimagga*), Ch. III. Para. 2 – 4. p. 83 – 85.

⁴⁹Vajirañāna Mahāthera, Paravahera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, Third ed. 1987, BMS. pp.17

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⁵⁰Rahula Walpola, *What The Buddha Taught*, ed. 2006, BCC. p. 68.

⁵¹Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 2008, Jaico Publishing House. p. 543.

Ākiñcaññāyatana—the state of voidness or nothingness and (iv) *Nevaśaññān’asaññāyatana*—the state of neither- perception-nor non-perception.

These *jhānas* or trances are not permanent. They change sooner or later therefore they are to be confirmed by insight—wisdom. Although these trances are impermanent, they are important to suppress desire (*rāga*). Insight or wisdom is used to eradicate ignorance (*avijjā*). *Nirodhasamāpatti* is the total eradication of perceptions and feelings. A detailed description is given in the *JhānaSutta*: “The ending of the mental fermentations depends on the first *jhāna*... the second *jhāna*... the third... the fourth... the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness. The ending of the mental fermentations depends on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.”⁵²

The *SubhūtiSutta* says that the Buddha praises a monk for practising *Jhāna*. Although the Buddha praises *jhānic* attainments, adherence to them as permanent attainments are rejected.⁵³ But they are accepted and recommended as the gradual path to the ultimate knowledge. For instance, *pādaka-jhāna*—foundation—forming absorption (as starting point) for higher spiritual powers (*abhiññā*) or for insight (*vipassanā*) leading to the supra mundane paths.⁵⁴

Both Tranquility meditation (*samathabhāvanā*) and Insight meditation (*vipassanābhāvanā*) develop one –pointedness of mind or absorption into its objects because both need to hold the mind its object for long periods to give it strength, to serve their purpose. But they are not exactly the same. The main aim of concentration meditation is to develop right concentration – concentration of the pure mind. As a result of this, deep states of concentration or absorption (*jhāna*) can be attained. When these are further developed, they can give rise to supernormal powers – like levitation, mind reading, recollection of past lives, and so forth. In the final stage, because of the powers of concentration, you will find rebirth in the Brahma realms. These realms are above the sensual heavens – very high and lofty forms of existence. In Insight Meditation or *vipassanā*, the concentration is used to develop understanding into the nature of the world, the nature of mind-body processes. Everything in the world is a mind-body process. And they are realized in their true nature as impermanent, suffering and non –self. When one finally transcends all these, the mind finds union with the absolute, the unchanging and the unconditioned, or as we say, the everlasting peace. Firstly, the aim is different. Secondly, the object is different. The object in *samatha* meditation is a concept conceived by mind. It is not real. It is something that is created by the mind. But in insight meditation, the object is real in the sense that it is a mind-body process. The mind does not think or conceive the reality. It is thereby the virtue of its existence.

Faculties concerned in concentration in *samatha* and *vipassanā* are also different. In tranquility meditation, the main faculty concerned is one –pointedness of concentration, with the support of mindfulness. Whereas in insight meditation, the main factor involved is mindfulness and the degree of energy or exertion of activities is much compared with tranquility meditation. Tranquility meditation itself is of many types, depending on what we concentrate on. For instance, when we concentrate on loving – kindness, you think of

⁵²The Book of Gradual Sayings (AN), Vol. IV. 9.36. PTS. p. 284.

⁵³Verses of Uplift (Udāna), 6.7 (71). London Geoffrey Cumberlege (Oxford University Press). p. 86.

⁵⁴Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary, Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, Fourth ed. 1988, BPS. p. 226.

the person in mind. The person or being is a concept. The person in your mind is a thought. Therefore, you concentrate on the person, which is a concept and you bring loving – kindness to the person. Another tranquility meditation object is visualization. For instance, *kasiṇas* are visualized circles. The light *kasiṇa* where you visualize is a circle of light. The mind created that circle and holds it there. Thus, the visualized circle in the mind is a mind –conceived, mind–thought –up or mind - created object. *Vipassanā* object is a reality – like “rising” and “falling”, an actual sensation or pain. You do not create it. It is there already in self although you may have to look for it. And as you become more aware of its nature, you will notice that it is not a still or static object. It is vibrant, dynamic, changing, arising and passing away. The more you are aware of it, the clearer the changing nature. It is different from the *samatha* object or visualization where the deeper you go the quieter and motionless the object becomes. The *vipassanā* object fluctuates because of the nature of impermanence. When it changes, the suffering and non-self-aspect also becomes very clear. *Vipassanā* concentration is to be continuously applied on the fluctuating object until insight arises. This insight is the realization with regard to the Three Universal Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*). Tranquility concentration is peaceful and powerful. It cannot lead to realization because the concentration developed does not lead there. It is easier to concentrate on a still object than a changing object. *Vipassanā* concentration is unique. It is not common. It is not easy to be developed because the object is of changing nature. The Role of Concentration in Meditation is that no deliberate effort is made to develop concentration in the process of *vipassanābhāvanā* (insight meditation) as the meditator’s attention is not confined to a single object but to the contemplation of the incessantly transient flow or flux of phenomena arising and passing away.⁵⁵ Therefore, the arising of concentration at the access level or absorption level is not possible in the practice of insight meditation. However, a spontaneous concentration existing concurrently with itself, scrutinizing with undistracted attention the ever-changing phenomenal process is produced in successive moments of contemplation. This type of concentration which unifies the mind with the contemplation is known as momentary concentration (*khaṇikasamādhi*) and this momentary spontaneous concentration enables the meditator to prevent the disturbances from the hindrances to the constant contemplation which allows the insight to arise. The access concentration helps the meditator of *samatha* to suppress the hindrances firstly and then to develop insight. The momentary concentration that eliminates the hindrances helps the meditator of *vipassanā* to contemplate the four foundations of mindfulness and awaken insight.

The doctrinal term *samatha* or *samādhi* means concentration, tranquility, serenity, calmness, or one-pointedness of mind (*cittaekaggatā*) and undistractedness (*avikkhepa*). It is the mental state of being firmly fixed. *Samādhi*: *Sam* + *ā* + *√ dhā* is the fixing of mind on a single object. Thus, *samatha* or *samādhi* is the unperturbed, peaceful and lucid state of mind attained by strong mental concentration. The doctrinal term *vipassanā* or *vidarsanā* refers to insight, wisdom (*paññā*), the light of wisdom that flashes forth realizing the truth of impermanence (*anicca*), the unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and the unsubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence (*anatta*). *Vipassanā*: viz. means the three characteristics of *nāma* and *rūpa* (mentality and corporeality) and *passanā* is the right understanding through deep concentration attained through the mindfulness of physical and

⁵⁵Gunaratana, Henepola, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*. MotilalBanarsidass, Reprint 2009, p. 45.

mental phenomena. Thus, insight leads to entrance into supramundane state of purity and to the final liberation. Bhikkhu Bodhi says that the task of insight meditation is to sever our attachments by enabling us to pierce through this net of conceptual projections in order to see things as they really are. To see things really are refers to see them in terms of the three characteristics – as impermanent, as painful or suffering, and as not self.⁵⁶

The purpose of the *samathabhāvanā* is the attainment of deep concentration such as *parikamma-samādhi* (preparatory concentration – this exists at the beginning of mental exercise), *upacāra-samādhi* (access or neighborhood concentration – this is the approaching concentration but not yet attaining the first absorption or *jhāna*), *appanā-samādhi* (absorption or attainment concentration – this is present during the absorptions). Thus, the prime purpose of tranquility meditation is to attain deep concentration.

The purpose of *vipassanābhāvanā* is the attainment of not only certain degree of concentration but also the understanding of bodily and mental process in their reality through mindfulness. Thus, the ultimate purpose of Insight meditation is to attain the cessation of all the suffering through the realization of the true nature of mental and physical process (*nāma* and *rūpa*). Prof. David J. Kalupahana says that the ultimate goal of insight (*paññā*) is freedom (*vimutti*).⁵⁷ The result of *samathabhāvanā* is the attainment of peace and happiness through deep concentration. Although *samatha* brings certain degree of peace and happiness, it does not enable the meditator to realize the true nature of physical and mental phenomena.

The result of *vipassanābhāvanā* is the attainment of cessation of suffering through the realization of body-mind process in the context of the three universal characteristics.

The difference between serenity meditation (*samathabhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*vipassanābhāvanā*) mentioned in the introduction to the third edition of the translation of the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (*Majjhima Nikāya*) by Bhikkhu Bodhi can be cited as follows; “Whereas in serenity meditation the meditator attempts to focus upon a single uniform object abstracted from actual experience, in insight meditation the endeavour is made to contemplate, from a position of detached observation, the ever-shifting flux of experience itself in order to penetrate through to the essential nature of bodily and mental phenomena.”⁵⁸ The *Vijjābhāgiya Sutta* shows in brief the result of *Samatha* and *Vipassanā*. The result of the development of tranquility or serenity (*samatha*) is development of the mind. The development of the mind leads to the abandonment of passion or lust. The result of the development of insight (*vipassanā*) is the development of wisdom or discernment. The development of wisdom leads to the abandonment of ignorance. A mind defiled by passion or lust is not liberated and wisdom or discernment defiled by ignorance is not developed. Thus, the fading away of passion or lust leads to liberation of mind and the fading away of ignorance is conducive to liberation of wisdom (discernment–release).⁵⁹ Thus, *Samatha* (serenity) and *Vipassanā* (insight) function together to uproot passion (*rāga*) and ignorance (*avijjā*).

⁵⁶ The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN), WP. p. 40.

⁵⁷ Kalupahana, David, J., *Buddhist Philosophy A Historical Analysis*, The University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu. 1977. p. 56.

⁵⁸ The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (MN), WP. p. 39.

⁵⁹ The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (AN), 2.31 (11). WP. p. 152.

The practice of *samathabhāvanā* is based on a single object. Attention or mindfulness is always focused on the object. When the mind wanders or gets distracted, it is not allowed to observe or indulge in the wandering or distracting object but the mind is brought back to the object of concentration meditation. *Vipassanābhāvanā* is based on a variety of objects of mental and physical processes. When the mind wanders or gets distracted during this meditation, it is not brought back to the primary object but lead to observe that object in its real nature. This process of observation goes on as long as that object exists in mind, and it is only after the disappearance of the object which is in focus that the mind is brought back to the primary object.

According the Vijja-bhagiyaSutta⁶⁰ the two qualities which have a share in clear knowing are Tranquility (*samatha*) and Insight (*vipassanā*). When tranquility is developed, the mind is developed, and when the mind is developed, passion is abandoned. When insight is developed, discernment is developed, and when discernment is developed, ignorance is abandoned. Defiled by passion, the mind is not released. Defiled by ignorance, discernment does not develop. Thus, from the fading of passion is there awareness-release. From the fading of ignorance is there discernment-release. Concentration meditation (*samathabhāvanā*) suppresses mental defilements that cause mental problems and unwholesome behavior. It is a requisite for meditation. Nevertheless, in concentration meditation, defilements remain dormant in mind. Insight meditation (*vipassanābhāvanā*) eradicates defilements uprooting them and leading to the ultimate goal of Buddhism – the realization of *Nibbāna*. However, *samatha* or *samādhi* lays the foundation for *vipassanā* or Insight meditation.

⁶⁰The Book of Gradual Sayings (AN), 2. 30.3. 10. PTS.p. 55.