

MINDFULNESS, RECOLLECTION & CONCENTRATION

VEN. DHAMMAVUDDHO THERO

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THE GIFT OF DHAMMA SURPASSES ALL GIFTS

Sabba Danam Dhammadanam Jinati

MAY ALL BEINGS REJOICE IN THE MERIT OF THIS DHAMMA-DANA

MINDFULNESS, RECOLLECTION & CONCENTRATION

Ven. Dhammavuddho Thero
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there is increasing and widespread interest in meditation. Even non-Buddhist Westerners and free thinkers take to meditation for various reasons: for psychotherapy; to combat stress, as tranquility of mind is considered the best anti-stress medicine; or for health, as most doctors agree that many sicknesses are affected by or even originate in the mind.

Aim of meditation. There is no doubt that meditation can help to improve our lives and health in various ways, but the aim of the Buddha's teachings and meditation is much more than that. Buddhist meditation actually aims at the highest spiritual goal, freedom from suffering. Suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) pervades every aspect of our lives, including joy and happiness, because of the impermanent nature of everything in existence. The Buddha prescribed the Noble Eightfold Path as the medicine that, if taken fully, will lead to the end of suffering.

Noble Eightfold Path. However, we have to understand the precise meaning of the Noble Eightfold Path's factors so that our practice will lead us directly to this goal. The eight factors of the Noble Path are right view, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection and right concentration. They are included under the three aggregates: morality (right speech, right action, right livelihood), concentration or higher mind (right effort, right recollection, right concentration) and wisdom (right view, right thoughts).

Earliest discourses. There seems to be some confusion when it comes to the meditative aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path. The best way to clear our doubts is to take guidance from our foremost teacher, the Buddha himself. There are differing opinions among Buddhists about what exactly constitutes the Buddha's teachings, but generally all are agreed on the authenticity of approximately 5,000 discourses contained in the earliest four collections (*nikayas*)¹ of the Buddha's teachings.

Furthermore, these four *nikayas* are consistent, with no contradictions, and contain the flavour of liberation, which is the essence of the Buddha's teachings. His words found in these discourses (*suttas*), along with the monastic discipline (*vinaya*), were declared by the Buddha himself to be the only authority in determining what his teachings are.²

With this in mind, I shall discuss some of the meditative aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path so that their original meanings and practices, as laid down by the Buddha, are better understood. The three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path pertaining to meditation are right effort (*samma vayama*), right recollection (*samma sati*), and right concentration (*samma samadhi*). I shall discuss right recollection and right concentration in some detail. Then, I shall touch on *samatha* (tranquilization) and *vipassana* (contemplation), as well as the importance of understanding the *suttas*.

PALI TRANSLATIONS

A correct understanding of key meditation terms used by the Buddha is essential if we hope for even a partial attainment of the goal, freedom of suffering.

¹ The four collections (*nikayas*) of the Buddha's discourses (*suttas*) are the *Digha Nikaya*, the *Majjhima Nikaya*, the *Samyutta Nikaya*, and *Anguttara Nikaya*. The importance of the *suttas* is discussed in the book "Liberation: Relevance of *Sutta-Vinaya*" by the author.

² *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.180.

Before explaining these *Pali* terms, let me say that there is great danger in using the translation of a *Pali* word literally. It is usually difficult to find an English word that is an exact equivalent of a *Pali* word, and, besides, words normally have several shades of meaning. For example, the word *sanna* has been translated as labeling, thinking, perception; and each is correct to a limited degree. But a beginner may find difficulty in understanding the meaning of *sanna* from these different translations.

To know what the Buddha meant by a particular *Pali* term, we have to investigate the earliest four nikayas and see how the Buddha defined the term, how it was used and the characteristics of the term.

SAMMA SATI

Right recollection (*Samma sati*) is the seventh factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, and it is probably one of the most misunderstood. I shall discuss several key areas to highlight its meaning and practice with reference to the *suttas*.

SAMPAJANNA

First, I shall discuss mindfulness (*sampajanna*), as it is a tool that assists the practice of right recollection. *Sampajanna* comes from the word *janati* (to know). A definition of this term is not given in the *suttas*. However, its meaning can be inferred from two *suttas*:

Sampajanna means mindfulness. ‘Again, monks, a monk is one who acts with *sampajanna* when going forward and returning; who acts with *sampajanna* when looking ahead and looking away; who acts with *sampajanna* when flexing and extending his limbs; who acts with *sampajanna* when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl; who acts with *sampajanna* when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts with *sampajanna* when defecating or urinating; who acts with *sampajanna* when walking, standing, sitting, asleep, awake, talking, and keeping quiet’³

³ *Majjhima Nikaya* 119.

‘And how, monks, is a monk *sampajano*? Here, monks, for a monk feelings are known as they arise . . . persist . . . cease Thoughts are known as they arise . . . persist . . . cease Perceptions are known as they arise . . . persist . . . cease’⁴

From these *suttas* we find that *sampajanna* means mindfulness or full awareness. The first *sutta* refers to mindfulness of bodily actions, while the second refers to mindfulness of mental movements. And in *Pacittiya*, rule one, of the monk’s precepts, the term *sampajanna musavade* means ‘lying in full awareness’, which confirms that *sampajanna* means mindfulness or full awareness.

Trying to attain that mindfulness is one of the preliminary steps in meditation. It prevents our attention from being scattered, so that we can have some control of our mind and thus prevent the arising of unwholesome states. In the context of Buddhist meditation, mindfulness is concerned both with the body and mind, as shown above.

Sampajanna assists the practice of *sati*, and they go hand in hand. This is why the compound word *sati-sampajanna* often occurs together in the *suttas*.⁵

SATI

Sati means recollection. This is another very important term in meditation. Fortunately, a consistent and precise definition of this word is given in nine *suttas*.⁶ The definition of *sati* is ‘he has recollection, possessing supreme recollection and prudence, one who remembers and recollects what was done and said long ago’. In other words, *sati* means the quality of remembering, and a suitable translation can be ‘recollection’. It should be mentioned in passing that *sati* is derived from *smṛti*, which means ‘to remember’. Recollection or remembering does not necessarily refer only to the past. It can be used for the present or even the future, e.g. ‘Remember to lock the gate when you go out.’ Translations of *sati* in *Pali*

⁴ *Samyutta Nikaya* 47.35.

⁵ For example, *Majjhima Nikaya* 39.

⁶ For example, *Majjhima Nikaya* 53, *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.14 and *Samyutta Nikaya* 48.1.9.

dictionaries include memory, mindfulness etc.. Here, *recollection (sati) means calling to mind, paying attention to, contemplating.*

Four recollections. What is it that we have to recollect in the practice of meditation? From the *Satipatthana Sutta*, we find that we have to, first recollect four things: body, feeling, mind and categories of *Dhamma* (the Buddha's teachings). They are basically body, mind and *Dhamma*. Contemplation of the body and mind is important because they are the five aggregates, which we cling to in connection with the self. And contemplation of *Dhamma* is one of the skilful means to attain insight into the Four Noble Truths. Contemplating them will lead to penetrative insights provided that all the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are present and fully developed. Thus *sati* means to remember to contemplate these four objects, and not worldly objects of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibles.

Body and mind. The Buddha taught that suffering arises because we cling to the five aggregates (*khandhas*), which we take to be the self or as belonging to self or as being in the self or as self being in the five aggregates. The five aggregates are body, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness; they are basically body and mind in a wider sense.⁷

This self which we cling to is a false perception of something (a soul or ego) that we take to be permanent, everlasting. However, everything in existence is in constant motion or change, with no core or entity.

We delight in, cling to, and want to prolong whatever in the world that gives us happiness. But everything changes! For instance, youth changes to old age, health to sickness, loved ones will die, and love changes and often can grow cold. All these give us suffering. And if we don't understand that impermanence is the nature of life and accept it, then we shall always continue to suffer.

Therefore we have to observe and understand the nature of body and mind, which we associate with the self, that they arise, endure and

⁷ In a wider sense, mind includes feeling, perception, volition and consciousness.

cease and that they are dependent on conditions, have no core or entity and are not worth clinging to.

CASE STUDIES: MINDFULNESS AND RECOLLECTION

To enable us to understand mindfulness and recollection better, let us consider a few case studies:

(i) Ordinary Person

Let us consider an ordinary person, not a *Dhamma* practitioner, in a normal waking state. This person goes about his daily life with a normal amount of mindfulness (awareness), and recollection. His mindfulness moves from object to object, depending on where his attention is directed. If his mindfulness is not directed well enough to whatever he is doing, he may have an accident. For example, he will cut his finger instead of cutting the vegetables, or collide with another car while he is driving because of being distracted by a pretty girl. So he learns that mindfulness is necessary in daily life. His recollection is also that of an ordinary person. He has to remember to keep an appointment with his client, remember to do a few chores, remember to repair the fence, etc..

Worldly recollection. So what is the difference between this person and a *Dhamma* practitioner's mindfulness and recollection? This former's mindfulness and recollection are scattered and worldly, not focused on body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*. In other words, he is not practising the *Dhamma* in order to end suffering.

Right mindfulness and recollection. The *Samyutta Nikaya* gives the very interesting parable of the quail and falcon,⁸ which illustrates clearly how mindfulness and recollection should be directed.

In the parable, a quail wandered out of its home ground and was caught by a falcon. This smart quail then challenged the falcon to a fight on its own home ground, which the falcon accepted. Returning there and standing on a great clod of earth, the quail taunted the

⁸*Samyutta Nikaya* 47.1.6. See also *Samyutta Nikaya* 35.199 and 47.1.7 for similar parables.

falcon. As the falcon swooped down upon it, the little quail slipped into a hole behind the clod, while the falcon smashed into the clod.

Using this parable, the Buddha said that if a monk stayed within his own home ground, Mara (the tempter) would get no access, no opportunity. One's own home ground is contemplating the body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*. Wandering away from it is contemplating sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tangibles, i.e. worldly objects. Meditation is concerned with internal contemplation, not with external sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tangibles.

(ii) Dhamma Practitioner

Let us consider the case of a person who has heard the *Dhamma* and wishes to practise the Buddha's way of mindfulness and recollection. He tries to be mindful and contemplate body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*. As he goes about his daily working life, he finds that it is very difficult to do this. Having to do and remember so many things of a worldly nature, his attention is always running here and there instead of being with body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*. The mind is either thinking of the past, worrying about the future, or scheming and daydreaming etc.. He is not mindful of the here and now, so how can he remember to be mindful and contemplate body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*?

Being in the here and now. To practise mindfulness and right recollection, he has to be mindful of the here and now; he has to stop thinking, stop worrying, stop planning or scheming and stop using the mind.⁹ And this is certainly not easy to do!

Lifetime after lifetime we have considered our thinking faculty to be our best friend, our greatest protector. It has helped us to make a living and to succeed in life and it has protected us in times of difficulty and danger. Because we have used our mind so much, it is much more developed than other creatures on earth; that is why man is the predominant creature on earth. The word 'man' (*manusya*) probably comes from the word *mano* (thinking faculty).

We are so used to thinking that it is very difficult to stop thinking. In fact, we are reluctant to do so because it is the self's

⁹ *Majjhima Nikaya* 125.

protection system. Giving up the thinking mind is practically renouncing the self, and renunciation is very frightening to most people. But, we have to stop using the thinking mind in order to be mindful of the here and now and practise mindfulness and right recollection. To be mindful of the here and now is the second thing we have to remember, besides remembering to contemplate body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*.

(iii) Sleep State

Now let us consider the sleep state. Scientists have discovered that most people dream much of the time during sleep. When a person is asleep and dreaming, is he fully aware or mindful? In a way, he can be said to be mindful because there is no other distraction. He is paying attention to his dream to the exclusion of everything else.

Deluded here and now. Is the dreamer mindful of the here and now? To the dreamer, he is in the here and now. However, it is a deluded here and now. It is a delusion and deception because he is taking the person in the dream to be himself.

Recollecting not-self. In the same way, we are deluded and take this body and mind to be the self. The Buddha said that the world is of a deceptive nature and false, whereas Nibbana is of an undeceptive nature.¹⁰ We have been misled by our mind lifetime after lifetime.¹¹

The Buddha is the Awakened One. To help to awaken us the Buddha taught in many *suttas*¹² that any kind of body (or material form) or mind, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

When we practise in this way, attachment will start to loosen its grip and dispassion towards the world will arise in the heart. This stage, when the mind inclines towards relinquishment or letting go of

¹⁰ *Majjhima Nikaya* 140.

¹¹ *Majjhima Nikaya* 75.

¹² For example, *Majjhima Nikaya* 22, *Anguttara Nikaya* 3.131, and *Samyutta Nikaya* 22.15.

attachments and the world, is one of the preconditions for the attainment of right concentration or *jhana*.

Therefore, this not-self contemplation is very important. It is the third thing we have to remember when practising mindfulness and right recollection.

Now we see that there are three things we have to remember in the practice of mindfulness and right recollection: to contemplate the body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*; to be mindful of the here and now; and to see any kind of body and mind as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this not my self.'

(iv) Insane Person

Let us consider the case of an insane person. An insane person typically has a totally confused and uncontrolled mind. He cannot concentrate at all. Sometimes he may get up even in the middle of his meal because the mind has a thought to do something else. And his mind keeps flowing and flowing with uncontrolled thoughts. This person, even if given the proper instructions for meditation, cannot do so because he cannot get hold of his mind, nor can he see things as they really are.

The Buddha said that it is difficult to find beings who are free from mental sickness even for one moment, except *arahants*.¹³ In other words, most beings are deranged to a certain extent, with unfocussed minds that keep flowing with uncontrolled thoughts. The *Pali* word *asava* literally means outflows, discharge. A reasonable translation would be 'uncontrolled mental outflows'. An *arahant* is also called a *khinasava*, one who has destroyed the *asavas*. All other beings still have uncontrolled mental outflows, which also means unfocussed minds, unless they are in a state of *samadhi*. So most beings have uncontrolled, unfocused minds, which prevent them from seeing things as they really are, realising not-self (*anatta*) and attaining liberation. It is explained in the *suttas* that the necessary condition for seeing things as they really are is concentration.¹⁴

¹³ *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.157.

¹⁴ *Samyutta Nikaya* 12.23 and *Anguttara Nikaya* 7.61.

Cultivation incomplete without right concentration. Therefore, with uncontrolled and unfocused minds, practising mindfulness and right recollection is still insufficient for attaining liberation. Hence, the necessity of right concentration, the eighth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The practice of right recollection is to contemplate the body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*; to be mindful of the here and now; to see that any kind of body and mind as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this not my self.’

At this stage, our cultivation is still not complete without right concentration. The key here is to cultivate and develop right recollection to an intense state and attain *satipatthana*. The attainment of *satipatthana* is crucial because it is the springboard to right concentration. I shall discuss this in detail next.

SATIPATTHANA

Another important *Pali* term frequently encountered concerning meditation is *satipatthana*. There is no definition of *satipatthana*, but its practice is similar to that of *sati* — basically to contemplate body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*.

Satipatthana comes from the words *sati* and *patthana* or *upatthana*. *Patthana* or *upatthana* has been variously translated as foundations, uprisings, applications, establishment, etc.. However, these translations do not throw any light on the difference between *sati* and *satipatthana*.

Intense state of recollection. When we investigate the *suttas* we find that there is a difference between *sati* and *satipatthana*. As explained earlier, *sati* means recollection. Now *patthana* possibly comes from two words, *pa* and *thana*. *Pa* means ‘setting forth’, and also implies going beyond. Thus it can also mean extreme, intense. *Thana* means standing still, and can also mean a state or condition. Thus *satipatthana* probably means an intense state of recollection. This translation of *satipatthana* seems to agree with the *suttas*, to which I shall now refer.

Practice of Satipatthana. The *Satipatthana Samyutta* 47.2.10 gives a very striking simile to show how *satipatthana* should be practised. In this simile a man is forced to carry a bowl, filled to the brim with oil, in between a great crowd of people watching the most beautiful girl of the land singing and dancing. Following him is a man with uplifted sword, ready to chop off his head should even a drop of oil be spilled. That being so, he has to pay intense attention on the bowl of oil without allowing himself to be the least distracted by any other thing, i.e. one-pointed attention. This is a clear explanation of the meaning of *satipatthana*.

Characteristic mark of jhana. In *Majjhima Nikaya* 44, it is stated that *satipatthana* is the characteristic mark (*nimitta*) of *samadhi*. This implies that when one attains concentration (*samadhi*, defined as one-pointedness of mind, or *jhana*), *satipatthana* (not just *sati*) must automatically be present. The state of concentration or right concentration (*jhana*) is a state of intense awareness and recollection in which the mind lights up — a state of mental brightness because the mind is focused, not scattered. Hence, it is stated that *satipatthana* is a characteristic mark of concentration.

In *Samyutta Nikaya* 52.2.2, the *Arahant Anuruddha* was asked what he had cultivated to attain such great psychic power — he could see the thousandfold world system clearly. He answered that it was due to cultivating and developing *satipatthana*. Elsewhere, psychic power is always said to be due to the attainment of *jhana*.

In *Majjhima Nikaya* 125, the Buddha describes the various stages in the cultivation of conduct or practice (*carana*), which culminates in the four *ghanas*, just like the Noble Eightfold Path. In place of the first *jhana*, there is the description of *satipatthana*, followed by the second, third and fourth *jhana*, which implies that *satipatthana* is synonymous with the first *jhana*.

Satipatthana and jhana goes hand in hand. In *Majjhima Nikaya* 118, it is stated: ‘When recollection of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfils the four *satipatthanas*. When the four *satipatthanas* are developed and cultivated, they fulfill the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhanga*). When the seven factors of enlightenment

are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and liberation.’

Recollection of breathing, when developed, is said to fulfill the four *satipatthanas*. In comparison, *Samyutta Nikaya* 54.1.8 says that intense concentration on recollection of breathing leads to the attainment of all the *jhana*s. Again this implies that *satipatthana* is synonymous with *jhana*. Furthermore the four *satipatthanas*, when developed, are said to fulfill the seven factors of enlightenment. Now, four of the seven factors are delight, tranquility, concentration and equanimity, all of which are also the characteristics of *jhana*. Again the implication is that we cannot separate *satipatthana* attainment and *jhana* attainment. They go hand in hand.

In *Majjhima Nikaya* 10 it is stated: ‘Monks, this is the path leading one way only for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *Nibbana* — namely, the four *satipatthanas*.’ This does not contradict the statement in *Anguttara Nikaya* 9.36: ‘Truly, I say, *asava* destruction (*arahantship*) depends on the first *jhana* . . . second *jhana* . . . third *jhana* . . . fourth *jhana*’, and the statement in *Majjhima Nikaya* 52 by Venerable Ananda that the ‘one thing taught by the Buddha to attain liberation is the first *jhana* . . . second *jhana* . . . third *jhana* . . . fourth *jhana* . . .’

Sati versus satipatthana. The practice of *satipatthana* is similar to *sati* in the sense that both involve recollecting the body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*. What distinguishes them is the intensity of *sati*. When right recollection (*samma sati*) is cultivated and developed into an intense state, it becomes *satipatthana*.

Satipatthana leads to jhana. In *Samyutta Nikaya* 47.1.8, it is stated that a foolish, unskillful monk practises *satipatthana* but his mind is unconcentrated and the hindrances are not eliminated. However, when a wise, skilful monk practises *satipatthana*, his mind becomes concentrated and the hindrances are eliminated. Therefore, when a monk practises *satipatthana* unskillfully, he does not attain to concentration (*jhana*).

A skilful monk attains concentration when he attains *satipatthana*. This again confirms that one who attains concentration naturally possesses *satipatthana*. This is why the state of concentration is also called the higher mind (*adhicitta*) in *Anguttara Nikaya* 3.85 and a developed mind (*bhavitam cittam*) in *Anguttara Nikaya* 2.3.10. And we know that the higher mind is the precondition for higher wisdom, which is the basis for liberation. Hence *jhana* is an essential factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

One should practise right recollection and then develop it into an intense state in order to attain *satipatthana*. When *satipatthana* is attained, concentration or *jhana* is also attained. This is why in *Majjhima Nikaya* 119, we find that one of the benefits of repeatedly cultivating and developing right recollection of body is the ability to ‘obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four *ghanas* that constitute the higher mind and provide a pleasant abiding here and now.’ Thus it was said that a skilful monk practises *satipatthana* and attains concentration.

In *Majjhima Nikaya* 117, it is stated that the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are to be cultivated one by one. Thus, as right recollection leads to right concentration, so *satipatthana* can be said to be the link or bridge that connects the seventh factor (right recollection) to the eighth factor (right concentration) of the Noble Eightfold Path.

SAMMA SAMADHI

Pali dictionaries translate *samma samadhi* as right concentration, meditation, one-pointedness of mind etc.. Concentration is a factor of the Five Faculties (*Indriya*), the Five Powers (*Bala*), the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*Bojjhanga*) and the Noble Eightfold Path. Throughout the *suttas*, there is a consistent definition of concentration and right concentration as either one-pointedness of mind¹⁵ or the Four *Jhanas*.¹⁶ When the definition is given as the Four *Jhanas* (states

¹⁵ For example, *Majjhima Nikaya* 44 and *Anguttara Nikaya* 7.42.

¹⁶ For example, *Majjhima Nikaya* 141 and *Samyutta Nikaya* 45.1.8.

of mental brightness), there is a long description of the *jhanas*. Noble right concentration is stated in *Majjhima Nikaya* 117 to be one-pointedness of mind, supported by the other seven factors of the Noble Eightfold Path.

One-pointedness of mind refers to the Four Jhanas. If one-pointedness of mind and the Four *Jhanas* refer to two different levels of right concentration, then there is inconsistency in the *Dhamma*, which is impossible. When we investigate the *suttas* in greater detail, we find that they both refer to the *jhanas*, as can be seen from the definition of concentration given in *Samyutta Nikaya* 48.1.10:

‘And what, monks, is the concentration faculty? Herein, monks, the *ariyan* disciple, having made relinquishment his basis, attains concentration, attains one-pointedness of mind.

Secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, he enters and abides in the first *jhana*, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with delight (*piti*) and pleasure (*sukha*) born of seclusion. With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, he enters and abides in the second *jhana*, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind, without applied and sustained thought, with delight and pleasure born of concentration. With the calming down of delight, he enters and abides in the third *jhana*, dwelling equanimous, collected and mindful, feeling pleasure with the body, on account of which *ariyans* say: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who is equanimous and collected.’

With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and the previous fading away of joy and grief, he enters and abides in the fourth *jhana*, which has neither pain nor pleasure, with complete purity of equanimity and recollection (*sati*).¹⁷ This, monks, is called the concentration faculty.’

From this *sutta* we find that *one-pointedness of mind undoubtedly refers to the Four Jhanas. Even in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta*,¹⁸ *right concentration is defined as the Four Jhanas.*

¹⁷ Contrary to common belief that there is no *sati* in *jhana*, the Buddha said that *sati* is very much present in *jhana*. In fact, he pointed out that it is in the fourth *jhana* that complete purity of *sati* is attained.

¹⁸ *Digha Nikaya* 22.

Concentration is the precondition for wisdom to arise. One reason concentration and right concentration are defined as the *jhanas* in the *suttas* can be understood from *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.41. In this *sutta*, the development of concentration, which conduces to gaining knowledge and insight (*nanadassana*), is said to be the mind that is cultivated to brilliance, i.e. a state of mental brightness — which is none other than *jhana*.

There is a prevalent view nowadays that one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ekaggata*) need not refer to the *jhanas*. The interpretation is that it means keeping the mind on one thing at a time — the so-called momentary concentration — which was not mentioned by the Buddha. The parable of the hunter and the six animals (see below) found in *Samyutta Nikaya* 35.206 makes it quite clear that the mind which moves from object to object is just the ordinary mind. This parable is elaborated later under the section ‘Practice’. *Anguttara Nikaya* 3.100 teaches the way to develop the higher mind, to attain one-pointedness of mind. First, one has to get rid of faulty bodily conduct, faulty verbal conduct and faulty mental conduct. Second, one has to rid oneself of sensual thoughts, malicious thoughts and cruel thoughts. Then, one has to rid oneself of thoughts about relatives, thoughts about the country and thoughts about one’s reputation. Finally, only after doing away even with thoughts about mind objects, does one’s mind settle down and attain one-pointedness. From this, one can see that one-pointedness of mind certainly is not so shallow as keeping the mind on one thing at a time.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF JHANA ?

Jhana literally means fire, or brightness. So *jhana* can be translated as a state of mental brightness.

Intensely aware and collected. When a person attains *jhana*, the mind is absorbed in one object only, not scattered as it normally is, and is intensely aware and collected.¹⁹ For example, from the description of

¹⁹ *Majjhima Nikaya* 111.

the fourth *jhana* above we see that recollection is completely pure here. As the mind is not scattered but collected, it is in its pure bright state,²⁰ and great bliss wells up.

Thus beings who attain *jhana* can be reborn into the form realm (*rupaloka*) heavens with shining bodies and experience intense happiness for a long time. For most people, this state is not easily attainable because it involves letting go of attachments. For this reason, it is considered a superhuman state (*uttari manussa dhamma*) in the *suttas*.

The four *ghanas* are defined in the various *suttas* as follows:

First Jhana

- Perceptions of sensual pleasures cease (DN 9)
- Subtle but true perception of delight and pleasure born of seclusion. (DN 9)
- Invisible to *Mara* (MN 25)
- Five hindrances are eliminated and five *jhana* factors attained (MN 43)
- Still perturbable state (MN 66)
- Unwholesome thoughts cease without remainder (MN 78)
- Speech ceases (SN 36.11)
- Bodily pain ceases (SN 48.4.10)
- State of happy abiding (AN 6.29)
- Beyond the reach of *Mara* (AN 9.39)

Second Jhana

- Subtle but true perception of delight and pleasure born of concentration (DN 9)
- Still perturbable state (MN 66)
- Wholesome thoughts cease (MN 78)
- State of *ariyan* silence (SN 21.1)
- Applied and sustained thoughts cease (SN 36.11)
- Delight that is not worldly (SN 36.29)
- Mental grief ceases (SN 48.4.10)

²⁰ *Anguttara Nikaya* 1.6.1.

Third Jhana

- Subtle but true perception of pleasure and equanimity (DN 9)
- Still perturbable state (MN 66)
- Delight ceases (SN 36.11)
- Pleasure that is not worldly (SN 36.29)
- Bodily pleasure ceases (SN 48.4.10)

Fourth Jhana

- Subtle but true perception of neither pain nor pleasure (DN 9)
- Complete purity of recollection (*sati*) and equanimity (MN 39)
- Pure bright mind pervades the entire body (MN 39)
- Imperturbable state (MN 66)
- Can talk to heavenly beings and an entirely pleasant world has been realized (MN79)
- Equanimity that is not worldly (SN 36.29)
- Breathing ceases (SN 36.11)
- Mental joy ceases (SN 48.4.10)
- On emerging therefrom, one walks, stands etc. in bliss (AN 3.63)
- Leads to the complete penetration of the countless elements (AN 6.29)

PRACTICE

In *Majjhima Nikaya* 117 and *Digha Nikaya* 18 and 33, we find that the seven supports and requisites for the development of noble right concentration²¹ are right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort and right recollection.

Parable of the six animals. There is an important principle found in *Samyutta Nikaya* 35.206. This is illustrated by the parable of a hunter who caught six animals: a snake, crocodile, bird, dog, jackal and monkey. He tied each to a stout rope and then tied the six ropes together before releasing them. Those six animals would naturally take off in six different directions — the snake into a hole, the

²¹ That is the right concentration or *jhana* of a noble one or *ariya*.

crocodile into water, the bird to the sky, the dog to the village, the jackal to the cemetery and the monkey to the forest. As they pull in their different directions, they would have to follow whichever is the strongest at that moment. This is similar to the ordinary mind, which is pulled by the six different sense objects. The Buddha calls that the unrestrained mind.

However, if the six animals were tied to a stout post, then they can only go round and round the post until they grow weary. When this happens, they will stand or lie beside the post, tamed. Likewise, the Buddha said that if a monk practises recollection of the body — meditating on this one object — he is not pulled in different directions by the six sense objects, and the mind is restrained.

This parable shows that the way to tame the mind is to tie it to one object of meditation, something it is not accustomed to, until the mind is able to stay with that one object so that one-pointedness of mind is achieved.

Let go of attachments and the world. To attain to right concentration or the *jhanas* is certainly not easy. In *Samyutta Nikaya* 48.1.10 mentioned earlier, one has to make letting go of attachments and the world generally the basis or foundation before one can attain to right concentration. However, most meditators are unable to let go of attachments and the world. It is for this reason that the practice of *samatha* meditation and the subsequent attainment of *jhanas* is difficult.

NECESSITY OF JHANA FOR LIBERATION

In *Anguttara Nikaya* 3.85 and 9.12, the Buddha compares the threefold training of higher morality, higher mind/concentration and higher wisdom with the four *ariya* (noble) fruitions. It is said that the *sotapanna* (stream-enterer), the first fruition, and the *sakadagami* (once-returner), the second fruition, are accomplished in morality. The *anagami* (non-returner), the third fruition, is accomplished in morality and concentration. The *arahant* (one who is liberated), the fourth fruition, is accomplished in morality, concentration and wisdom.

As concentration and right concentration refers to the *jhanas* in the *suttas*, *jhana* is clearly a necessary condition to attain the *anagami* and *arahant* stages.

EVIDENCE IN THE SUTTAS

Anguttara Nikaya 3.88: This *sutta* is also about the same threefold training. Here the training in the higher mind is defined as the Four *Jhanas*. Similarly in *Majjhima Nikaya* 6, the Buddha described the Four *Jhanas* as that which constitute the higher mind and provide a pleasant abiding here and now.

Anguttara Nikaya 4.61: ‘Endowed with wisdom’ is described in this *sutta*. It is stated that one who has eliminated the defilements of the Five Hindrances (*panca nivarana*)²² is ‘of great wisdom, of widespread wisdom, of clear vision, one endowed with wisdom’. From the description of the first *jhana* above we find that the hindrances are eliminated when one attains the *jhanas*. This means that attainment of the *jhanas* (with the other seven factors of the Noble Eightfold Path) results in great wisdom.

Anguttara Nikaya 6.70: Here the Buddha says: ‘Truly, monks, that a monk without the peace of concentration in high degree, without winning one-pointedness of mind shall enter and abide in liberation by mind or liberation by wisdom — that cannot be.’²³

Anguttara Nikaya 9.36: The Buddha says: ‘Truly, I say, *asava*²⁴ - destruction (*arahantship*) depends upon the first *jhana* . . . second *jhana* . . . third *jhana* . . . fourth *jhana* . . .’

²² The Five Hindrances are sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. These hindrances obstruct us from seeing things clearly as they are, and thus are the main obstacles to wisdom and liberation.

²³ That is why *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.51 states that a person who gives the requisites -- alms food, robes, lodging, medical care -- to a monk, using which the monk attains boundless concentration, attains boundless merit.

²⁴ *Asava* means uncontrolled mental outflows.

Majjhima Nikaya 24: This *sutta* talks about the seven purifications which lead to *Nibbana*, the final goal. One of these is the purification of mind, which is not defined here. However, in *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.194, it is stated that utter purification of mind refers to the four *jhanas*.

Majjhima Nikaya 36: In this *sutta* the Buddha talked about his struggle for enlightenment, how he cultivated various austerities for several years in vain. Then he sought an alternative way to liberation and recalled his attainment of *jhana* when he was young under the rose-apple tree. Following on that memory came the realization: ‘That is the path to enlightenment.’ Then, using *jhana*, he finally attained enlightenment. That is why the *jhanas* are called the ‘footprints of the *Tathagata*’ in *Majjhima Nikaya* 27.

Majjhima Nikaya 52: Here venerable Ananda was asked what is the one thing the Buddha taught that is needed to win liberation. Venerable Ananda replied: ‘first *jhana* . . . second *jhana* . . . third *jhana* . . . fourth *jhana* . . .’

Majjhima Nikaya 64: The Buddha says here: ‘There is a path, Ananda, a way to the elimination of the five lower fetters; *that anyone, without coming to that path, to that way, shall know or see or eliminate the five lower fetters*²⁵ — *that is not possible.*’

Then the Buddha goes on to explain the *path, the way* — *which is the attainment of the first jhana . . . second jhana . . . third jhana . . . fourth jhana . . . Here, it’s very clear that it is impossible to attain the state of the anagami or arahant without jhana.*

Majjhima Nikaya 108: Venerable Ananda was asked what kind of meditation was praised by the Buddha and what kind of meditation was not praised by the Buddha. Venerable Ananda replied that the kind of meditation where the Four *Jhanas* were attained was praised by the Buddha; the kind of meditation where the Five Hindrances are not eliminated was not praised by the Buddha.

²⁵ Elimination of the five lower fetters is the state of the *anagami*, and also includes the *arahant*, who has eliminated the ten fetters.

Majjhima Nikaya 68: Here the Buddha confirms that *jhana* is the necessary condition for the elimination of the Five Hindrances:

‘While he still does not attain to the delight and pleasure that are secluded from sensual pleasures and secluded from unwholesome states (i.e. first *jhana*) or to something more peaceful than that (i.e. higher *ghanas*), covetousness²⁶ . . . ill-will . . . sloth and torpor . . . restlessness and remorse . . . doubt . . . discontent . . . weariness invade his mind and remains When he attains to the delight and pleasure that are secluded from sensual pleasures and secluded from unwholesome states or to something more peaceful than that, covetousness . . . ill-will . . . sloth and torpor . . . restlessness and remorse . . . doubt . . . discontent . . . weariness do not invade his mind and remain’

Thus the type of meditation where there is *jhana* attainment was praised by the Buddha; the type of meditation where *jhana* is not attained was not praised by the Buddha. It can be concluded from this that the primary aim of meditation is to eliminate the Five Hindrances and attain the *ghanas*.

Digha Nikaya 12: ‘. . . A disciple goes forth and practices the moralities and attains the first *jhana* And whenever the pupil of a teacher attains to such excellent distinction, that is a teacher who is not to be blamed in the world. And if anyone blames that teacher, his blame is improper, untrue, not in accordance with reality, and faulty’

Majjhima Nikaya 76: Ananda points out that the Buddha declared a wise man certainly would live the holy life, and while living it would attain the true way, the *Dhamma* that is wholesome, if he can eliminate the Five Hindrances and attain the Four *Jhanas* as well as realize the three true knowledges.

Majjhima Nikaya 14: ‘Even though a noble disciple has seen clearly as it actually is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering . . . , as long as he still does not attain to the delight and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart

²⁶ Covetousness (*abhijjha*) is similar to sensual desire.

from unwholesome states (the first *jhana*) or to something more peaceful than that (the higher *ghanas*), he may still be attracted to sensual pleasure.’

No *jhana*, the wrong path. Right concentration is the Four *Jhanas*, the eighth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. When *jhana* is attained, the Five Hindrances are eliminated. This is the type of meditation praised by the Buddha because it is conducive to liberation, *Nibbana*. In *Majjhima Nikaya* 31, ‘a superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones’ is defined as the first *jhana* . . . second *jhana* . . . third *jhana* . . . fourth *jhana*’ To say that *jhana* is not necessary is the same as saying that right concentration is not necessary for liberation. In effect, this means we are only practising a sevenfold path, which is not the path laid down by the Buddha to win *Nibbana*. In *Samyutta Nikaya* 16.13, this is mentioned as one of the factors leading to the disappearance of the true *Dhamma*. Thus in *Anguttara Nikaya* 6.64 the Buddha said: ‘Concentration is the path; no-concentration, the wrong path.’

JHANAS ARE HALFWAY STATIONS TO NIBBANA

The reason *ghanas* are necessary for *arahantship* is because they are halfway stations to *Nibbana*.

Nibbana is a completely cooled state where the six types of consciousness (of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) have ceased totally. *Jhana* is a cooled state where perceptions of sensual pleasures cease. It is also a cooled state because the mind is not agitated at all but very collected.

Anguttara Nikaya 9.33: The Buddha says concerning *jhana*: ‘Where sensual pleasures end (the state of *jhana*) and those who have ended sensual pleasures so abide — surely those venerable ones are without craving, cooled (*nibbuta*), crossed over and gone beyond with respect to that factor, I say.’

Digha Nikaya 13: The Buddha says that if a person does not behave like Brahma in this life, how can he expect to be reborn as Brahma in the next life? Similarly, let us consider the state of *Nibbana*. The Buddha says: '*Nibbana* is the highest bliss.'²⁷ Now *jhanas* are states of great bliss and delight. If a person cannot attain *jhana*, a state of great bliss and delight, which surpasses divine bliss²⁸, how can he expect to attain the highest bliss of *Nibbana*?

Majjhima Nikaya 53: 'When a noble disciple has thus become one who is possessed of virtue, who guards the doors of his sense faculties, who is moderate in eating, who is devoted to wakefulness, who possesses seven good qualities, who obtains at will, without trouble or difficulty, the Four *Jhanas* that constitute the higher mind and provide a pleasant abiding here and now, he is called one in higher training who has entered upon the way He is capable of breaking out, capable of enlightenment, capable of attaining the supreme security from bondage.'

Anguttara Nikaya 5.3.28: 'Monks, I will teach you how to develop the five factored *ariyan* right concentration . . . Monks, take the case of a monk who, aloof from sensual pleasures, enters and abides in the first *jhana* . . . second *jhana* . . . third *jhana* . . . fourth *jhana* The contemplation (meditation) sign is rightly attended to by the monk . . . Monks, when a monk has thus developed and strengthened the five-factored *ariyan* right concentration, he can incline his mind to realize by higher knowledge whatever condition is so realizable, and become an eyewitness in every case, whatever the range may be.'

No *jhana*, no *asava*-destruction. As the *suttas* describe, the most important of the six higher knowledges (*abhinnas*), which include various types of psychic power, is *asava*-destruction — the attainment of *arahantship*. *Asavas*, as explained earlier, mean uncontrolled mental outflows. So an *arahant* is one whose uncontrolled mental outflows have ceased permanently. *Jhana* is a state where the uncontrolled mental outflows cease temporarily. For instance,

²⁷ *Dhammapada* verse 204.

²⁸ *Majjhima Nikaya* 75.

unwholesome thoughts cease in the first *jhana*; and all thoughts cease, a state of ‘*ariyan* silence’, in the second and higher *ghanas*. *If one cannot attain jhana and cause the asavas to cease temporarily, how can one possibly make the asavas cease permanently?*

Advice to indulge in Jhana. In *Majjhima Nikaya* 66, the Buddha describes the bliss of *jhana*: ‘This is called the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment. I say of this kind of pleasure that it should be pursued, that it should be developed, that it should be cultivated, that it should not be feared.’

The Buddha further explains in *Digha Nikaya* 29: ‘. . . these four kinds of life devoted to pleasure which are entirely conducive to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to *Nibbana*. What are they? . . . the first *jhana* . . . second *jhana* . . . third *jhana* . . . fourth *jhana* So if wanderers from other sects should say that the followers of the *Sakyan* are addicted to these four forms of pleasure-seeking, they should be told: ‘Yes’, for they would be speaking correctly about you

Well then, those who are given to these four forms of pleasure-seeking — how many fruits, how many benefits can they expect? . . . They can expect four fruits . . . they become a *sotapanna* . . . *sakadagami* . . . *anagami* . . . *arahant*’

SAMATHA AND VIPASSANA

In the practice of right recollection, one can either recollect one object or several objects. Recollection of one object, e.g. recollection of the breath (*anapanasati*), leads to tranquility and concentration of mind — the precondition for wisdom. Recollection of several objects, e.g. body, feeling, mind and *Dhamma*, leads to wisdom — provided there is concentration of mind²⁹, and also the other factors of the Noble Eightfold Path.

²⁹ *Anguttara Nikaya* 2.3.10.

Generally speaking, recollection of one object is called *samatha*, tranquility meditation, and recollection of several objects is called *vipassana*, contemplation.³⁰

Nowadays there is a popular belief that Buddhist meditation consists only of *vipassana*. However, even a nodding acquaintance with the *suttas* should make it clear that *samatha* is also an important and integral part of it. As mentioned above, *Majjhima Nikaya* 108 states clearly that the only type of meditation praised by the Buddha is that which results in the attainment of the four *Jhanas*, i.e. tranquility meditation (*samatha*). *Vipassana* is synonymous to the seventh factor (Right Recollection) of the Ariyan Eightfold Path, while *Samatha* is synonymous to the eighth factor (Right Concentration). In fact in *Samyutta Nikaya* 54.1.8 and 54.2.1 the Buddha said that before enlightenment, and even after that, he would generally spend his time on intent recollection of breathing, calling it ‘The Ariyan way of life, the best of ways, the *Tathagata*’s way of life’. Both *samatha* and *vipassana* are needed for final liberation. But the order of practice is not important. One can practise *samatha* or *vipassana* first, or practise them simultaneously.

NECESSITY OF BOTH SAMATHA AND VIPASSANA

Anguttara Nikaya 4.170: In this *sutta*, Venerable Ananda says that monks and nuns who informed him that they had attained *arahantship* all declared that they did so by one of the four categories, i.e. there are only these four ways to *arahantship*:

- *Samatha* followed by *vipassana* — after which the path is born in him/her,
- *Vipassana* followed by *samatha*³¹ — after which the path is born in him/her,

³⁰ For an in-depth treatment of this topic, please refer to “*Samatha and Vipassana*” by the author.

³¹ *Vipassana* followed by *samatha*: It can be inferred here that *vipassana* is not insight as is sometimes translated. If *vipassana* is insight, there would be no necessity to cultivate *samatha* at all. Also, as explained in *Anguttara Nikaya* 2.3.10, the practice of *vipassana* leads to insight -- provided other factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are present and developed. Therefore, *vipassana* is not insight but contemplation.

- *Samatha* and *vipassana* together, simultaneously — after which the path is born in him/her, and
- The mind stands fixed internally (i.e. on the cognizant consciousness or ‘self’) until it becomes one-pointed³² — after which the path is born in him/her.

Majjhima Nikaya 43: After right view is attained, five other supporting conditions are necessary for final liberation, namely:

- Morality (*sila*),
- Listening to the *Dhamma* (*dhammasavana*),
- Discussion of the *Dhamma* (*dhammasakaccha*),
- Tranquility meditation (*samatha*), and
- Contemplation (*vipassana*).

Majjhima Nikaya 149: The Buddha says here that when a person develops the Noble Eightfold Path fully, the 37 requisites of enlightenment³³ are also developed fully, and *samatha* and *vipassana* occur in him working evenly together.

Samyutta Nikaya 35.204: Here the Buddha gives the parable of a swift pair of messengers (*samatha* and *vipassana*) who bring the message of reality (*Nibbana*).

Anguttara Nikaya 9.4 and 10.54: These two *suttas* also say that both *samatha* and *vipassana* are necessary.

Meaning of Vipassana. The *suttas* mentioned above imply that both *samatha* and *vipassana* are needed for liberation. However, we find in the *suttas* and *vinaya* that there were several instances where external sect ascetics who had practised *samatha*, upon hearing the *Dhamma* for the first time, attained liberation or *Arahanthood*. So

³² This seems to be the method to self-realization, which later became the foundation of Zen meditation and *Jñana Yoga*.

³³ The 37 requisites of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya Dhamma*) consist of the Four Intense States of Recollection, the Four Bases of Psychic Power, the Four Right Efforts, the Five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment and the Noble Eightfold Path.

what is the *vipassana* ingredient here? *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.26 mentioned below gives us the answer ... the *vipassana* ingredient is listening to the *Dhamma*, and would also include teaching, repeating, and reflecting on the *Dhamma*. Thus *vipassana* should be translated as contemplation, as translated by the Chinese over a thousand years ago, and not insight, as is commonly translated nowadays.

Role of Samatha and Vipassana. Charity (*dana*) and morality (*sila*) are the positive and negative aspects of doing good. Likewise, *samatha* and *vipassana* can be said to be the positive and negative aspects of spiritual practice. *Samatha*, which results in the attainment of *jhana*, is the positive aspect which brings one closer to *Nibbana*, *ghanas* being halfway stations to *Nibbana*. *Vipassana* is the negative aspect, because one sees everything in the world as it is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self’³⁴ — as a result, one will naturally withdraw from and let go of the sensory world. In other words, *samatha* meditation pulls one towards *Nibbana*, in contrast to *vipassana*, which pushes one away from the world.

In summary, we need to fully cultivate and develop both *samatha* and *vipassana*, as well as all the other factors in the Noble Eightfold Path for final liberation. To say that the Buddha’s way of meditation is *samatha* or *vipassana* only misrepresents the Buddha.

IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE SUTTAS

Attaining Right View. The importance of understanding the earliest *suttas*, found in the *nikayas*, cannot be overemphasized.³⁵ Why? Because they are the authoritative means for right view. It is said in *Majjhima Nikaya* 43 that right view arises from the voice of another (teaching the *Dhamma*) and having thorough consideration. Gaining

³⁴ *Majjhima Nikaya* 62.

³⁵ For an in-depth discussion of the importance of understanding the *suttas*, please refer to “Liberation: Relevance of *Sutta-Vinaya*” by the author, first published in the “*Theravada*”, *Journal of the Theravada Society of Australia*, March 1999. Subsequently, it was reproduced in a book.

right view is crucial because it is synonymous with becoming an ariya.³⁶ Anguttara Nikaya 9.20 shows that a Sotapanna (First Fruit Ariya) is one who has Right View, and Samyutta Nikaya 55.3.4 proves that Sotapanna is attained by listening to and understanding the Dhamma. Thus the Buddha put right view as the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, saying that the cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path starts with right view.³⁷ Hence we see in the *Suttas and Vinaya* that every person who attained stream-entry (first path ariya) did so by listening to the Dhamma. After right view is attained, five other supporting conditions are necessary for final liberation — among them, listening to the *Dhamma* and discussing the *Dhamma*. This means that to practise meditation without studying the discourses (*suttas*) is a great mistake if one's aim is liberation from suffering.

Dhamma-Vinaya is the teacher. In fact in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*³⁸, the Buddha, before his demise, advised the monks to take the *Dhamma-Vinaya*³⁹ as their teacher after he passed away. In *Digha Nikaya* 26, the Buddha further emphasized: 'Monks, be a lamp unto yourselves, be a refuge unto yourselves, with no other refuge. Take the *Dhamma* as your lamp; take the *Dhamma* as your refuge, with no other refuge.'

The great authorities. Understanding the *Dhamma* (i.e. the *suttas*) is very important because it is the spiritual road map if we ever wish to attain the various stages of becoming an ariya. In *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.180 the Buddha teaches the great authorities. He advises that when any monk says that such and such are the teachings of the Buddha we should, without scorning or welcoming his words, compare those words with the *suttas* and *vinaya*. If they are not in accordance with the *suttas* and *vinaya*, we should reject them.

³⁶ An ariya is one who has attained one of the eight stages of sainthood and is thus on his/her way out of the cycle of rebirths.

³⁷ *Majjhima Nikaya* 117.

³⁸ *Digha Nikaya* 16.

³⁹ The *Dhamma-Vinaya* is the totality of the Buddha's original teachings. In *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.180, the *Dhamma* is said to be his discourses (*suttas*).

Advice to master the suttas. Also, the Buddha warns in *Samyutta Nikaya* 20.7: ‘. . . in the future, those *suttas* uttered by the *Tathagata* (Buddha), deep, profound in meaning, transcending the world, concerning emptiness (*sunyata*): to these when uttered they will not listen, will not give a ready ear, will not want to understand, to recite, to master them. But those discourses made by poets, mere poetry, a conglomeration of words and phrases, alien (outside the Buddha’s teachings), utterances of disciples: to these when uttered they will listen, will give a ready ear, will want to understand, to recite, to master them. Thus it is, monks, that the *suttas* uttered by the *Tathagata*, deep, profound in meaning, transcending the world, concerning emptiness, will disappear. Therefore, monks, train yourselves thus: To these very *suttas* will we listen, give a ready ear, understand, recite, and master them.’

Liberation. In addition, *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.26 gives the five occasions when liberation is attained:

- Listening to the *Dhamma*,
- Teaching the *Dhamma*,
- Repeating the *Dhamma*,
- Reflecting on the *Dhamma*, and
- Some concentration sign (*samadhi nimitta*) is rightly reflected upon and understood.

Of these five occasions, only the last possibly refers to formal meditation. *This shows that understanding the Dhamma is of paramount importance for liberation.* Two synonymous *Pali* terms frequently recur in the *suttas*: (i) *bahusacca* — much hearing of the Truths (*Dhamma*), and (ii) *bahussuta* — much hearing of *Dhamma*. And in *Majjhima Nikaya* 53, *bahussuta* is said to be one of the possessions of a noble one.

Penetrative insights only possible with jhana. We find in the *suttas* that people often attained the various levels of *ariyahood* while listening to the *Dhamma*, especially the *sotapanna* stage. Depending on how developed their mind is, i.e. the degree of concentration they possess, their attainment corresponds to their concentration level when they heard the *Dhamma*. Thus one without *jhana* could become a

sotapanna or *sakadagami* on hearing, teaching, repeating or reflecting on the *Dhamma*; whereas another possessing *jhana* would have become an *anagami* or *arahant*. Why? Because they possess the pure and developed mind, owing to *jhana* with its supports and requisites, for penetrative insights to be possible.

Chapter One of the *Mahavagga* (*Vinaya-pitaka*) makes this quite clear. After the Buddha converted 1,000 matted-hair ascetics (*jatilas*) to become his disciples, he preached to them the *Adittapariyaya Sutta*, whereupon all 1,000 of them became *arahants*. Thereafter the Buddha brought them to Rajagaha, where King Bimbisara led 12 *nahutas* of lay people to visit the Buddha. According to *Pali* dictionaries, a *nahuta* is ‘a vast number, a myriad’; and according to the *Vinaya* Commentary is 10,000. The Buddha gave them a graduated discourse on the *Dhamma*, basically on the Four Noble Truths, and all 12 *nahutas* (120,000) of them attained the *Dhamma*-eye — the first path *ariya* attainment. Some of them may have practised meditation, but it is highly improbable that everyone in this large number of people would have done so.

CONCLUSION

The way to the ending of suffering taught by the Buddha is the Noble Eightfold Path. The practice of this path starts with the first factor, right view. To attain right view one has to study and be thoroughly familiar with the original discourses of the Buddha. Further, one has to practise moral conduct and meditation.

Mindfulness (*sampajanna*) is the preliminary step in meditation. This has to be combined with recollection (*sati*) so that it is directed towards the goal of Buddhist meditation. However, *sati-sampajanna* alone is insufficient to win liberation. We need to get a hold on the mind — otherwise we may find that ‘the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak’. Thus *sati-sampajanna* needs to be cultivated and developed into an intense state, until *satipatthana* (an intense state of recollection) is attained and concentration achieved. When concentration (*jhana*) is achieved, the Five Hindrances are eliminated — this is the type of meditation praised by the Buddha.

Thus the primary aim of meditation is to rid the mind of the Five Hindrances and attain to the *jhanas*. When the mind is developed in this manner, it is possible for one to attain insight into the *suttas* either when one listens, teaches, repeats or reflects on the Noble Truths found in the *suttas* or during formal meditation. This is why meditation practice must be combined with the study of the earliest discourses.

Meditation is about cultivating a developed mind and developed faculties so that one can go against the grain of our natural unwholesome tendencies and attain liberation from greed, hatred and delusion. A developed mind is attained when *jhana* is attained and the Five Hindrances are eliminated. Developed faculties are explained quite clearly in the following quotation from the *Indriyabhavana Sutta* 26:

‘And how, Ananda, is one a noble one with developed faculties? Here, Ananda, when a monk sees a form with the eye . . . hears a sound with the ear . . . smells an odour with the nose . . . tastes a flavour with the tongue . . . touches a tangible with the body . . . cognizes a mind-object with the mind, there arises what is agreeable, there arises what is disagreeable, there arises what is both agreeable and disagreeable. If he should wish: ‘May I abide perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive’, he abides perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive. If he should wish: ‘May I abide perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive’, he abides perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive. If he should wish: ‘May I abide perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive and the unrepulsive’, he abides perceiving the unrepulsive in that. If he should wish: ‘May I abide perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive and the repulsive’, he abides perceiving the repulsive in that. If he should wish: ‘May I, avoiding both the repulsive and the unrepulsive, abide in equanimity, mindful and collected’, he abides in equanimity towards that, mindful and collected. That is how one is a noble one with developed faculties.’

Thus meditation is not just passive mindfulness or observation. It is to be in full control of our mind so that we can control our perceptions and feelings and not let them control us.

