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A STUDY OF EARLY BUDDHIST MEDITATION

A Comparative Study Based on
the Pāli Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Department of Pāli and Buddhist Studies
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Peradeniya

By

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2005

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ABSTRACT

**A Study of Early Buddhist Meditation:
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Dissertation submitted for the degree of D. Phil., 2005

This dissertation attempts an examination of forms of meditation prevalent during the time of the Buddha and the newly discovered forms of meditation in Buddhism resulting in immediate attainment of *nibbāna* here and now. Modern scholarship shows a difference in the understanding of the meditations that were known in the Buddhist tradition, the Theravāda tradition in particular. Some maintain that the meditations are of wholly Buddhist origin; others who are opposed to that view maintain that they were borrowed from Brahmanism; some suggest that they were a combination of the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist methods. Some even radically deny the function of meditation in the path of liberation by contending that the merit of insight alone is sufficient for the attainment of final liberation. The present study seeks to show that some of the meditations were re-examined by the Buddha and some others were originally taught by the Buddha. These meditations, either re-evaluated or newly discovered were meant to lead the adept effectively to the attainment of final liberation.

The inquiry of this dissertation has been mostly limited to the Pāli Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas considering that these canonical traditions, for the most part, preserve authentic sayings of the Buddha connected with the topic under investigation. I demonstrate in three fundamental ways the contribution of Gotama Buddha towards the enduring achievement of ending suffering by means of meditation. First, I have examined the attitude of the Buddha towards the then known nine *samāpattis* thereby showing the attainment of *nibbāna* can be achieved by using any of the nine *samāpattis* as a base. Second, I have examined the threefold *samādhi* as methods of overcoming the limitations of the methods of meditation of the ascetics and as leading to the attainment of *nibbāna* giving the opportunity for a person to abide in *nibbānic* life. Third, I have shown that *ānāpānasati* is a practice leading anyone to *nibbāna* regardless of whether he had experienced any form of meditation.