

# Samādhi

By: Professor Angraj Chaudhary

*Samādhi* means concentration, one-pointedness of mind. When one fixes one's mind on any object, it is called *samādhi* i.e., concentration of mind. Concentration may be right (*sammā samādhi*) or wrong (*micchā samādhi*). When a cat concentrates its mind to catch a rat or a stork stands on one leg on the bank of a pond to catch fish, it is called concentration of *akusala citta* (unwholesome mind). Such mind can cause only destruction. But the *samādhi* that does one good is really the concentration of wholesome mind which is called *sammā samādhi* (*kusalacittassa ekaggatā samādhi*). This kind of *samādhi* is very helpful for a person who wants to make progress on the spiritual path.

The characteristic (*lakkhaṇa*) of concentration is unwavering, undistracted. In other words, its characteristic is one-pointedness. Its function (*rasa*) is to remove distraction. It manifests itself as being non-wavering and bliss is its immediate cause. Concentration makes mind stable, unwavering and undistracted.

Mind is naturally very fickle and unsteady as it keeps on wavering and getting distracted. But once it is tamed and controlled, it has infinite power to do good. One can make good use of it and make it capable of doing wholesome work. That is why it is said in the *Dhammapada* that a well-directed mind (*sammā panihitaṃ cittaṃ*) is far more helpful than even one's parents. In other words, what one's parents cannot do, one's mind can do for one.

*'Na taṃ mātā pitā kayirā, aṭṭhē vā pi ca ñātakā/  
Sammā panihitaṃ cittaṃ, seyyaso naṃ tato kare!'*

Similarly, if the mind is not controlled and tamed then it can do a lot of harm, it can do greater harm than even one's enemies can do.

*'Diso disaṃ yaṃ taṃ kayirā, verī vā pana verinaṃ/  
Micchāpanihitaṃ cittaṃ, pāpiyo na tato kare!'*

One can direct one's mind only when one has control over it. For this, practicing meditation is necessary.

Meditation cannot be practiced unless the impediments are removed. In the Visuddhimaggo, Buddhaghosa has enumerated ten impediments. They are: a dwelling place (hut, room or monastery where many things are stored which will distract his attention), family (relatives or supporters who will often visit him and take his time), gain (it is an impediment in the sense that when a *bhikkhu* gets requisites, he has to teach the givers, thus not getting time to do his duties), class (if he has to teach *suttas* or Abhidhamma to students, he hardly finds time to meditate), *nava-kamma* (building work or repair work also takes a lot of time), travel (if he has to undertake a journey, he will keep thinking about it and will not find time to meditate), kins (either mother, father or other relative or one's teacher, co-resident, pupil etc. who will take his time), illness (a great obstacle, because if he is ill he cannot undertake the arduous task of doing meditation), books (if he is busy reciting them, they will prove distracting) and supernormal powers (great impediment for attaining insight, these powers are obtainable through meditation, but meditation should not be a means for attaining supernormal powers but it should be a means to attain insight).

But these are very gross obstacles which are visible, but there are many subtle impediments called defilements such as *kāmachhanda* (sensuous desire), *vyāpada* (ill-will), *thinamiddha* (sloth and torpor), *uddhaccakukucca* (restlessness and scruples) and *vicikicchā* (doubt). They are great distracting forces.

For being able to practice meditation, one has to observe moral precepts. By observing moral precepts, one tries to minimize or drive out different defilements from mind. It is these defilements which distract the mind and do not let it concentrate. By observing *sīla* (morality), one keeps his physical and vocal actions pure. This means that he is able to keep greed, ill-will, sexual desire, fear etc. at bay which will not prompt him to do unwholesome and impure physical and vocal actions.

Besides observing moral precepts, one has to ask for a suitable *kammaṭṭhāna* (meditation subject) from one's teacher who is called a *kalyāṇamitta*.

There are several *kammaṭṭhānas*. Buddhaghosa enumerated forty of them, such as 10 *kaṣiṇas*, ten kinds of *asubha* (foulness), ten recollections such as *buddhānussati*, four *brahmavihārā* such as *mettā*, *karuṇā* etc.

These *kammaṭṭhānas* are not suitable for all; what is suitable for one may not be suitable for another person. The reason for this is that there are different types of people with different temperaments. Some are greedy (*rāga carita*), some are hateful (*dosa carita*), some are deluded (*moha carita*), some are faithful (*saddhā carita*), some are intelligent (*buddhi carita*) and some are speculative (*vitakka carita*).

Ten kinds of foulness (*asubha*) that one observes in the cemetery such as a bloated, discolored and festering body being eaten by crows and vultures and the observation of the thirty-two parts of body (*atthi imasmi kāye kesa, lomā, nakhā, dantā* etc.) are the suitable meditation subjects for greedy and lustful people. They have excessive sense-desire. They are very much enamored with physical beauty. When they observe the impurities that the body contains and what happens to it after one is dead, they become disillusioned and gradually get rid of attachment to it.

The four *brahmavihārā* and four color *kasiṇas* are suitable for one with a hateful temperament.

Mindfulness of the incoming and outgoing breath is a suitable meditation subject for persons of a deluded temperament. It is also suitable for people of a speculative temperament.

Out of the ten *anussatis*, the first six such as *buddhānussati, dhammānussati* etc. are suitable meditation subjects for the people of the faithful temperament.

Mindfulness of death, the recollection of peace, the defining of four elements such as *paṭhavī* (earth), *āpo* (water), *tejo* (fire) and *vāyo* (air) and the perception of repulsiveness in nutriment (*āhārepaṭikkūla saññā*) are suitable meditation subjects for people of an intelligent temperament.

The rest of the meditation subjects, *kasiṇas* and immaterial states are by and large suitable for all people.

A concentrated mind leads to absorption. When one meditates on some visible object suitable to one's temperament, one becomes so absorbed in it that all other thoughts are driven out of one's mind. It means that the mind is absolutely concentrated on that object, so much so that that a stage comes when one can visualize the object even when one's eyes are closed. One concentrates the mind on this visualized image called *uggaha nimitta* then makes further progress in attaining concentration of mind. This enables one to develop *uggaha nimitta* into *paṭibhāga nimitta* (conceptualized image).

One makes further progress in developing the concentration of mind and thus possesses what is called *upacara samādhi* (proximate concentration). *Upacara samadhi* means that one is very near to attaining *appanā samādhi* (ecstatic concentration). When one is at this stage, the five hindrances mentioned above are kept firmly at bay, although only for as long as one is at that stage. This is called *rūpāvacara jhāna* (fine material absorption). There are five factors of *rūpāvacara jhāna*. They are *vitakka* (initial application), *vicāra* (sustained application), *pīti* (joy), *sukha* (happiness) and *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness). In the second *rūpāvacara jhāna*, *vitakka* is dropped; in the third, *vicāra* is dropped, in the fourth, *pīti* is dropped; in the fifth, *sukha* is dropped and is replaced by *upekkhā* in the sixth fine material absorption.

After one has attained mastery over fine material absorption, one develops absorption more and more and then attains the four formless concentrations. They are *Ākāsañcāyatana* (one concentrates thinking that space is infinite), *Viññāṇañcāyatana* (one concentrates thinking that consciousness is infinite), *Ākiñcāññāyatana* (one concentrates thinking that there is nothing) and *Nevasaññānāsaññāyatana* (one concentrates thinking that there is neither perception nor perceiver).

The last is the highest state of absorption, the highest of the *samatha* (calm) type of *samādhi*. But in the *samatha* type of *samādhi*, one controls only the *paritta citta* (small part of the mind or conscious mind). If one attains this absorption, one will have full control over the sense organs and will not create any new *saṅkhāras* (*navam natthi sambhavam*) but one will not be able to observe and control the subconscious and unconscious parts of mind where every moment *taṇhā* (desire) is being created without one being aware of it.

The Buddha discovered *vipassana* meditation practicing which one can be aware of what is happening within, where craving is being created and how this process of entangling one in infinite misery can be stopped. Here, besides attaining concentration of mind, *sati* (mindfulness) and *sampajañña* (knowledge of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* at the experiential level is gained) are developed. Ultimately, this realization leads one to develop non-attachment to the objects of the world, craving for which keeps one moving in the cycle of birth and death, suffering birth after birth endlessly.

*Samādhi* is actually *samatha*—concentration of mind, but *vipassana* is to experience *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* and to develop *nirveda*.

Forty *kammaṭṭhānas* called *ārammaṇas* are the subjects of meditation suitable for practicing *samatha* type of meditation. So, they are called *ārammaṇūpajjhāna*. For practicing *vipassana*, *lakkhaṇas* such as *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anattā* (no-self) of an object are suitable subjects of meditation. These three, therefore, are called *lakkhaṇūpajjhāna*.

In short, concentration of mind can be achieved by one who observes the five moral precepts, removes defilements from one's mind and focuses the mind on one of the forty *kammaṭṭhānas* (subjects of meditation). *Vipassana*, however, can be practiced when such a person realizes the three characteristics of all objects of the world i.e., *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*.

Questions:

- 1 Define *samādhi*. How many kinds of *samādhi* are there? Write in detail.
- 2 What is *sammā samādhi*? How does it differ from *micchā samādhi*?
3. Define *sammā panihitaṃ cittaṃ* and *micchā panihita cittaṃ* and their advantages and disadvantages respectively.
4. What do you mean by *kammaṭṭhāna*? How many *kammaṭṭhānas* are described in the *Visuddhimaggo*?
5. Enumerate ten *palibodhas* (impediments) and define them briefly.
6. What are five *nivaraṇas*? Explain each of them in detail.
7. Explain the four *brahmavihārās*.
8. What are the five factors of *rūpāvacara jhāna*? Explain each of them in detail.
9. Bring out the difference between *rūpāvacara* and *arūpāvacara jhāna*.
10. Show the difference between *samatha* and *vipassana*.

11. *Samatha* can enable you to concentrate your mind but *vipassana* will enable you to liberate yourself. Elaborate.
12. Explain ‘*Khīṇaṃ purāṇaṃ*’.
13. Bring out the difference between *rūpāvacara* and *arūpāvacara jhāna*.
14. Bring out the difference between *ārammaṇūpajjhāna* and *lakkhaṇūpajjhāna*.
15. What are the factors of *arūpāvacara jhāna*? Explain them in detail.