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**Jhāna and Sammā-samādhi
in Buddhist Practice
Toward the Attainment of Liberation**

**By Ven. Dhamma Citta
(Chu Dong Loc)**

**Supervisors: Ven. Dr. Muwaetagama Gnanananda
Ven. Dr. Analayo**

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Introduction

As a number of contemporary religions in the time of the Buddha, Buddhism also aims at attaining the spiritual freedom for mankind. Spiritual freedom, from the Buddhist perspective, means freedom from suffering. The problem of suffering is the wellspring out of which the whole current of Buddhist teaching arises; freedom from suffering is the end towards which it moves. Thus the Buddha could say throughout his ministry: "Previously, monks, as also now I make known only suffering and the cessation of suffering."¹

This focal concern with the issue of suffering is evident from the formula of the Four Noble Truths in which the Buddha summed up his doctrine: the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering. Whereas the first three Truths provide the doctrinal perspective of the Buddha's teaching, the fourth truth, the truth of the path, prescribes its practical regimen. This regimen focuses upon personal experience. The path itself every man must follow for himself. It is each man's own delusions and defilements that chain him to the cycle of suffering, and again each man's own efforts at inner purification that pave the road to his deliverance. Since bondage ultimately springs from ignorance (*avijjā*) the key to liberation, the Buddha declares, is found in wisdom (*paññā*), a wisdom which must be generated inwardly as an immediate personal understanding of the basic truths of existence. The Dhamma is *paccattam veditabbo viññūhi* "to be realized by the wise within themselves".

¹ AN. 4.203

It is because personal realization of truth is needed to reach the end of suffering that meditation assumes a position of such crucial importance in the Buddhist formulation of the liberating path. Meditation, for Buddhism, is the means of generating the inner understanding required for deliverance from suffering. Its diversity of techniques stems from differences in the people to be taught, but its purpose and procedure is the same for all: to produce that purity of mind and clarity of vision needed for the liberating wisdom to arise.

The methods of meditation taught in the Pali Buddhist tradition are based on the Buddha's own experience, forged by him in the course of his own quest for enlightenment. They are designed to recreate in the disciple who practice them the same essential discovery the Buddha himself made when he sat beneath the Bodhi Tree, the discovery of the Four Noble Truths.

The various subjects and methods of meditation expounded in the Pali scriptures divide into two inter-related systems. One is called the development of serenity (*samathabhāvanā*), the other the development of insight (*vipassanābhāvanā*). The former also goes under the name of the development of concentration (*samādhibhāvanā*), the latter under the name of the development of wisdom (*paññābhāvanā*).

The practice of serenity meditation aims at developing a calm, concentrated, unified state of consciousness as a means of experiencing inner peace and generating wisdom. The practice of insight meditation aims at gaining direct understanding of the real nature of phenomena. Of the two, the development of insight is regarded by Buddhism as the essential key to liberation, the direct antidote to the ignorance underlying bondage and suffering. Whereas serenity meditation is recognized as common to both

Buddhist and non-Buddhist contemplative disciplines, insight meditation is held to be the unique discovery of the Buddha and an unparalleled feature of his path. However, the growth of insight presupposes a certain degree of concentration (*samādhi*), and serenity meditation serves to secure this concentration, the development of serenity claims an incontestable place in the Buddhist meditative process. Together the two types of meditation work to make the mind a fit instrument for enlightenment. With his mind unified by means of development of serenity, made sharp and bright by the development of insight, the meditator can proceed unobstructed to reach the end of suffering.

In Theravāda Buddhist circles during the past few decades a debate has repeatedly erupted over the question whether or not *jhāna* is necessary to attain the “paths and fruits”, that is the four stages of enlightenment. Those who advocate such systems of meditation contend that the paths and fruits can be attained by developing insight (*vipassanā*) without a foundation of *jhāna*. This method is called the vehicle of bare insight (*suddhaviṭṭhanā*), and those who practice in this mode are known as “dry insighters” (*sukkha-vipassaka*) because their practice of insight has not been “moistened” by prior attainment of the *jhānas*. Apparently, this system finds support from the *Visuddhimagga* and the Pali Commentaries, though it is not given a very prominent place in the commentarial treatment of the path, which usually follows the canonical model in placing the *jhānas* before the development of insight.

The focal concern of such controversies is that how the meditator attains *sammā-samādhi* without the fourth *jhāna* attainment, which the Buddha clearly defines in the suttas to be *sammā-samādhi*. To shed some light on this practical point, it is necessary to examine the role of *jhāna* in the course of practice as

well as its causal relation with *sammā-samādhi* as defined in the suttas and commentaries. It is from this dynamic aspect of the *sammā-samādhi* that arises different practical approaches, all of which claim to be derived from the original teachings in the suttas themselves.

Thus, it is the purpose of this dissertation to examine this crucial relationship between *jhāna* and *sammā-samādhi* in order to determine their role in the Buddhist spiritual discipline. This examination will make ground for further investigation of *sammā-samādhi* in case of dry-insight approach, which is attained without *jhāna*, as well as the different practical approaches in attaining *sammā-samādhi* in the course of actual practice.

To that end, the dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter, “***jhāna in Buddhist practice***” will examine thoroughly the *jhānas*, their different aspects, components as well as practical approach to attain and master them. This investigation will serve as the basis for the next chapter, “***jhāna and sammā-samādhi***”, which aims at clarifying the role of *jhāna* in the course of practice by examining the relationship between *jhāna* and *sammā-samādhi* from different angles. The place of *jhāna* in the scheme of constituents of the path which highlights the important functions of *jhāna* in actual practice will also be investigated. Having been clarified the relation between *jhāna* and *sammā-samādhi*, the second part of this chapter will be devoted to examine the role and various possible uses of *sammā-samādhi* in the Buddhist path to liberation.

The third chapter, “***sammā-samādhi without jhāna***”, will deal with the possibility of the “dry-insight” approach, in which the dry-insight meditators who are bereft of mundane *jhānas* manage to attain *sammā-samādhi* and

supramundane *jhāna* to breakthrough to the supramundane path. Thus this chapter will serve to investigate the question of whether or not the *jhāna* is indispensable for all *magga-phala* attainments. In order to do so, the concept of supramundane *jhāna* will be discussed and this discussion will help make clear the possibility of attaining supramundane *jhāna* without mundane *jhāna* attainment.

The concluding chapter, the fourth: **“Different practical approaches to *sammā-samādhi* attainment”**, will introduce the two approaches to the same goal of Buddhist practice, namely the final liberation from the inner cankers. These two approaches, presented in the suttas as the way of gradual training and the way of mindfulness, or the two vehicles: *samathayāna* and *vipassanāyāna* as described in the commentaries. The validity and theoretical basis of each approach will be examined, thus shedding some light on the current debate over the role of *jhāna* in actual practice of different practical approaches.

Though the topic is not new to Buddhist scholars since it has been discussed in a good number of researches over the past few decades, this dissertation would try to approach the issue from a different angle, from the practical point of view. However, due to the limited framework of the paper itself as an MA dissertation, points of investigation and discussion in this work are still based largely on the theoretical side, only with some observations from practical side added to clarify some points of controversy when necessary. We hope that the further expansion of this version in the future would make more contributions with more exhausting examinations of the topic from the practical points of view.