

THE WAY OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION*

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This is *the hard way*, painstakingly documented and analysed for those wise men who already “well established in virtue” undertake the right effort of the *further* “ennobling of consciousness and understanding” (SI 13):

“Just as a woman or a man, or a smart boy or girl, looking at the image of his own face in a *clean* and brilliant mirror or in a basin of clear water, if it had a mole on it, would know that it had, and if not, would know that it had not,—...so the bhikkhu in his mind—concentrated, *purified*, translucent, blameless, *free of moral obstruction*, supple, ready to act, firm and imperturbable—directs and bends down his mind to that knowledge which penetrates the heart...” (Sāmañña-phala-suttam, D 2)

“Clean—purified—free of *moral obstruction*”—consequently nothing for hippies and multipurpose technicians on shortcuts to Nibbāna.

Only a mind which by moral purification (*sīlam*) and mental concentration (*samādhi*) has reached the height of spiritual clarity and calm (*samatho*) in his progress along the noble (*ariyo*) eight-fold path of cultivation (*bhāvanā*) can attain that perfection of quiet water on whose surface the spontaneous and effortless reflection of existential qualities may appear undistorted, adequately, in their true being (*yathā-bhūtaṃ*).

The warning of Jesus that “pearls should not be thrown to swine” corresponds in Buddho’s more polite and rationally discursive explanation to the requirement of *selecting his disciples most carefully* among

“those sons of noble families who having trust in me have gone forth from home into the homeless life. Have they not found contentment in their *ascetic life*? ... To escape into this homeless state they have not been persecuted either by the king, or by brigands, or for debts, or by fear, or for being deprived of a livelihood ... (M 68)

—or, let us add, for trafficking in drugs, enslaved by the Mafia through addiction.

Ven. Kheminda Thera reminds us at the outset in clear terms of the essential statement that “there are two things that have to be developed in the course of Buddhist contemplation (*bhāvanā*): calm and serenity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*)”. (P. XI)

The author undertakes to demonstrate on the ground of a precise, extensive and widely *interconnected* documentation—avoiding any doubt of superficial and tendentious fragmentation of “some sayings of the Buddha” from primary and secondary (commentarial) texts—the

* Serenity and insight according to the Pali Canon—by Kheminda Thera, Vajirarama, Colombo 1980, xiv—66pp.

inseparability of these two essential components, pointing out not only the doctrinal and also *psychological impossibility* of their separation by merely verbal analysis of artificially detached fragments, but also the *organic danger of any attempt of such dislodging by vivisection*. The essential relation cannot be reduced either to an alternative or even to a dialectical "model" or "pattern" of thinking. It remains organically interwoven in a vitally essential sequence of a strictly determined structural development.

"The fruition of *samatha-bhāvanā* is the attainment of *samādhi*, concentration, a state of unification of mind...permeated by a sense of clarity and inward tranquility."

Samādhi is the eighth and the last attainment of Buddha's eightfold path and the summit of the fourth and ultimate noble truth of the entire and integral structure of his teaching. Its development "comes to fulfillment in *jhāna-samādhi*". (P. XI)

"The second thing to be developed is insight"—*vipassanā*—"known as *paññā* or wisdom."—"Vipassanā, however, does not arise in a void, but upon secure foundations in the absence of which there can be no genuine insight..."

The author's thesis, underscored clearly already in the Preface is:

"The outcome, to state our conclusion in advance, will be an insistence upon the importance, indeed the necessity, of *sammā-samādhi*, Right Concentration, in the form in which it is defined in the *suttas*—as the four *jhānas* for the successful completion of the contemplative process ...And the indispensable foundation for the development of insight, its *proximate cause* we will see, is *sammā-samādhi*..." (P. XII)—attainable only in the progressive development of *jhānas*.

"The gradual progress in the Dhamma follows a certain order...This sequence of stages..." is contained in "the most comprehensive formulation...of the Three Aggregates (*tayo khandhā*), also known as the Threefold Training (*tividha sikkhā*): the aggregate of Virtue (*sīlakkhandha*), the aggregate of Concentration (*samādhikkhandha*), and the aggregate of wisdom (*paññakkhandha*). All the more specific formulations of the path to deliverance—the Noble Eightfold Path, the Seven Purifications, the *Invariable Sequence*—are, as we shall see, included in these three groups..."

"True penetration of knowledge occurs not abruptly". (P. 1)

"A second formulation for the gradual training is the progression called the Seven Purifications. "According to the Rathavinātasuttam (M 24):

"...Purification of Virtue has for aim...Purification of Mind; Purification of Mind has for aim...Purification of View; Purification of View has for aim Purification of Transcending Doubt; Purification of Transcending Doubt has for aim...Purification

of knowledge and Vision of what is the Path and what is not the Path. (This purification) has for aim Purification of Knowledge and Vision of Practice;..." (P. 14)

It was necessary for the author to underscore it in particular that "in the Saṅgīpatthāna Sutta, too, provision is made for the abandonment of the five hindrances before the development of the four foundations of mindfulness". (P. 37)

Returning to the critical ailment "so typical of this age of speed and restlessness" (P. XII), the elitist and aristocratic character of Buddha's Noble Way of Liberation is singled out as an unavoidable prerequisite in such clear formulations by Buddha as e.g.:

(a) The transformation "from the state of the commoner (*putthujjana*) to that of the noble" character (*ariya-puggalo*). This process of transition is described in several *suttas*, quoted by the author, as "disenchantment-dispassion" (*nibbidā-virāge*) (P. 21). With "the attainment in strong insight, with immediate condition for the path of stream-entrance attainment, the yogi is called a *gotrabhū*, a changer-of-lineage" (P. 28), or more adequately, we might designate it as a biological change of *species* in his animal *genus*. But already "the sufficing condition of tender insight (*taruṇa vipassanā*) is nothing less than *jhāna*" (P. 22).

In many attempts, direct and indirect, to reduce the entire teaching of Buddha to a *putthujjano* level and thus to avoid even the ascetic seriousness of his First Noble Truth, even statistical methods have been applied in calculations of "semantic differentials" in order to prove that the word *sukhaṃ* occurs in Pāli *suttas* in a higher percentage of "instances." than the word *dukkhaṃ*.

But what does the positive attainment of that happiness or bliss mean in our serious contexts, and to what level of attainment is it essentially restricted?

"...we know from *sutta* passages and their commentaries that the expression 'Abiding in happiness here and now', is one of the descriptions in the four *jhānas*... 'abidings in happiness'... is an 'approximate synonym' for the form plane *jhānas*. The contemplators who sit having attained those (*jhānas*) experience the untarnished happiness of renunciation in this very life. Therefore they are called 'abiding in happiness here and now'" (M 6 quoted by Kheminda Thera on P. 43).

(b) To the question reminding us of the "modern" utilitarian concern with "the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number": "Will the whole world, or a half of it, or a third of it realise Nibbāna?" (A V 194-95), the only adequate (pre-Mahāyānist!) answer is that "the Tathāgata is concerned only with how Nibbāna is realised, and not with the question of how many realise it". (P. 34),—with the quality and not with the quantity of noble characters (*ariya-puggalā*).

Since the appearance of the first and the best voluminous manual of Buddhist meditation, the *Visuddhi-maggo* by Buddhaghosa (5th. c. A.) until our days of universal spiritual decadence, the following essential

and basic condition has often been repeated, quoted here in the statement of a recent author of the same school on the same subject:¹

“Thus we see that Virtue, Concentration and Wisdom (*sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*) are not isolated qualities, but integral parts of the Noble Eightfold Path which is also the Path of Meditation already outlined.”

In the actual crisis of psychiatric theories, confronted with the rapid spreading of narcomania, one of the best known representatives of the psychoanalyst trend, Erich Fromm, insisting on the central importance of such reintegration of the “total personality” (partly also under direct influence of Buddhist schools of meditation, both Zen and Theravāda trends) seems to have formulated our problem in still clearer Buddhist terms:

“In fact, happiness and unhappiness are expressions of the state of the entire organism, of the total personality.”²

This is the basic tenet of the whole *anti-technical* trend in the actual situation of psychological and psychiatrist theories.

Consequently, if a method of Buddhist meditation wishes to serve such therapeutic purposes, it is in the first place expected by psychiatrists of today *not to vivisect* any further its own primeval potentialities in disintegrating itself into practical “multi-purpose” tools and mechanisms, or even advertising its own “*anāntā-panacea*”. Scientific psychology of today expects from us a help in fundamental prerequisites of quieting and mastering the “monkey-mind” and its endless attempts of trouble-shooting in superficial behavioural attitudes and shallowness of “models” standardised in dictionary “meanings of words”, while we are confronted with deepest existential facts. The ideal of a “quiet mind” for which all their patients are groping, even when visiting quack *gurus* on their mass exodus to the East, is now more than ever expressible by the symbol of a clean mirror as the unique means of reflecting, without any stress and frustration, the world as it really is, *yathā-bhūtaṃ*. This symbol seems to have retained at least its sacred place until today in Zen and some Tibetan temples where the continuity of the oldest tradition of *jhānaṃ* has been preserved better than in some too “modern” attempts to revive the pressure of acute mental ailments short-cut fragments of the originally integral “threefold training”.

The corroboration of the integrity of the Noble Eightfold Path, culminating in *samādhi*, was never so evident as it is now in our “modern” world of *dukkhaṃ* where exactly due to discarding the *ethos of knowledge* a materialistic civilisation bereft of spiritual culture (*—bhāvanā*) has been brought to its own ruin.

1. *Buddhist Meditation—The Way to Inner Calm and Clarity*, by Piyadassi Thera, Vajjirarama, Colombo 1980.

2. Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, Holt, Rinehart and Winstone, New York 1966, p. 181. Cf. also D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm and Richard de Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, London 1960, repr. 1974; subsequently translated into Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish and Swedish.

Unfortunately, this valuable book of the Ven. Kheminda Thera, the same as a few others on an equivalent level (e.g. *Forest Dhamma*, A Selection of Talks on Buddhist Practice by Phra Mahā Boowa Nāṇasampanno, Bangkok 1973), has been published for free distribution only and thus excluded from the net of wider distribution by bookshops.

BOOK REVIEWS

Buddhist Studies in honour of walpola Rahula. Edited by Somaratna Balasooriya et al. Gordon Fraser (London) and Vimamsa (Sri Lanka) 1980. pp. 293+xiii, photo, £20.00

This excellently printed and bound book contains twenty-four contributions by an international range of Buddhist scholars. In this review we shall look at only those essays which centre upon Pali Buddhism. For the others, though interesting, we have no room here.

Out of the twenty-four, nine are directly related to Pali studies and each of these will be briefly reviewed.

Kamaleswar Bhattacharya in an article entitled "Diṭṭhaṃ Sutaṃ Mutam Viññātaṃ" (Seen, heard, sensed, known) quotes at first the Snake Simile Discourse of the Middling Collection on fields of view (*diṭṭhitthāna*) and the difference between the uninstructed ordinary person and the instructed Noble Disciple. No translation is given but an interested reader may consult Ven. Nyanaponika's excellent rendering in "The Wheel" series. The author comments about this passage as follows: "The first five theories about the Ātman/Attan, mentioned in this passage, concern an Ātman belonging to this world, while the sixth theory concerns an other-worldly Ātman which ignorant people aspire to attain after their death. All these theories are false because they make of the Ātman an 'object', while Ātman, the Absolute, the Being in itself, can never be an object. The wise people therefore reject them.⁴ This is clever jugglery. The Buddha taught about not identifying anything anywhere at all with self-soul.

Now *ātman* or *attan* in Sanskrit and Pali has the same sort of range of meanings as Self/self (plus soul) does in English. The Buddha is saying therefore that all *views* should be given up, and one of them is that there exists "Ātman, the Absolute, the Being in itself". Philosophers who cling to Ātman or Self-soul theories never seem to have considered *why* the words *ātman* and self which refer to attachment and self-identification, are also used metaphysically where their use is justified by saying that they are transcendental, or an aspect of God, and so on. They are still hanging on (*upādāna*) very firmly; this means that they are determined to get self, Self, SELF into the religious picture somewhere. Only the Buddha was forthright enough to show that however subtly conceived, the Ātman, Self is still an extension of one's very ordinary self. There is no way of transcending self like this, it is merely called refining self.