



“The Difference Between Vipassana and Samatha”

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Abstract

Today, meditation (kammaṭṭhāna) has become a worldwide practice. Due to many people's interests, a lot of meditation centers appeared. People, regardless of religion, go to meditation centers. But the meditation practice has different intentions: For reduction of stress and to have a peaceful mind, or for liberation from the suffering of Saṃsāra and to attain path (magga), fruition (phala), and Nibbāna. The meaning of kammaṭṭhāna is the object of mental development or the process of mind practice. Kammaṭṭhāna is of two kinds: Samatha and vipassanā. Whoever wishes to follow should know the technique and differences between the two clearly, so that one will understand if one's practice belongs to Samatha or vipassanā.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Buddhist Theravada tradition, the teaching of meditation techniques consists of many forms of practice; however, all kinds of them are in general called “bhāvanā,” believed to be an ancient discipline according to the historical records. Hence, the term “bhāvanā” or mental development” can be found in many discourses of the *Suttanta Piṭaka* as well as the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. Mainly, it is used in the way of mental training. But on the other hand, the English meaning of the word “meditation” is an inferior substitute for the original term “bhāvanā,” which means “culture” or “development,” i.e., the mental culture or the mental development. Accordingly, the synonyms may be found in a massive number of sources of Buddhist texts as well as other commentaries, which is known as “kammaṭṭhāna” (the background

of mental exercises), as often used in the *Visuddhimagga*.

Concerning Buddhist meditation, it could be accurately said that it is the mental culture in the complete sense of the term, aimed at cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as lustful desires, hatred, ill-will, sloth, 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 wisdom which sees the nature of things as they are, and realizes the Ultimate Truth, *Nirvāna* or *Nibbāna*.

The Differences between Samatha-bhāvanā and Vipassanā-bhāvanā

In Theravada Buddhism, traditionally, there exist two forms of meditation practice, namely, the development of mental concentration (*Samatha-bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*). The first one is not considered essential, which has to be cultivated and developed as cognitive training, but it is necessary for beginning and background practice. Based on the Theravada Buddhist tradition, the last one is generally regarded as the fundamental technique to build up the highest level of mental training. However, both of them need to be taken into consideration to clarify and find out the concepts of differences between *Samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*. Meditation is a fundamental aspect of Buddhist teachings, covering three factors of the Eightfold Noble Path, [i.e., the right effort, the right mindfulness, and the right



concentration], which are essentially regarded as a foundation for developing, cultivating, and bringing about wisdom (*paññā*) together with levels of insight knowledge (*vipassanāñāṇa*).

Nevertheless, Buddhist meditation techniques consist of many different types practiced continually by Buddhist followers; it depends on a particular branch of Buddhism or even a specific master of meditation practice. Therefore, all these techniques fall into two main categories that are to say “tranquility or concentration meditation (*Samatha-bhāvanā*)” and insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*),” which are going to find out and do more research in detail for understanding and more comprehension based on the mental training or mental development respectively according to various sources arising in the canonical texts in the following items.

Samatha-bhāvanā (Tranquility Meditation)

“*Samatha*” means “tranquility,” which is the concentrated, unshaken, undefiled, and peaceful state of mind. It is called “calm” because it calms down the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), including passions. On the other hand, tranquility meditation is one of the Buddhist meditation systems called *Samatha-bhāvanā* in Pali. The term *Samatha* (tranquility or serenity) is a synonym of *samādhi* (concentration), *cittakkaggatā* (the one-pointedness of the mind), and *avikkhepa* (undistractedness). Whereas the term *samādhi* (concentration) is of many sorts and has various aspects, which aimed to cover it all would accomplish neither its intention nor its intention and would, besides, lead to distraction; so, we would confine ourselves to the kind intended here, calling profitable concentration unification of mind. On the other hand, the term *samādhi* should be clearly understood according to the Buddhist terminology: *samādhi* means “placing firmly together” (*sam-ā-dhā*) or “putting together” regarding the state of mind formed and the method used to induce that state. Etymologically, it means “one-pointedness of mind upon a single object” (*ekārammaṇecittassa ekaggatā*).

However, owing to the attained levels of tranquility meditation, there are three types of concentration, namely: (1) The momentary concentration (*khaṇika-samādhi*), (2) The access concentration or neighborhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*), and (3) The attainment concentration (*appanā-samādhi*), or the one-pointedness of the mind (*cittakkaggatā*), which will be discussed and given a detailed explanation respectively to its following items.

To touch on the theories and get more understanding based on tranquility meditation practice as mentioned in the *Vissuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa Thera, it is showed clearly a detailed exposition of the forty subjects of meditation known as *kammaṭṭhāna* (the exercise background for meditation practices). Here are all the forty types of meditation subjects for developing the “tranquility meditation or *Samatha-bhāvanā*” as mentioned in the Path of Purification (*Visuddhimagga*), consisting of seven divisions as follows: (1) Ten Kinds of Device (*kaṣiṇa*): (2) Ten Kinds of Foulness (*asubha*): (3) Ten Kinds of Recollection (*anusati*): (4) Four Divine Abidings (*brahmavihāra*) or four Unbounded States of the Mind (*appamaññā*) (5) Four Immaterial States (*arūpa-jhāna*) (6) One Perception: The perception of the loathsomeness of food (*āhārepaṭikūlasaññā*). (7) One Defining: The defining or analysis of the four elements (*catudhātu-vavatthāna*). *Samatha-bhāvanā* (tranquility meditation or calm meditation development) is systematically practiced by many traditions to free and calm one’s mind from mental impurities and inner obstacles, i.e., the five hindrances. It is used as a preparation for developing the concentration with greater penetration strength to bring about *vipassanābhāvanā* (insight meditation development); or to allow the work of mental cultivation step by step in terms of the sixteen levels of insight knowledge (*soḷasa-vipassanā-ñāṇa*).

Owing to the Buddhist theory of meditation, right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) as expounded by the Buddha for the first time in his inaugural sermon, the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*, the Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine, based on the Noble Eightfold Path is the doctrine called “*majjhimā-paṭipadā*” or the “middle way.” It is so called because it refers to the state of moderation, which avoids the two extremes— on the one hand, indulgence in sense pleasures and adherence to the way of practice in self-mortification. But, on the other hand, Right Concentration is impossible without purity of *sīla* (the moral code of conduct or morality), which gives rise to purity in deeds, speeches, and thoughts.

Therefore, to upgrade its levels, three principles of *sīla* or moral conduct, [i.e., the right speech (*Sammavaca*), the right action (*Sammakammanta*), and the right livelihood (*Sammaajiva*), are indispensable for the preparatory ground to doing meditation practice based on this training in terms of moral principles. Hence, in the way of Buddhist practices, one should



conduct himself with moral purity concerning the rules of the middle way leading to the ultimate success in Buddhist meditation practices. Therefore, the way of training in this method is a medium between the two extremes, avoiding other useless aspects leading to the fruitlessness of life, which cannot be followed by the worldly man who is not willing to reduce earthly conditions and sense desires. So, it is found in the formula of the right path, well accompanied and supported by other wisdom factors [that is, the right effort and the right mindfulness], which comprise the ability to give rise to ultimate results of right understanding in terms of the correct and fruitful practice in Buddhism.

***Vipassanā-bhāvanā*(Insight Meditation)**

Vipassanā, which means to see things as they really are, is one type of Buddhist meditation practice leading to the ultimate goal of Buddhism. It is simply called *vipassanā-bhāvanā* (insight meditation), which is synonymous with *vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna* (exercise of mental meditation of insight) and sometimes called mindfulness meditation, which is not rather than just stilling the mind, but also noting or observing it as it really arises.

Historically, *vipassanā*, rediscovered by the *Gotama* Buddha more than 2,500 years ago and regarded effectively as a universal remedy for curing man's mental ills, is the intuitive insight into the three characteristics of physical and mental phenomena: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self or no soul (*anatta*). *Vipassanā* is a powerful way of self-transformation through self-observation, which focuses on the deep interconnection between the mind and body, leading to the penetrative understanding by one's own experiences in meditation utilizing three characteristics of all material and mental phenomena of existence, and leading to entrance into the final goal of practice, that is to say: final liberation from the supermundane states towards the holiness of life. The way how to observe one's thoughts, feelings, or mind-objects through direct experiences by way of real practice, based on the right understanding according to meditation theories, which give rise to growth and development of mental levels in sight characterized by increased mindfulness, clear comprehension, self-control, and inner peace.

In a general sense, *vipassanā* practice can be used as one of the aspects of mental development – two types of Buddhist meditation, it is useful for us to live every daily life through

developing mindfulness and awareness of objects as they arise. This term can be found in various aspects of Buddhist meditation, particularly in the Theravada traditional practices concerning several discourses that appeared in *Pāli* Canon, the original Buddhist text.

In Theravada tradition, *vipassanā-bhāvanā* (insight meditation) is the Buddhist technique popularly practiced by many Buddhist followers basically included in the Four Noble Truths as well as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness as described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. This form is a simple technique that depends on direct experience and observation based on the contemplation of impermanence (*aniccānupassanā*), misery (*dukkhānupassanā*), impersonality (*anattānupassanā*), which will be put into my consideration in the following items. Furthermore, it also relates to the three types of training taught by the Buddha as the main principles of developing a spiritual path: devotion to morality (*sīla*) without an end in itself but required to develop the second part, the concentration of the mind (*samādhi*), and with this concentrated mind as background for the third training, i.e., wisdom or *paññā* in the context of related work has to be developed through close and attentive observation of the way of the mind and body from moment to moment as they really are.

In its experiential form, *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, or insight meditation, is comprised of experiential observation of the mind and matter (*nāma* and *rūpa*). It is applied to any Buddhist meditation to thoroughly understand the aspects of three characteristic marks, namely, *dukkha* (suffering or unsatisfactoriness), *anicca* (impermanence or changing), and *anattā* (not-self or no soul). Therefore, one can attentively and strenuously contemplate one of these natural aspects until he can clearly see and realize the truths as they really are in everything in the universe.

The fundamental principles of this way of practice are the immediate investigation of physical and mental phenomena as they are manifested in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, namely: (i) mindfulness as regards the body (*kāyānupassanā*), (ii) the mindfulness as regards the feelings or sensations (*vedanānupassanā*), (iii) The mindfulness as regards the mind (*cittānupassanā*), and (iv) The mindfulness as regards the mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*). These intrinsic phenomena are different from the five *khandhas* (aggregates) because the *citta*, and its mental factors (*cetasika*), are not connected to any aggregate, as it



is the basic mood of the mind and body aggregate. In contrast, the mind-objects encompass all the mental phenomena that are the fruits of *Kamma* (i.e., the *viññāṇa*, *saññā*, and *sankhāra* aggregates, and also all the mind-objects that are not a fruit of *Kamma*, for instance, the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*).

On the other hand, *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, or the insight meditation, consists of two related types, i.e., the first one, *vipassanā* meditation, is preceded by way of tranquility meditation (*Samatha-bhāvanā*), and the second one is the pure *vipassanā* meditation, which is not preceded by way of tranquility meditation. That means the first one is practiced by one with plenty of time to devote to their meditation, which needs as long as possible. Lastly, based on their satisfaction with their attainment of *jhāna* concentration or mental absorption, they can carry on *vipassanā* meditation directly.

Therefore, it can be called the last one as a pure *vipassanā* meditation which is practiced by those who do not have enough time to devote to their meditation practice; anyhow, one can spend his time on meditation dependent on his suitable situation, just like ten days of a *vipassanā* meditation retreat, and so forth. It is, of course, just ten days in *vipassanā* practice, not enough yet, however within a short period, one may succeed in any noticeable experience in his meditation utilizing *vipassanābhāvanā* (insight development), which can attain higher levels of insight knowledge through the realization of the body-mind processes and their true nature. So, with intensive and strenuous effort, one can get some new meditation experience as much as possible during a limited daily practice.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it has been indicated that the *dhamma* principles presented in it: the five aggregates, three general characteristics marks, three true intrinsic natures, the differences between tranquility and insight meditation, insight knowledge, and so on – are vital guidelines for Buddhist meditation practices. Hence, it may be considered an essential aspect of understanding the *Buddha-dhamma*, the teaching of the Buddha as taught in various discourses (*suttas*), in particular the *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* and its related references. To follow this guideline, if the practices are by the above *dhamma* principles and the guideline as presented due to the theoretical aspects of Buddhist meditation, of course. As a result, he or she will receive many benefits ranging from alleviating

physical and mental suffering momentarily in daily life. Moreover, based on a correct understanding of practical procedures, he or she will achieve more of a level of true happiness in life.

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