

C
294.3
XIA

The Place of Jhāna in the Buddhist Path to Liberation

By Li Hui Xia

(Ven. Kai Yi)



A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA SRI LANKA
IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN PALI AND BUDDHIST STUDIES

JANUARY 2009

648597

Abstract

One of the most important aspects of Buddhist meditation repeated in the scriptural texts of early Buddhism is a set of attainments called, the Jhānas in Pāli. The Jhānas were instrumental in the Buddha's own achievement of enlightenment. It is in the meditational practice developing Jhānic attainments is a key aspect that the Buddha formulated for his disciples. They appear in stages of the path preparatory to the cultivation of insight knowledge, leading to wisdom and liberation, finally as a spiritual endowment of the fully liberated man. It is the purpose of the present work to examine the Jhānas in order to determine their role in the Buddhist spiritual discipline.

The various subjects and methods of meditation expounded in the Theravāda Buddhist scriptures—the Pāli canon, its commentaries and subcommentaries—divide into two interrelated and interconnected systems. One is called the development of serenity (*samathabhāvanā*), the other the development of insight (*vipassanābhāvanā*). The former is also referred to as development of concentration (*samādhibhāvanā*), the latter the development of wisdom (*paññābhāvanā*). Of these two, the development of insight is considered in Buddhism as being paramount to wisdom liberation.

On the other hand, in the Theravāda practice of meditation there is no consensus among the practitioners regarding the role of Jhāna. This lack of consensus is also reflected in the texts. In my present study, I will bring out the released textual passages

to show this lack of consensus. Though this lack of consensus could be interpreted as a contradiction in the Theravāda Path, I will attempt to view it as that the Buddha has shown two paths: one with Jhānas and other without Jhānas. Whereas serenity meditation is recognized as common to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist contemplative disciplines, insight meditation is held to be the important discovery of the Buddha. Around these aspects, in my research I examined the details in each chapter.

In chapter I, a brief account of the religious background of Buddhism and the special features in the Buddhist Path described about the way to inner calm and clarity in the Buddha's life; pre-Buddhist meditation in ancient India; and the essential teaching of the Buddha.

In the following chapter, an attempt is made to explain how the Bodhisattva got acquainted with Jhānic practice and made it a part of the practice leading to the goal, such as: the Buddha's adoption of Jhāna as part of the Path; how the Bodhisattva got into Jhāna; how it helped the Bodhisattva to achieve the goal.

In order to give full picture of the Jhāna theories, chapter III focused on the concepts of Samatha, Jhāna and Samādhi, and to identify special features added by the Buddha. There is a very detailed classification of the four jhanas; Samatha and Vipassanā meditation; the differences between Samatha and Vipassanā; Jhāna and Samādhi and so on.

Jhāna and the four spiritual stages are the main discussions in chapter IV, herein attention paid to find out the relation between Jhānic attainments and the four spiritual stages. The path of wisdom; the two vehicles; Jhāna and the noble attainments are explained here.

The relation between Jhānic attainments and the development of Vipassanā is discussed in chapter V, in which the question whether the Jhānic attainments and the development of abhiññā are necessary for the development of Vipassanā are explained here. In the course of my study I explained full enlightenment; attainments of the noble ones; supernormal intellections; controversies surrounding the practice of the Jhānas.

In conclusion, Buddhism's concern is primary man's predicament, namely, dukkha. The Buddha's teaching, according to his own promulgation, is about the prevalence of dukkha and its cessation. The Buddha evolved a novel path, a path that was not known before, to overcome this problem of dukkha. In this path mind development occupies a crucial place. The Buddha's approach to man's predicament is psychologically oriented. It has shown that the mind holds the key to the solution of this problem.