

Samādhi Bhāvanā Sutta

The Discourse on the Cultivation of Samadhi

[Four kinds of samadhi]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.41/2:44-46)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction

1.1 The Samādhi Bhāvanā Sutta (A 4.41) mentions four uses of mental concentration (*samādhi*), namely, (1) for happiness here and now; (2) for the divine eye¹ (clairvoyance and knowledge of the working of karma); (3) mindfulness and full awareness; and (4) spiritual liberation. The method for each of these samadhi, is as follows:

(1) for dwelling happily here and now	the four dhyanas	[§2]
(2) for knowledge and vision	the perception of light	[§3]
(3) for mindfulness and full awareness	the perception of impermanence	[§4]
(4) for the destruction of mental influxes ²	the rise and fall of the aggregates	[§5]

(1) “**The four dhyanas**” (*jhāna*) [§2] are here stated as being for the purpose of dwelling happily here and now refers to right concentration (*sammā samādhi*), which, after all, is defined as *the four dhyanas*.³ In terms of the noble eightfold path, the dhyanas play a major role in propelling the focusses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) from the mundane to the supramundane level of path-entry. The dhyanic mind is so calm and clear that, on emerging from it, the temporarily defilement-free mind can easily focus itself to penetrate to see true reality.

(2) “**The perception of light**” (*āloka, saññā*) here [§3] is prescribed for the attainment of “knowledge and vision,” defined as *the divine eye* (that is, the psychic power of clairvoyance and the knowledge of the working of karma and rebirth).⁴ However, the perception of light is also efficacious in a more mundane way, such as the overcoming of drowsiness, as prescribed in **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58).⁵ In psychological terms, the perception of light is also useful in keeping the mind “bright” in a positive sense, which prevents or cures depressive and negative mental states.

(3) “**The perception of impermanence**” (*anicca, saññā*) is a very simple and efficacious practice that promotes mindfulness and full awareness by way of watching the most fundamental characteristic of all conditioned things, that is, impermanence. This practice prevents the mind from being distracted by any of the senses, and if the mind is distracted, the distraction is easily abandoned by reflecting on its impermanent nature. As stated in **the Okkanti Saṃyutta**, this perception is efficacious in bringing about streamwinning in this life itself.⁶

¹ *Dibba, cakkhu*, clairvoyance, not to be confused with the Dharma-eye (*dhamma, cakkhu*) (see n in §104). On the relationship of this knowledge to the 62 grounds for wrong views, see **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1) = SD 25.3(76.3).

² “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*, which comes from *ā-savati*, “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsavas*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj’-āsava*) (D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDiet: *āsava*.

³ See eg **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141.31/3:252) = SD 11.11.

⁴ See eg **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.97 f/1:82 f) = SD 8.10.

⁵ A 7.58.7/4:86 = SD 4.11.

⁶ S 25/3:225-228. See (**Cakkhu**) **Anicca S** (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7.

(4) **Contemplating on “the rise and fall”** (*udayabbaya*) of the aggregates is a powerful meditative practice that leads to insight into the true nature of reality. This sustained practice leads, in due course, to the destruction of the mental influxes, that is, arhathood or full self-awakening itself.

1.2 The Sutta closes with the last verse of **Puṇṇaka Māṇava Puccha** (here called *Puṇṇaka Pañha*) of the Pārāyana Vagga (Sn 1048), which is the last chapter of the Sutta Nipāta. The Aṅguttara Commentary explains that at the end of the Samādhi Bhāvanā Sutta, the Buddha explains the concentration of the path (*magga samādhi*), while in the verse, he shows the meditative attainment of fruition (*phala, samāpatti*) (AA 3:86). **The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) says that while the Buddha is staying in the hamlet of Beluva, he falls sick (with dysentery), and that he overcomes his serious illness with his own physical strength and from his meditative attainment of fruition. This new strength, derived from the attainment, helps him to both overcome the illness and extend his life.⁷

There are two kinds of *phala, samāpatti*: (1) temporary attainment (*khaṇika, samāpatti*), and (2) attainment in the form of great insight (*mahā vipassanā*). The temporary attainment suppresses pain while one remains in the attainment. As soon as one emerges from the attainment, the pain pervades the body again. The attainment in the form of great insight, however, suppresses pain very well. After emerging from that state, pain re-arises only after a long time. Buddhaghosa says that the Buddha has attained the temporary attainment before, but this is the first time that his attainment is in the form of great insight (DA 2:547).⁸

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⁷ D 13.2.23/2:99 = SD 9.

⁸ See Vism 700 where Buddhaghosa explains the purpose of gaining the attainment of fruition, ie for the abiding in bliss here and now.

The Discourse on the Cultivation of Samadhi

(A 4.41/2:44-46)

Originating in Sāvattihī.

1 Bhikshus, there are four kinds of cultivation of samadhi. What are the four?

- (1) There is, bhikshus, the cultivation, the growing of samadhi for dwelling happily here and now.
- (2) There is, bhikshus, the cultivation, the growing of samadhi for bringing about to the attainment of knowledge and vision.
- (3) There is, bhikshus, the cultivation, the growing of samadhi for bringing about mindfulness and full awareness.
- (4) There is, bhikshus, the cultivation, the growing of samadhi for bringing about the destruction of the mental influxes. [45]

2 (1) And what, bhikshus, is **the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for dwelling happily here and now**?

THE FOUR DHYANAS. 1. Here, bhikshus, a monk, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, attains and dwells in the first dhyana, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.⁹

2. With the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he attains and dwells in **the second dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.

3. With the fading away of zest, he remains equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experiences happiness with the body. He attains and dwells in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’

4. With the abandoning of pleasure and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of happiness and displeasure—he attains and dwells in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

This, bhikshus, is the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for dwelling happily here and now.

3 (2) And what, bhikshus, is **the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for bringing about the attainment of knowledge and vision**?¹⁰

THE PERCEPTION OF LIGHT. Here, bhikshus, a monk attends to **the perception of light** (*āloka, -saññā*),¹¹ determine the perception of daylight: just as day is, so is night; just as night is, so is day. Thus through a mind that is open and unhindered, you should cultivate a mind of bright light.

This, bhikshus, is the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for bringing about to the attainment of knowledge and vision.

4 (3) And what, bhikshus, is **the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for bringing about mindfulness and full awareness**?

THE PERCEPTION OF IMPERMANENCE. Here, bhikshus, for a monk

there is understanding regarding feelings as they arise, as they remain active, as they pass away;¹²

there is understanding regarding perception as they arise, as they remain active, as they pass away;

⁹ These are the dhyana factors: *vitakka vicāra pīti sukhasa ek’aggatā*, respectively. On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhī*) here, see **The layman and dhyana** = SD 8.5.

¹⁰ Comy explains “knowledge and vision” (*ñāṇa, dassana*) here as the divine eye (*dibba, cakkhu*), the super-human power of vision or clairvoyance, which enables one to see forms in the distance and in other realms, and also to understand the karmic process (AA 3:84): see **Nimitta S** (A 3.100b.19/1:258) = SD 19.12. For this attainment, the practice begins with the cultivation of the perception of light, after which this inner light is directed to distant objects and to other realms (AA 3:85): see **Vism** 13.72-101/423-429.

¹¹ As at (**Anussatiṭṭhāna**) **Udāyi S** (A 6.29.3/3:323) = SD 24.8, & (**Moggallāna**) **Pacalā S** (A 7.58.7/4:86) = SD 4.11.

¹² *Viditā vedanā uppajanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbattham gacchanti.*

there is understanding regarding thoughts as they arise, as they remain active, as they pass away.

This, bhikshus, is the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for bringing about mindfulness and full awareness.

5 (4) And what, bhikshus, is **the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for bringing about the destruction of the mental influxes?**

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE AGGREGATES. Here, bhikshus, for a monk dwells contemplating the arising and falling way of the five aggregates, thus:¹³

this is form, this is the arising of form, this is the passing away of form;

this is feeling, this is the arising of feeling, this is the passing away of feeling;

this is perception, this is the arising of perception, this is the passing away of perception;

these are formations, this is the arising of formations, this is the passing away of formations;

this is consciousness, this is the arising of consciousness, this is the passing away of consciousness.

This, bhikshus, is the cultivation, the growing, of samadhi for bringing about the destruction of the mental influxes.

These, bhikshus, are four kinds of cultivation of samadhi.

And, bhikshus, it is in this connection that this is spoken in the Questions of Puṇṇaka (*Puṇṇaka Pañha*) in the Pārāyana,¹⁴ thus:

6 *Saṅkhāya lokasmiṃ parovarāni
Yass 'iñjitaṃ n'atthi kuhiñci loke [46]
santo vidhūmo anīgho nirāso
atāri so jāti,jaran ti brūmī ti*

Having regarded the far and near¹⁵ in the world,
for whom there are commotions anywhere in it,
at peace,¹⁶ not fuming,¹⁷ affliction-free, desire-free—
he has crossed over birth and decay, I say!

(Sn 1048)

— evaṃ —

080409; 080413; 090622

¹³ This is concentration (*samādhi*) connected with insight directed towards the rise and fall of the 5 aggregates, which affirms the characteristic of impermanence, on which basis the meditator discerns that whatever is impermanent is suffering, and consequently, not-self: see **Anatta,Jakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68) = SD 1.2; **Hetu S** (S 24.7.9-14/3:210) = SD 23.6; Vism 20.93-104/629-633.

¹⁴ This is the last verse of **Puṇṇaka Māṇava Puccha** (here called *Puṇṇaka Pañha*) of the Pārāyana Vagga (Sn 1048), the last ch of Sn. Comy says that at the end of the Sutta, the Buddha explains the concentration of the path, while in the verse, he shows the meditative attainment of fruition (*phala,samāpatti*) (AA 3:86). On *phala,samāpatti*, see Intro (1.2).

¹⁵ “Far and near” (*parovarāni*), ie, high and low, highest and lowest (in ref to existence) (AA 3:85). Sn Comy however explains “~ is said of far and near, that is, the others and these, existence of self and of others” (*parovarāni ti parāni ca orāni ca, par'atta.bhāva,sak'atta,bhāv'ādini parāni ca orāni cā ti vuttam hoti*, SnA 590,6-7). In other words, this refers to the existences of others and of our own.

¹⁶ “At peace” (*santo*), ie, peaceful through the stilling of opposite defilements (AA 3:85 f).

¹⁷ *Vidhūmo* (*vi*, “away” + *dhuma*, “smoke”), “not fuming,” ie, free from the fumes (or smoke) of anger (AA 3:86); or, rid of the fumes of evil deeds of the body, etc (*kāya,duccarit'ādi,dhūma,virahito*, SnA 590).