

CHAPTER 3

VIPASSANA BHAVANA - INSIGHT MEDITATION

According to Canonical text, the ideal spiritual training of the Buddhist Disciple is a Triad of Trainings (*tividha sikkhā*) comprising Morality (*Sila*), Concentration (*Samādhi*) and wisdom (*Paḍḍā*). The Noble Eightfold path forms the highest development of this Training.

According to *Culla Vedalla Sutta* (Majjhima Nikāya 44), Right Understanding and Right Thought comprise the Training of Wisdom (*Paḍḍā sikkhā*), Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood comprise the Training of Morality (*Sila sikkhā*), and Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration Comprise the Training of Concentration (*Samādhi Sikkhā*).

In the very first Discourse, Buddha identified the Noble Eightfold Path as the way to Cessation of Suffering which was Nibbana. Although the three forms of Training may be developed simultaneously, considering the support that one form of Training can lend to another Morality is treated as the indispensable foundation for Concentration which leads one to the threshold of Nibbana and unfolds wisdom through which alone one can enter the Realm of Nibbana.

While morality is the foundation of the spiritual path Buddha's exhortation regarding the effective way to Nibbana is clearly enunciated in the *Satipatthāna Sutta* that concentration (based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness) is the sole way to all spiritual attainments culminating in the realization of Nibbana. Mindfulness and concentration are exercises that are included in the Comprehensive Scheme of mental cultures called, in Buddhist Psychological Ethics, "Bhāvana" (Meditation).

The word "Bhāvanā" is derived from the Pali verb 'bhaveti' meaning 'producing', developing by means thought or cultivating the mind. Meditation includes all methods of mind culture including subjects/ objects of contemplation (*kammatthāna*).

The Buddhist meditation is a comprehensive and elaborate system of mental culture and practice consisting of two branches, called, respectively Tranquillity Meditation (*Samatha bhāvanā*) and Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā bhāvanā*).

Samatha (some times called *Samādhi*) is one - pointed ness of mind (*cittassa ekaggatā*) on one object to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Tranquillity meditation aims at achieving utmost one-pointed ness of the mind on a selected subject and elevating one's conception of the subject to an abstraction. In this process one attains states of mental serenity and tranquillity called Absorptions (*Jhāna*) destroying defilements which are hostile to spiritual progress, develops factors that are salutary (*jhānānga*) and attains intuitive awareness. As one attains the Five Absorptions one after another, one destroys a hindrance (*Nivarana*) by means of a salutary factor (*jhānānga*) at each stage. Tranquillity meditation is practiced by concentrating on a selected object or subject. Visuddhi Magga gives a list of Forty objects of Meditation (*Kammatthāna*)

(Refer to the thirteenth chapter of Book Three for details)

Tranquillity meditation is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The stillness of mind established on the purity of thought provides a stable and conducive foundation for the development of insight (*Vipassana*) which consists in "seeing all phenomena in their true perspective.

INSIGHT MEDITATION (*Vipassanā Bhāvanā*).

The term '*Vipassanā*' is purely a Buddhistic term unlike *Jhāna* which had a pre - Buddhist origin. It is derived from the Pali verb '*vipassati*' which means ' to see and penetrate an object thoroughly'. The closest English equivalent for '*Vipassanā*' is 'Insight'. The term '*Vipassanā Òāna*' is applied to "full knowledge acquired by discerning the three characteristics of phenomena namely, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and Non - self (*anatta*).". When applied to meditation '*Vipassana*' signifies mental culture that induces the knowledge of '*Insight*' with or without the practice of Tranquillity meditation.

A method of practising 'Vipassana' meditation is described in the *Rathavinita Sutta* (Majjhima Nikaya 24) where the development of the seven stages of purity (*Satta Visuddhi*) is treated as a process of developing Vipassana. *Abhidhammatta Sangaha* treats the Seven Stages of Purity as subjects of Insight meditation. The Seven Stages of Purity are the following:

- I. Purity of Morality - *Sila Visuddhi*
- II. Purity of Mind - *Citta Visuddhi*
- III. Purity of Right Views - *Ditthi Visuddhi*
- IV. Purity consisting in overcoming doubts - *Kankhā vitarana Visuddhi*
- V. Purity by knowledge and Vision as to what is the path and what is not the path - *Maggāmagga Òānadassana Visuddhi*
- VI. Purity by knowledge and vision of the way - *Patipada Òānadassana Visuddhi*
- VII. Purity by knowledge and Vision - *Òānadassana Visuddhi*

Vipassana meditation should be continued in the Three Contemplations which are -

- I. Contemplation of Impermanence - *Aniccānupassanā*
- II. Contemplation of Suffering - *Dukkhānupassanā*
- III. Contemplation of Non - ego - *Anattānupassanā*

Twenty five subjects are to be focussed on under each of the above Contemplations They are: Aggregates, sense - cognitions, sense-objects, sense - contacts, sense - feelings, sense - perceptions, volitions, sensory desires, sensory reasoning, sensory investigations, sense - elements, kasinas, 32 parts of the body, sense spheres, 18 elements, 22 faculties,

planes of existence, becoming (*bhava*), threefold existence, three stages of becoming, 4 *Jhānas*, 4 illimitables, formless attainments, 12 Nidanas,

At the end of each contemplation, the disciple should reflect:

- a) All is impermanent in the sense of being extinct
- b) All is suffering in the sense of being fearful
- c) All is non - self in the sense of being void for essence.

The path of Tranquillity Meditation is set forth along reflection on Objects of Meditation (*Kammatthana*), the path of Insight Meditation is set forth along the Seven Stages of Purity and True knowledge of phenomenal existence (*yathābhūta òānadassana*).

Tranquillity Meditation leads to the attainment of Absorptions (*Jhāna*) and Superior Intellects (*Abhiòòà*) of the Absorptions, the Ninth Neither perception nor non - perception (*Neva saòòā nāsaòòāyatana*) and of the Superior Intellects, Knowledge of the Destruction of Cankers (*Āsavakkhaya Nana*) can be attained only through Insight Meditation.

Tranquillity Meditation and Insight Meditation are both exercises in the development of concentration (*Samādhī*). Concentration, itself, does not mark the culmination of the path leading to liberation. Concentration must be developed to its fullness to realise wisdom which elevates the disciple to Four Noble paths and Fruits which culminate in liberation at two levels, liberation through Mental development (*Samādhī*) (*cetovimutti*) and liberation through Full knowledge (*Paòòā Vimutti*). This is the end of the long course of Meditation practice when the disciple attains his goal of eternal happiness of Nibbana.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the main differences between Tranquillity Meditation (*Samatha bhāvanā*) and Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā Bhāvanā*)
- 2) Describe the methods of contemplating ' Five Aggregates' (*Pancakkhandha*) in developing Insight Meditation.
- 3) Explain the concept of "Seeing things in their true perspective" (*yathābhutanana dassana*) in Insight Meditation.
- 4) Discuss the importance of Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā bhāvanā*) as the culmination of the path to Nibbana.