

RIGHT CONCENTRATION AND MENTAL WELL BEING

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IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT CONCENTRATION

Mental well-being is the most important factor to make the society peaceful, to cause the family happy and oneself comfortable. According to Buddhism, mental well-being can be attained and maintained for ever by practicing right concentration. The Buddha himself declares the meditation to be a kind of the mental well-being in this present life and the next.¹

Right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*), the final factor of the path means firmly establishing one-pointed attention of the mind (*cittassekaggatā* or *ekaggatā*)² or focusing the mind on a single mental object, not being scattered but stable and tranquil. The concentration of mind is carried out with unfailing effort. This concentration of mind which precedes the attainment of meditations (*jhāna*), according to the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*,³ is the result of a process of continuous development, starting with moral virtue (*sīlakkhandha*) and proceeding toward restraint of sense faculties (*indriyasamvara*) and mental and intellectual alertness (*satisampajañña*). This development enables the meditator to effect an inward purity and to cleanse his mind of the five obstacles or hindrances (*nīvarana*).

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1. A. IV. 453f; GS. IV. 298.

2. M. I. 301; MLS. I. 363; Trung I. 660.

3. D. I. 71; DB. I. 82; Trường I. 136.

To attain the four meditations, the first task is to detach the mind from sensual and unwholesome dispositions. This mentions the exclusion of the five hindrances (*pañca-nīvaranāni*).⁴ This is done by right mindfulness.⁵

When someone realizes that these five hindrances (*nīvarana*), which defile the mind and weaken the intellect,⁶ have been got rid of and are no more within him, then gladness (*pāmojjaṃ*) springs up⁷ and to gladness joy (*pīti*) arises. His state becomes at ease, then he is filled with a sense of peace (*passambhāti*), and in that peace his heart is stayed.⁸ At this moment, he, “aloof from sensuality, aloof from evil states, enters on the first trance, which is accompanied by thought directed and sustained, born of solitude, easeful and zestful, and abides therein.”⁹ Thus, his mind reaches a state of concentration called the first meditation, in which five hindrances are abandoned, and five meditation factors are possessed.¹⁰ The five meditation factors are initial application of thought (*vitakka*), sustained application of thought (*vicāra*), zest or joy (*pīti*), ease or rapture (*sukha*), and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) of mind.¹¹

Attaining the fourth meditation is considered as the attainment of the freedom of mind, which has neither pain nor pleasure.¹²

The rising from one meditation to another is denoted by the progressive exclusion of meditation factors as below:

1) First meditation comprises five elements, namely, initial application of thought (*vitakka*), sustained application of thought

4. Referring to the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaranāni*) the Buddha teaches that: “Monks, there are these five hindrances which cause blindness, loss of sight and ignorance; which obstruct insight, consort with pain and conduce not to Nibbāna.” See S. V. 97; KS. V. 81; Tāng V. 155.

5. D. II. 300; DB. II. 335; Trường II. 197.

6. M. I. 181.

7. The gladness arisen from putting away of the five hindrances is compared to freedom from debt, getting rid of disease, being out of jail, a free man, and secure. See D. I. 73; DB. I. 84; Trường I. 138.

8. D. I. 73; DB. I. 84; Trường I. 139.

9. S. V. 9; KS. V. 9; Tāng V. 21f. See also D. I. 73, II. 313; DB. I. 84, II. 345; Trường I. 139, II. 214.

10. M. I. 294; MLS. I. 354; Trung I. 646.

11. M. I. 294; MLS. I. 354; Trung I. 646. Vide also M. III. 25; MLS. III. 78; Trung III. 154.

12. M. I. 296; MLS. I. 357; Trung I. 650.

(*vicāra*), rapture or joy (*pīti*), bliss or happiness (*sukha*), and one-pointed attention (*ekaggatā*).

2) Second meditation (*dutiya-jhāna*) embraces joy (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*), and one-pointed attention (*ekaggatā*). Initial application of thought (*vitakka*) and sustained application of thought (*vicāra*) are eliminated.

3) Third meditation (*tatiya-jhāna*) involves happiness (*sukha*), and one-pointed attention (*ekaggatā*). The first three factors, initial application of thought (*vitakka*), sustained application of thought (*vicāra*) and rapture or joy (*pīti*) are absent.

4) Fourth meditation (*catuttha-jhāna*) includes indifference (*upekkhā*) and one-pointed attention (*ekaggatā*), and eliminates the four factors, namely, initial application of thought (*vitakka*), sustained application of thought (*vicāra*), rapture or joy (*pīti*) and bliss or happiness (*sukha*).

RIGHT CONCENTRATION AS CALM (*SAMATHA*) AND INSIGHT (*VIPASSANĀ*)

Concentration occupies the highest place since through concentration that enlightenment and *nibbāna* are attained. This method of concentration is based upon the Buddha's personal experience of mental development, and as it is reported he used it for his own attainment of enlightenment.

Concentration that is one-pointedness (*cittakaggatā*) of mind is divided into two inter-related systems, namely, calm (*samatha*), and insight (*vipassanā*).¹³ Calm (*samatha*) has the function of focussing the mind on one good object to exclude all others and bad ones and to calm the mind. Such a good object is known as one of the objects of the four foundations of mindfulness in right mindfulness, which also is called the distinguishing marks of concentration. The development of the calm (*samatha*) along with its cultivation is supported by the four right efforts.¹⁴ In this stage, it is clearly seen that the three factors

13. D. III. 273; DB. III. 251; Trường II. 655. The word *vipassanā* includes *vi+passanā*. The word *passati* is to see and the prefix 'vi' stands for special or particular.

14. M. I. 301; MLS. I. 363; Trung I. 660: The text mentions: "What is concentration, what are the distinguishing marks of concentration, what are the requisites for concentration, what is the

such as right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration operate in integrating each other.

It is clear to see that calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) occur simultaneously.¹⁵ They combine with each other to destroy all bad tendencies¹⁶ for calming the mind and to investigate every thing.

All this points out that calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) are not other than right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) and right view (*sammā-ditṭhi*) respectively, both cannot be separated. Without calm (*samatha*), no insight (*vipassanā*) can be developed. Without insight (*vipassanā*), no calm (*samatha*) can be developed.¹⁷ The combination of both in practice conduces to the freedom (*vimutti*), freedom of mind (*cetovimutti*) and freedom through insight (*paññāvimutti*).

CONCENTRATION ON EMPTINESS (*SUÑÑATĀ*)

Concentration on emptiness (*suññatā-samādhi*)¹⁸ is practised in various ways. The meditator sees that all things are void of self.¹⁹ They are non-self because of the words, “what is suffering, that is void of the self,”²⁰ and because of four reasons that are in the sense

development of concentration? Ñ Whatever is one-pointedness of mind, this is concentration; the four arousings of mindfulness are the distinguishing marks of concentration; the four right efforts are the requisites for concentration; whatever is the practice, the development, the increase of these very things, this is herein the development of concentration.”

15. M. III. 289; MLS. III. 338; Trung III. 646.

16. A. I. 100; GS. I. 85f; Tăng I. 179: The Buddha teaches: “Monks, for the full comprehension of lust... for the utter destruction, abandoning, ending, decay, fading out, giving up and renunciation... For the full comprehension of anger, delusion, hate, hypocrisy and spite, envy and grudging, deceit and treachery, obstinacy and impetuosity, pride and overweening pride, mental intoxication and negligence... two conditions must be cultivated. What two? Ñ Calm and insight.”

17. Dh. 372: “There is no concentration to him who lacks wisdom, nor is there wisdom to him who lacks concentration. In whom are both concentration and wisdom Ñ he, indeed, is in the presence of Nibbāna.

18. The term ‘emptiness’ (*suññatā*) also occurs in several passages of the Pāli canon. See M. III, 104ff; MLS. III, 147ff; Trung III, 291ff.

19. S. IV, 54; KS. IV, 29; Tương IV, 96: “Because the world is void of the self, or of what belongs to the self, therefore it is said “Void is the world.” Called the world is what is transitory by nature (S. IV, 53; KS. IV, 29; Tương IV, 95). See at S. IV. 296; KS. IV. 205; Tương IV. 465: “Void is this of self or of what pertains to self.” Vide also M. I. 297f; MLS. I. 358; Trung I, 652.

20. . III, 22; KS. III, 21; Tương III, 47.

of voidness, of having no owner-master, of having no overlord, and of opposing self.²¹ The meditator observes all this with perfect insight, he sees that nothing can be identified as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘my self’.²² Thus, concentration on emptiness is reflection on all worldly things that are of impermanence, of suffering in impermanence, of no self in suffering.²³

The meditator practises this concentration that is the wisdom faculty (*paññā-indriya*) is strong.²⁴ Then the worldly things present themselves to him in their true nature of emptiness, as being empty of self. Being filled with wisdom (*paññā*) and considering the things as non-self, he gains the faculty of wisdom, (*paññā-indriya*) and he is liberated by the void liberation (*suññata-vimokkha*).²⁵ Then he enters the path of Stream-winning (*sotāpattimagga*); at that moment he is called *Dhamma* Devotee (*Dhammānusāri*), one of the seven noble disciples. At the later higher stages of perfection, he is a Vision-Possessed One (*Diṭṭhippatta*). At the highest stage of perfection, he will be a Wisdom-Liberated One (*Paññā-vimutta*).²⁶

CONCENTRATION ON THE SIGNLESSNESS (*ANIMITTA-SAMĀDHI*)

Concentration on the signless is to contemplate that every object is impermanent,²⁷ subject to destruction,²⁸ because of its non-existence after having been. It is in the state of rise and fall,²⁹ of

21. PP.746, n. 3; TTD. III, 310.

22. S. III, 22; KS. III, 21; Tương III, 21: “What is void of the self, that is not mine, I am not it, it is not my self.” See also M. I, 139; MLS. I, 178; Trung I, 316f.

23. A. IV, 148; GS. IV, 102; Tăng III, 487.

24. PP.767, n. 31; TTD. III, 345.

25. S. IV. 296; KS. IV. 205; Tương IV. 465.

26. PP. xxi, 89, p. 774f; TTD. III, 358.

27. Buddhaghosa identifies the signless liberation with the contemplation of impermanence (PP. xxi, 73, p. 769; n. 34; TTD. III, 349).

28. D.II, 156; DB. II, 173; Trường I, 665: This is the Buddha’s last word: “Dacay is inherent in all component things. Work out your salvation with diligence.”

29. D. II, 144; DB. II, 159; Trường I, 649: The Buddha says to ānanda: “Have I not already, on former occasions, told you that it is in the very nature of all things most near and dear unto us that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves from them? How, then, ānanda, can this be possible-whereas anything whatever born, brought into being, and organized, contains within itself the inherent necessity of dissolution-how, then, can this be possible, that such a being should not be dissolved? No such condition can exist!” Vide also at M. I, 380; MLS. II, 45; Trung II, 96: “Whatever is of the nature to uprise, all that is of the nature to stop.”

change, of temporariness, and of denying permanence.³⁰

When whosoever has faith in considering all component things as impermanent,³¹ and pays no attention to any signs, abiding in the signless mental concentration (*animitto cetosamādhi*),³² such a one reaches the freedom of mind that is signless (*animitto cetovimokkha*).³³ Then all conditioned things present themselves to him in their true nature of dissolution. He attains the faculty of faith (*saddhindriya*), and he is liberated as he enters the path to Stream-winning (*sotāpattimagga*). At the moment of his entrance to the path to stream winning (*sotāpattimagga*), he is called a Faith-Devotee (*saddhānusāri*),³⁴ one of the seven noble disciples, and in the remaining seven stages of perfection, he is called Faith-Liberated (*saddhāvimutta*).³⁵

The signless mental concentration (*animitto cetosamādhi*) is a developed state of mind, reached through constant training of the mind (*bhāvanā*), in which all signs are eliminated. In this state of mind all mental obsessions are absent and the mind is inclined towards insight (*vipassanā*), seeing things in their true perspective (*yathābhūta-ñāna*).³⁶

CONCENTRATION ON THE DESIRELESSNESS (*APPANIHITA-SAMĀDHI*)

Concentration on the desireless (*appanihita-samādhi*) is to contemplate that every phenomenal existence is suffering (*dukkha*),³⁷ It is suffering for four reasons, which are in the sense of burning, of being hard to bear, of being the basis for pain, and of

30. PP. 746; TTD. III, 309f.

31. S. III, 225; KS. III, 177; Tāng III, 369.

32. A. IV, 78; GS. IV, 45; Tāng III, 385: A description is given of how Mahāmoggallāna entered on and abode in the signless mental concentration with the assistance of the Buddha.

33. M. I. 298; MLS. I. 359; Trung I, 652: "A monk, by paying no attention to any signs, entering on the concentration of mind that is signless, abides therein. This is called the freedom of mind that is signless." See also at S. IV. 296; KS. IV. 205; Tāng IV. 465f: "Without thought of all signs, reaches and abides in that tranquillity of heart that is signless."

34. S. III, 225; KS. III, 177; Tāng III, 369.

35. PP. xxi, 89, p. 774; TT D. III, 358.

36. EB. I. 676.

37. Buddhaghosa identifies the desireless liberation with the contemplation of pain (*dukkhānupassanā*: PP. xxi, 73, p. 769; n. 34; TTD. III, 349).

opposing pleasure.³⁸ It is suffering because “what is impermanent is suffering,”³⁹ It involves understanding all things that exist as giving rise to suffering, due to the conflict generated through their continually changing nature. If the emergence is from the painful, then he acquires the concentration faculty (*samādhi-indriya*) because he has great tranquillity, he is liberated by the desireless liberation (*appanīhitavimokkha*), and among holy ones, he is the Body-Witness (*Kāyasakkhī*). If he has a formless meditation (*arūpa-jhāna*) as the basis for his insight, he becomes the Both-way Liberated One (*Ubhatobhāgavimutta*).⁴⁰

From the above consideration, these three kinds of concentration can be understood as expressing the contemplations of the three characteristics (*tilakkhana*), namely, impermanence (*aniccatā*), suffering (*dukkhatā*) and non-self (*anattatā*). These are the three aspects of realisation of the true nature of all phenomena.⁴¹ This realisation thus never arises in separation; it always goes with each other, and they are also called the three gateways to liberation (*tīni vimokkhamukhāni*).⁴²

BENEFITS OF RIGHT CONCENTRATION

The practice and development of concentration brings about various benefits as below:

- i) Abidings in ease (*sukha*) here-now in the discipline for a noble person.⁴³ Meditations (*jhāna*) are of benefit not only prior to final attainment, as a foundation for insight, but maintain their benefit even afterwards as well. The Buddha himself declares the meditation to be a kind of *nibbāna* in this present life.⁴⁴
- ii) Knowing things as they really are and no grasping them.⁴⁵

38. PP. xxi, p. 746, note 3; TTD. III, 310.

39. S. III, 22; KS. III, 21; Tāng III, 47.

40. PP. xxi, 89, p. 774; TTD. III, 358.

41. S. III, 28; KS. III, 28; Tāng III, 59.

42. The three gateways to liberation are the gateway to void liberation, the gateway to signless liberation, and the gateway to desireless liberation. See PP.xxi, 66, p. 766 and 70, p. 768; TTD. III, p. 344, 347.

43. M. I. 40-42; MLS. I. 52f; Trung I. 98-100. See also S. III. 169; KS. III. 144; Tāng III. 300.

44. A. IV. 453f; GS. IV. 298; Tāng IV. 221.

45. S. III. 13-15; KS. III. 15f; Tāng III. 31-34.

This can solve the problem of life and its repeated cycle of birth and death, by the total annihilation of all greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*).

iii) Attaining knowledge of the modes of supernormal power (*iddhividhañāna*). From the fourth form meditation onward, the concentrated mind is “pure, translucent, cultured, devoid of evil, supple, ready to act, firm, and imperturbable.”⁴⁶ This is the basis for attaining various kinds of supernormal powers (*abhiññā*).⁴⁷ On the other hand, the Buddha says that he preaches only the teachings that are beneficial (*attha-samhita*), the foundation of a divine life (*ādi-brahmacariyaka*), and conduce to repulsion (*ekanta-nibbidā*), to cessation of desires (*nirodha*), to peace (*upasama*), to super-knowledge (*abhiññā*), to enlightenment (*sambodhi*), and *nibbāna*.⁴⁸

Among the kinds of supernormal knowledge (*abhiññā*), the last form of knowledge is the most important and essential. Wisdom (*paññā*) has the destruction of cankers (*āsavakkhaya*) as its object.⁴⁹ The attainment of the destruction of cankers (*āsava*) is considered to be freedom (*nibbāna*).

Abbreviations

- A. *Anguttara Nikāya*, 6 vols, ed. R. Morris, E. Hardy, C. A. F. Rhys Davids. (London: PTS, 1885-1910).
- D. *Dīgha Nikāya*, 3 vols, ed. T. W. Rhys David and J. E. Carpenter, (London: PTS, 1890-1911)
- DB *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part I-III, tr. from the Pāli of *the Dīgha Nikāya* by T.W. Rhys Davids and C.A.F. Rhys Davids. Part I (London: PTS, 1992, 1st Ed. 1899)); Part II, (London:

46. D. I. 76; DB. I. 86; Trường I. 142.

47. The development of meditation concentration provides for the meditators the benefits of various supernormal powers whenever he directs and inclines his mind to the kinds of supernormal power, hence the Buddha says: “With his mind subtle, pliant, boundless concentration is well made become; and with boundless concentration well made become, he bends the mind to the realization by psychic knowledge and acquires the ability of an eyewitness in every case, whatever the range may be.” See A. IV. 420; GS. IV. 283; Tăng IV. 172. Vide also M. III. 96; MLS. III. 136; Trung III. 278 and A. I. 254; GS. I. 233; Tăng I. 461.

48. D. III. 173; DB. III. 128; Trường II. 469. Vide also S. II. 223; KS. II. 151; Tăng II. 348.

49. D. III. 230; DB. III. 221; Trường II. 595.

PTS, 1989, 1st Ed. 1910); Part III, (London: PTS, 1995, 1st Ed. 1921).

Dhp. Dhammapada, ed. K. R. Norman and O.Von Hinuber. (London: PTS, 1931). Reference is to verse number.

Ed. Edition, Edited by.

GS. *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols., (translation of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*); vol. I-II, tr. by F.L. Woodward (London: PTS, 1989-92, 1st Ed. 1932-3); vol. III-V, tr. by E.M. Hare (London: PTS, 1988-94, 1st Ed. 1934-6).

KS. *The Book of the Kindred Sayings or Grouped Suttas*, 5 vols. (Translation of the *Samyutta Nikāya*); vol. I-II, tr. by Mrs. Rhys Davids, Assisted by Sūriyagoḍa Sumangala Thera and F.L. Woodward (London: PTS, 1993-4, 1st Ed. 1917-22); vols. III-V, tr. by F. L. Woodward, ed. by Mrs. Rhys Davids. (London: PTS, 1992-4, 1st Ed. 1925-30).

M. *Majjhima Nikāya*, 4 vols., ed. V. Trenckner, R. Chalmers, Mrs. Rhys Davids. (London: PTS, 1888-1925).

MLS. *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., (translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya*) by. I. B. Horner. (London: PTS, 1993-5, 1st Ed. 1954-9).

Pāli

PP. *The Path of Purification*, 2 vols. Tr. by Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Colombo: R. Semage, 1956).

PTS. Pāli Text Society.

S. *Samyutta Nikāya*, 5 vols, ed. L. Feùer and Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids (London: PTS, 1884-1925).

(S) Sanskrit.

Tāng A Vietnamese translation of *Aṅguttara Nikāya* by Most Ven. Thich Minh Chau.

Tr Translated.

TTD. *Thanh Tinh Dao*, (A Vietnamese Translation of the *Visuddhimagga*.) Tr. by Tri Hai, 3 vols., Pomona: Chua Phap Van, 1992.

Trung A Vietnamese translation of *Majjhima Nikāya* by Most Ven. Thich Minh Chau.

Trường. A Vietnamese translation of *Dīgha Nikāya* by Most Ven. Thich Minh Chau.

Tương A Vietnamese translation of *Samyutta Nikāya*) by Most Ven. Thich Minh Chau.