

Samatha and Vipassana

Buddhist Meditation

Bhavana or Meditation means the cultivation and development of the mind with the aim of attaining enlightenment and thereby, Nibbana. Practicing meditation lessens and eventually eradicates negative mental states and defilements that cloud and delude the mind.

At the same time, meditation is practiced to cultivate positive mental states that help to purify the mind, and nurture the arising of insights into the true nature of our existence. Meditation brings concentration and joy to the mind. It trains the mind to develop mindfulness and clear comprehension of reality.

In other words, Buddhist meditation trains its practitioners to realize the three universal characteristics of existence, i.e. anicca, dukkha and anatta, in every moment. With this realization, and when the mind gets purified, insights will arise. These insights will ultimately result in the attainment of Nibanna.

The Buddha is said to have identified two paramount mental qualities that arise from wholesome meditative practice :

- Calm abiding (Pali: *Samatha*) which steadies, composes, unifies and concentrates the mind;
- Insight (Pali: *Vipassana*) which enables one to explore, discern and see things as they truly are.

Samatha Meditation

Kammatthana is a Pali word which literally means the place of work. Figuratively it means the place within the mind where one goes in order to work on spiritual development.

It refers to the forty canonical objects of meditation (samatha kammatthana), listed in the third chapter of the Visuddhimagga.

The kammatthana collectively are not suitable for all persons at all times. Each kammatthana can be prescribed, especially by a

teacher, to a given person at a given time, depending on the person's temperament and state of mind.

7 classes of meditation subjects :

- 1) Kasina - 10 Kasina objects
- 2) Asubha - 10 Corpse objects
- 3) Annussati - 10 Recollection objects
- 4) Brahma-vihara - 4 sublime abodes
- 5) Aruppa - 4 Immaterial spheres
- 6) Ahare-patikula-sanna - 1 Loathsomeness of food
- 7) Catu-dhatu-vavatthana - 1 Analysis of the 4 elements

Ten objects which one can behold directly (*kasina*) :

- (1) earth, (2) water, (3) fire, (4) air,
- (5) blue, green, (6) yellow, (7) red, (8) white,
- (9) enclosed space, (10) bright light.

Ten objects of repulsion (*asubha*) :

- (1) swollen corpse, (2) discolored corpse,
- (3) festering corpse, (4) fissured corpse,
- (5) gnawed corpse, (6) dismembered corpse,
- (7) scattered corpse, (8) bleeding corpse,
- (9) worm-eaten corpse, (10) skeleton.

Ten recollections (*anussati*) :

Recollections of the Triple Gem :

- (1) Buddha, (2) Dhamma, (3) Sangha.

Recollections of virtues :

- (4) morality (*sila*), (5) liberality (*caga*)
- (6) the wholesome attributes of Devas.

Recollections of :

- (7) peace, (8) death, (9) breath, (10) 32 parts of the body.

Four Brahma-viharas :

- (1) Metta, (2) Karuna, (3) Mudita, (4) Upekkha.

Four 4 immaterial spheres :

- Infinity of space
- Infinity of consciousness
- Nothingness
- Neither perception nor non-perception.

One (1) perception of the loathsomeness of food.

One (1) analysis of the four elements.

Meditation subjects based on temperament and state of mind :

- Greedy : 10 objects of repulsion; or 32 parts of the body contemplation.
- Hating: the 4 Brahma-viharas; or, the 4 color kasinas.
- Deluded: mindfulness of breath.
- Faithful: the first 6 recollections.
- Intelligent: recollection of death or peace; the perception of disgust of food; or, the analysis of the 4 elements.
- Speculative: mindfulness of breath.

The six non-color kasinas and the four formless states are suitable for all temperaments.

Samatha meditation :

- Leads to calm, tranquility, Jhana.
- 40 different types of objects, depending on temperament. Focuses on a single object.
- Temporarily suppresses the 5 Hindrances.

Vipassana meditation :

- Leads to insights of the true nature of existence of anicca, dukkha, anatta.
- Focuses on ever-changing objects.
- Eventually destroys the 5 Hindrances and all other defilements, and attainment of Nibbana.

Through the meditative development of calm abiding, one is able to suppress the obscuring Five Hindrances. With the suppression of these hindrances, the meditative development of insight yields liberating wisdom.

In the Kimsuka Tree Sutta, the Buddha said that calm abiding and insight are "the swift pair of messengers" who deliver the message of Nibbana via the Noble Eightfold Path.

In fact, these are indivisible facets of the same process. Calm leads to insight and insight leads to calm.