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An Examination of Vipassanā (Insight)

Meditation from a Theravāda Perspecti

ve

Shih Zizhuo

University of Illinois at Urbana and Champaign, Department of East Asi

a Languages and Cultures

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Summary

What is the relationship between insight meditation (vipassanā meditation) and serenity/ calm meditation (samatha meditation) in terms of attaining enlightenment? Is there any way, which is purely intellectual approach, could lead to liberation from all the defilements requiring not help at all of

meditation? This essay attempts to investigate the aforementioned issues posed by some articles which propose that vipassanā is a kind of intellectual activity and it could lead to the final goal, nibbanā, without the help of meditation.

Since this issue is caused by the term “vipassanā” (insight), this essay, firstly, will concentrate on examining the nature, characteristics and the practice of vipassanā as well as a very similar term “vipassanā bhāvanā” (the cultivation of insight). Then it goes further to investigate the relationship between vipassanā and samatha meditation.

The approach taken by this essay is not only consulting the resources of Nikāyas, Paṭisambhidāmagga, and Visuddhimagga, but also takes the contemporary works of some Theravāda masters into account.

關鍵詞：1.vipassanā (insight) 2.vipassanā bhāvanā (the cultivation of insight) 3.samatha (calm) 4.relationship and intellectual activity

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1. Introduction

In the Pāli Canon, the methods of meditation taught by the Buddha consist of two systems, that is, the development of serenity or calm (samatha) and the development of insight (vipassanā).[1] However, there are some controversial issues regarding serenity meditation and insight meditation for both contemporary scholarship and practitioners of Theravāda Buddhism. First of all, there is a debate concerning which technique is the crucial practice in order to attain nibbāna. On the one hand, Winston King suggested that, as regards techniques for achieving nibbāna in the practice of Theravāda Buddhism, insight (vipassanā) meditation is the most direct and exclusive way to attain the final goal.[2] On the other hand, Johannes Bronkhorst (1993) argued that the development of serenity (samatha) is the innovative and distinguishing meditation in early Buddhism. This second issue instead of emphasizing the tension between practice of calm and practice of insight, Lance Cousins pointed out that the important point is how much calm and insight should be developed at the different stages of the

path.[3] The third issue is whether insight (vipassanā) meditation bears a relationship to calm meditation as far as attaining enlightenment is concerned.[4] For instance, Vetter suggested that there is a “Discriminating insight” (Pāli: vipassanā / Sanskrit: vipaśyanā) which “conquering desire, other cankers and, thereby, ending rebirth”

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requires no meditation.[5] Yet, Gombrich argued that, even though there are some suttas showing that practitioners can attain enlightenment without meditation, the statement may have been amended by monastic compilers.[6]

The third issue is the most significant of all because it includes the main point of the first two issues, that is, what is the real relationship between serenity meditation and insight meditation and to what extent they should be developed in terms of obtaining liberation. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is firstly focus on clarifying vipassanā, and vipassanā meditation. Then, it goes on investigating into the relationship between vipassanā and samatha (calm meditation) in consideration of attaining enlightenment. The approach employed in this essay will not only use the literature, but also take the actual practice into account.

The primary sources employed in this essay are the Pāli suttas, which include the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Saṃyutta Nikāya, Aṅguttara Nikāya, and the Paṭisambhidāmagga.[7] The second resources include: the Visuddhimagga, the most influential work of Buddhaghosa, and some of the contemporary works of Theravādin masters and scholars.

2. What is vipassanā

In this section, this essay will discuss the confusion of vipassanā and vipassanā meditation, and continues further to probe whether insight (vipassanā) is the same as insight meditation (vipassanā meditation). In order to avoid confusion, hereafter this essay will employ the word “vipassanā” instead of using the translation “insight”, and use the term “vipassanā meditation” or “the cultivation of vipassanā” rather than the rendering of “insight meditation”.

2.1 The confusion among vipassanā, paññā and vipassanā meditation

According to the ways in which the notion of vipassanā is used by some scholars, there is a confusion among vipassanā (vipaśyanā), paññā (prajñā), and vipassanā meditation (vipaśyanā meditation). As Rupert Gethin (1988:198-201) has pointed out, a number of scholars, such as De La Vallee Poussin, Frauwallner, Schmithausen, Vetter, Griffiths, and Gombrich, [8] partly assume that the nature of vipassanā meditation is “a rather intellectual and rational conception”. [9] The fact that Poussin interprets the notion of vipassanā as an intellectual achievement can be discerned in the following statement: “one may discriminate in the Buddhist sources, both ancient and scholastic, between two opposed theories..... the theory of prajñā (or vipaśyanā) which makes salvation a purely or mainly intellectual achievement, and the theory which makes salvation the goal of ascetic and ecstatic disciplines.” [10] Vetter (1988:35) is certainly sympathetic to Poussin when he says: “discriminating insight (paññā or prajñā) is knowing that things we normally consider to be the self or belonging to the self cannot be or belong to the self if this self is conceived of as not suffering. To facilitate this ‘disidentification’ the main object of false identification, the human person, is divided into constituents or components; each part is examined as to whether it can be the self and

judged as not being the self”. In addition, he also denies that discriminative insight (vipassanā) bears any connection with serenity meditation. [11]

The previous information shows three problematic issues: (1) whether paññā is the same as vipassanā; (2) whether vipassanā (or paññā; insight) is the same as vipassanā meditation or the cultivation of insight (vipassanā bhāvanā); (3) whether the achievement of insight (vipassanā) is merely carried out by intellectual activity. In the following passage, this essay will clarify these three issues in turn.

2.2 The relationship between paññā and vipassanā

Poussin, and Gombrich pointed out that, basically, paññā has the same meaning as vipassanā, yet they used different words to translate paññā (prajñā) and vipassanā (vipaśyanā). Poussin translated vipassanā (vipaśyanā) as “contemplation” and paññā (prajñā) as “discrimination between things”;^[12] while Gombrich translated paññā as “insight” and vipassanā (vipaśyanā) as “intuition”.^[13] Although Poussin translated these two words into different English terms, he put both of them in the same scale and said that they refer to the same intellectual means of spiritual liberation.^[14] Similarly, Gombrich also agreed that these two words basically have the same meaning, though they were employed in different contexts as technical terms.^[15] Although Vetter did not explicitly make this point in his book, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*,

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his translation of paññā, as “discriminating insight”, does suggest that he shares a similar translation with what Poussin rendered the word “vipassanā”. Moreover, the Pāli suttas, MN22 and MN 74,^[16] the main resources employed by him, are related to the techniques of vipassanā meditation as far as their essential practices shown by these two suttas are concerned.^[17]

Therefore, it may be suggested that the issue discussed by the above scholars is “something about vipassanā”. The reason for using “something about vipassanā” instead of “vipassanā meditation” (vipassanā bhāvanā) is that there appears to be a confusion among vipassanā, paññā, and vipassanā meditation.

Since the clarification of the relationship between paññā and vipassanā requires more detailed investigation on the relationship of vipassanā and vipassanā meditation, this essay will focus on discussing the later relationship mainly, and mentions the relationship of vipassanā and paññā subordinarily. Here we accept the scholarly consensus, i.e. vipassanā has the same basic meaning as paññā provisionally, and go further to conclude that the relation between paññā and vipassanā is that paññā includes vipassanā, namely vipassanā is a sort of paññā.

2.3 Vipassanā and vipassanā meditation

As we can see in section 2.2, the notion of vipassanā has been confused with the notion of vipassanā meditation. For instance, when the scholar mean to say some kind of vipassanā (insight) or paññā (wisdom),

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they talks about how to practice in order to cultivate vipassanā, which actually, is “vipassanā meditation”.[18]

In order to clarify the differences between vipassanā and vipassanā meditation, it is helpful to define the exact meanings of these words and to consult the Pāli canon. According to the Pāli-English Dictionary, the word vipassanā refers to the inward vision, insight, intuition or introspection.[19] It derives from the verb vi-passati. “Vi” is a prefix and refers to expansion in variety or in detail, and passati means “to see”. Hence, vipassanā, the noun form of vi-passati, can mean “seeing an object in detail or “seeing an object in many ways” or “seeing or penetrating an object thoroughly”.[20] Furthermore, there is a deeper meaning when this word is employed in a more technical sense. Buddhaghosa, the most influential commentator of Theravāda Buddhism, defined vipassanā as that which “penetrated into dharmas as they are in themselves, and destroys the darkness of delusion, which covers up the own-being of dharmas”.[21] The Buddhist Dictionary also goes further to suggest that vipassanā is “the intuitive light flashing forth and exposing the truth of the impermanency, misery, and impersonality of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence.”[22] Here we find that vipassanā cultivates the realisation of the threefold nature of conditioned existence (lakkhaṇa)—impermanence, suffering and non-self.

The definitions mentioned above can be found in some Pāli suttas as well. In Pāli Agantukā sutta, the calm (samatha) and insight (vipassanā) are defined as follows:

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.....And what, monks, are the states (dhammā) that are to be cultivated (bhāvetabbā) by full comprehension (abhiññā)? They are calm (samatha) and insight (vipassanā).[\[23\]](#)

A Similar notion can be found in MN73 as well:

In that case, Vaccha, develop (bhāvehi) further two things (dhammā): serenity (samatha) and insight (vipassanā). When these two things are developed (bhāvitā) further, they will lead to the penetration of many elements.[\[24\]](#)

These suttas show three significant points relevant to vipassanā. (1) Vipassanā is cultivated (bhāvetabbā) by full comprehension (abhiññā). (2) The word “cultivate” (bhāveti) is applied to depict the development of vipassanā meditation. (3) When vipassanā and calm are cultivated (bhāvitā), they will penetrate many things. Here let us investigate briefly bhāvet” and abhiññā first.

In the text the words bhāvetabbā, bhāvehi and bhāvitā are derived from the verb bhāveti.[\[25\]](#) In a number of Pāli suttas,[\[26\]](#) when the practice of vipassanā meditation is mentioned, words derived from bhāveti are always employed. The term bhāveti means “practise” or “cultivate”.[\[27\]](#)

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Vajirañña Mahāthera pointed out that this is different from jhāyat” (meditate). The former is applied to mean any form of mental development, while the latter refers to “thinking upon a mental object or holding a mental image taken from an external object”. In addition, Buddhaghosa pointed out that the word bhāveti derives from the root bhū, which means “to be” or “to become”.[\[28\]](#) “To be” indicating a quality or a state while “to become” refers to “come to be” or “grow to be” which implies that it develops something gradually or makes something happen gradually. Therefore, Vajirañña suggested that although the word has various meanings (such as “developing”, “cultivating”, “reflection”, “meditation”, and “producing”), it is better to translate bhāvet into “practice” and “cultivation” because the word bhāvanā, the noun formed from bhāveti, refers to the accumulation of all good qualities within oneself, to become apt and fit for the attainment of nibbāna.[\[29\]](#) This suggestion is that

vipassanā is a sort of intuition which everyone is endowed with, nevertheless, it requires the practitioner to cultivate it and bring it out.

And yet what sort of quality is vipassanā? This question brings our attention to another significant term: abhiññā or full comprehension. According to the Pāli-English Dictionary, [30] Abhiññā refers to certain conditions conducive to the acquisition of calmness, special knowledge, special wisdom and nibbāna.

Abhiññā is derived from the verb, jānāti, which means to know, to have or gain knowledge, to experience, to be aware of or to find out. [31] That is, abhiññā is a special knowledge obtained through experience and awareness. The very significant words which we should pay attention to

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are “experience” and “awareness”. These two words suggest that vipassanā is cultivated by being aware of living activity (experience) rather than thinking barely or working on abstract ideas, such as speculation, assumption and the like. The statement can be supported by the Pāli-English Dictionary. In the explanation of abhiññā the dictionary says that “wrong-doing, priestly superstitions and vain speculation do not conduce to abhiññā”. [32]

Therefore, it may be concluded that vipassanā is an intuitive insight which can be brought out by means of meditation and when it becomes mature and powerful enough, it becomes a special wisdom (paññā) which is conducive to attaining enlightenment. However, vipassanā meditation refers to the technique of the cultivation of vipassanā or the process of bringing out the power of intuitive vipassanā. Thus, the word shares similar meaning with paññā is “vipassanā” rather than “vipassanā meditation”.

In the following section, this essay will go further to probe into the characteristics of vipassanā to see what is its relationship to paññā, whether vipassanā is simply a sort of intellectual activity.

2.4 The characteristics of vipassanā

2.4.1 The function of vipassanā

Many suttas which mention vipassanā usually show that the function of vipassanā is to extinguish greed, hatred and ignorance. In other words, the suttas point out that the nature of vipassanā is supramundane. This notion can be found in Saṃyutta Nikāya:

.....And what, brethren, is the path that goes to the Uncompounded?

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Calm and introspection (vipassanā). [33]

We find also in the Aṅguttara Nikāya:

Monks, these two conditions have part in knowledge. What two? Calm (samatha) and introspection (vipassanā). What profit results from a cultivated mind? All lust is abandoned. If insight be cultivated, what profit does it attain? All ignorance is abandoned. Indeed, monks, this ceasing of lust is the heart's release, this ceasing of ignorance is the release by insight. [34]

In the first sutta, the term "Uncompounded", according to the same sutta, refers to the destruction of greed, hatred and ignorance. Since these three mental illnesses are the root of all mental intoxicants, to destroy these three mental illnesses means to eradicate all defilements. In addition, the second sutta goes further to distinguish the different kinds of abandonment found in samatha and vipassanā, that is, samatha helps to get rid of lust and makes the practitioner concentrate his mind, while vipassanā uproots ignorance and frees the practitioner from saṃsāra, the transmigration of rebirth. [35] This information suggests that both the function and the nature of vipassanā are different from the intellect which ordinary people are endowed with. The detailed discussion of this issue can be seen in Visuddhimagga:

It (vipassanā) is knowing (jānana) in a particular mode separate

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from the modes of perceiving (sañjānana) and cognizing (vijānana). For though the state of knowing (jānana-bhāva) is equally present in perception (saññā), unconsciousness (viññāna), and in understanding (paññā), nevertheless perception is only the mere perceiving of an object as,

say, “blue” or “yellow”; it cannot bring about the penetration of its characteristics as impermanent, painful, and not-self. Consciousness knows the object as blue or yellow, and it brings about the penetration of its characteristics, but it cannot bring about, by endeavouring, the manifestation of the [supramundane] path. Understanding (vipassanā) knows the object in the way already stated, it brings about the penetration of the characteristics and it brings about, by endeavouring, the manifestation of the path.[36]

2.4.2 The state of vipassanā

The aforementioned information suggests that the most essential difference between vipassanā and worldly perception and consciousness is that the former can penetrate into the threefold fundamental characteristics (lakkhaṇa) of everything, and leads to liberation while the latter two cannot. This statement is supported by Majjhima Nikāya 73, and the Paṭisambhidāmagga,[37] and can also be ascertained in the teachings of two contemporary influential meditation masters of Thailand: Acharn Chah and Buddhadasa.

According to Majjhima Nikāya 73,[38] when the practitioner’s

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vipassanā is cultivated, he or she can penetrate into the impermanence of the five aggregates (khandas), which are physical matter, sensations, perceptions, formations and consciousness. The Paṭisambhidāmagga also points out that the practitioner whose vipassanā is developed will possess eighteen principal insights.[39] The main motifs of these eighteen insights are contemplation of impermanence (anicca), contemplation of suffering (dukkha) and contemplation of non-self (anattā) and emptiness (suññatā). Although the mention of contemplation of emptiness cannot be found in MN73, nevertheless, according to Theravādin doctrine, since this contemplation is similar to the contemplation of non-self, the motifs shown by the Paṭisambhidāmagga are equal to those of MN73. Furthermore, Acharn Chah, one of the greatest meditation masters in Thailand, not only agreed with this statement, but went further to explain why contemplating these three characteristics can lead to nibbāna. He said that when the practitioner observes everything and finds it is impermanence, unsatisfactoriness (or suffering), and non-self (or emptiness) in its own

nature, his mind will be calmed.[40] Likewise, another Thai meditation master, Buddhādāsa, also spelled out that insight into these threefold characteristics consists of the practitioner realizing that “nothing is worth

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getting, that no object whatsoever should be grasped at and clung to as being a self or as belonging to a self, as being good or bad, attractive or repulsive, liking or disliking things, even an idea or memory, is clinging.”[41] If a practitioner gives up grasping, he or she will not have rebirth in samsāra.

2.4.3 The stage of obtaining vipassanā

In which stage vipassanā becomes mature? No decisive answer could be found in the Pāli suttas. Yet we did find some descriptions where the practitioner whose vipassanā becomes mature when the practitioner attains the stream-entry path (sotāpatti-magga) with the first jhāna (the first level of calm). According to Saṃyutta Nikāya, when the practitioner obtains calm and vipassanā, he or she can cease perception and feeling.[42] MN151 also says that when the practitioner develops serenity and vipassanā, he or she stays in a happy and glad state, and trains in wholesome states all the time.[43]

The Paṭisambhidāmagga gives a more detailed analysis. The text shows that the one who has already developed vipassanā becomes dispassionate, causes greed to fade away, does not cling to anything and finally attains cessation and relinquishes all.[44] We found that in the

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Sallekha Sutta,[45] the situation is similar to the first stage of jhāna which is detached from sense-desires and unwholesome states, and abides in joy and pleasure born of detachment. Nevertheless, there are two paragraphs in the Paṭisambhidāmagga which suggest that vipassanā is cultivated in the stream-entry path. The first paragraph points out that there are ten sorts of equanimity of formations (sankhārārūpeti) which arise through insight, and these equanimity can lead to the stream-entry path.[46] The second paragraph mentions that when the practitioner sees everything to be in conformity with the forty aspects,[47] he enters upon the certainty of

rightness (sammattaniyāma) of the stream-entry path (sotāpatti-magga). Then he can attain the fruit of stream-entry (sotāpatti-phala), even the fruit of arahantship.[48] The main motifs of these forty aspects contemplated by

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the practitioner are the threefold characteristics of the five aggregates. As we mentioned before, this is the essential function of vipassanā. Therefore, it may be suggested that vipassanā can be completely brought out in the stream-entry path with the concentration of the first jhāna.[49]

According to the previous discussion, it may be concluded that the sort of vipassanā which leads to attaining enlightenment is a sort of intuitive insight whose function is beyond rational analysis, speculations, and assumption. By means of meditation, it becomes mature in the stream-entry path with the concentration of the first jhāna which in turn becomes powerful and sharpened enough to penetrate into the nature of all physical and mental world. As a result, the practitioner can achieve the realization of the true nature of impermanence, suffering and non-self and then attains to nibbāna.[50]

With regard to the relationship between vipassanā and paññā, as we can see from the previous information. If vipassanā can be classified into a kind of paññā, it is a sort of wisdom (paññā) which is endowed with insightful power and after being strengthened and sharpened by meditation, this insight (vipassanā) is powerful enough to see through all phenomena and can lead to enlightenment. Therefore, it is a kind of supramundane paññā in particular meaning rather than the ordinary intellectual activity.

Here after this essay will go on to discuss what is the technique which brings out this insight and why it differs from intellect activity.

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3. Vipassanā meditation

In this section, the essay will focus on examining whether vipassanā meditation is a purely intellectual activity. We will investigate this question by examining three aspects: (1) the main objects observed by the vipassanā practitioner; (2) the essential principles of vipassanā meditation; and (3) the process of the cultivation of vipassanā. The corresponding teaching of the Pāli suttas and of contemporary vipassanā masters will be taken into consideration.

3.1 The main objects observed by the vipassanā practitioner

As King (1980:82-102) pointed out the main object which the vipassanā practitioner contemplates on is the “self-as-experiencing” object, particularly the five aggregates. The key point for taking these factors into investigation is that they are intrinsic to the practitioner’s experiences. It is due to these experiences that the practitioner wrongly considers them to have a substantial existence, so that due to thinking in this way, he or she transmigrates again and again. Therefore, to penetrate into the nature of these factors and to see what they really are is the essential aim of vipassanā meditation. Accordingly, the observance of the body-mind as it functions is the central and most crucial focus of vipassanā meditation. We find examples in many suttas. Here is a typical example:

And what things should be fully understood (pariññeyyā) by direct knowledge (abhiññā)? The answer to that is: the five aggregates affected by clinging, that is, the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. These are the things that should be fully understood by direct

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knowledge.....[\[51\]](#)

As we mentioned before, vipassanā is cultivated by abhiññā, thus we know the five aggregates, i.e. the material form aggregate, the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate, the formations aggregate and

consciousness aggregate affected by clinging, are the main objects which are contemplated by the vipassanā practitioner. In addition, from this sutta, we find the key point of choosing these five objects is that they are “affected by clinging”. This is, what the practitioner concentrates on is not the abstract conception dealt with by intellect; rather, it is something that actually occurs in one’s daily life and relates to one’s feelings closely.

3.2 The essential principles of vipassanā meditation

We mentioned previously that contemplation on the threefold nature of impermanence, suffering and not-self of all things is the heart of developing vipassanā. In turn, it is this unique technique which leads the practitioner to achieve nibbāna. However, it also seems to be the reason which causes the confusion between vipassanā meditation and intellectual exercises. For instance, Vetter (1988:35) assumed that discriminating insight can attain enlightenment and asks for no meditation. Furthermore, he explained that the technique is to know that the human being is made up by constituents. The themes dealt with by Vetter are virtually the essential issues of vipassanā meditation; however, the technique which was suggested by him is different from what we found in the Pāli suttas.

Firstly, the Paṭisambhidāmagga suggests that to practise vipassanā is to contemplate the threefold characteristics within all dhammas. [52] The text

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says:

Insight (vipassanā) is in the sense of contemplation of ideas (dhamma) produced therein as impermanent, in the sense of contemplation of ideas produced therein as painful, in the sense of contemplation of ideas produced therein as not-self. [53]

The mentioned eighteen insights possessed by vipassanā also show that these threefold characteristics are the essential principle of cultivating vipassanā although the actual objects observed by the practitioner are different. The reason for meditating on these three characteristics is that they are a natural law. Once the practitioner penetrates into these characteristics, he or she will

find out the nature of things and realize that what people grasp is an illusory substance. Furthermore, since these threefold characteristics exist intrinsically and they do not possess inherent existence, what the practitioner needs to do is simply observe it and find out its true nature. Practising the technique requires neither speculation nor further assumptions.

3.3 The process and techniques of vipassanā meditation (or cultivation of vipassanā)

According to the Satipaṭṭhānasutta, the most famous sutta with regard to vipassanā meditation, the process and techniques are as follows:

.....he (the practitioner) remains observing the body as body inwardly, or observing the body as body outwardly, or observing the body as body both inwardly and outwardly. He remains observing the arising of phenomena in the body, or the ceasing of phenomena

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in the body, or the arising and ceasing of phenomena in the body. Or he is mindful that the body exists, just to the extent necessary for knowledge and awareness, and he remains detached, grasping at nothing in the world. This is how the monk remains observing the body as body.

This sutta uses the body as an observed object, so the practitioner observes the arising and ceasing of phenomena which appear in his or her body. This sutta goes on narrating the observing of arising and ceasing which happen in feelings (vedanā), mental states (citta) and mental objects (dhamma). That is, the arising and ceasing of all phenomena of physical and mental world. The Sāmañña-phala Sutta [54] goes further to explain the detail of this technique:

On seeing a visible object with the eye, he does not grasp at the object's major features nor at its secondary characteristics.....

The same practice is also employed in hearing a sound with the ear, smelling an odour with the nose, tasting a flavour with the tongue, sensing a tactile object with the body or becoming conscious of an image with the mind.

The aforementioned suttas show that, the most essential technique employed to contemplate impermanence, suffering and non-self is to observe or to be aware of these threefold characteristics. He neither analyzes the object nor does he or she think of or judges anything. Whatever the practitioner sees or whatever he or she does, he or she merely notices everything. As Acharn Chah pointed out, “turn your tranquil mind toward sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts, mental objects,

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mental factors. Whatever arises, investigate it. Notice whether you like it or not, whether it pleases or displeases you, but do not get involved with it.”^[55] Mahasi Sayadaw, the most influential contemporary meditation master of Burma, gave a further reason for using this bare contemplation. He said that the practice of contemplation aims to discover the true nature of the mind-body complex. Therefore, the technique is to observe every mental activity as it occurs inasmuch as people usually regard that there is a living entity of self which grows up from childhood to adulthood. People also hold that there is a “person”, “self” and “living entity” who is “thinking” or “planning”. In fact, such a living entity does not exist. What does exist is “a continuous process of elements of mind which occurs singly.” Therefore, on the occurrence of each activity, such as “thinking”, “planning”, “reflecting”, “knowing”, “attending”, “rejoicing” and “feeling lazy,” as the case may be, one should only be aware of it. Through this practice, the practitioner will experience and penetrate into the true nature of all phenomena. Then he lets go of attachment to everything.^[56]

All the above techniques, from the main observing objects to the process of vipassanā meditation, suggest that the cultivation of vipassanā does not require intellectual analysis or speculation. Yet, one may argue that the developing of vipassanā still can not avoid intellectual activity by virtue of the practitioner using conceptual realization and categorization. For instance, Acharn Chah suggested that no matter what sort of activity occurs in one’s mind, in addition to being aware of his or her emotional reaction, the practitioner should see it in a deeper level, that is, to categorize everything that arises into impermanence, suffering and non-self.^[57]

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This suggests that even to observe or to contemplate the threefold characteristics, one is involved in “realizing” and “categorizing” the activities which present themselves to the practitioner. For, if the practitioner does not realize or categorize the activities, there may be only a plain mind or other thoughts come up to the practitioner’s mind. However, these intellectual activities are subtle and slight mental activities. Furthermore, these mental activities may be said to happen in the “background” of cultivating vipassanā rather than in the “foreground” of vipassanā practice. This means that those subtle intellectual exercises occur more subconsciously instead of in the manner of logically analyzing and deducing. Therefore, the intellectual activities which are involved in constructing other new ideas, such as discriminating, judging and inferring etc. are different from the technique employed in vipassanā meditation.

Another significant underlying message is that this sort of technique may be practised at any moment. The practitioner may concentrate his or her mind on any object which occurs to him or her. Accordingly, to sit down with the posture of crossed legs is not the most crucial prerequisite because, according to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta [58] and the teachings of meditation masters, this technique can be practised when walking, standing, lying or sitting as well as any physical and mental movement. Therefore, as King (1980:94) pointed out, vipassanā meditation can be applied much more readily to daily life than jhāna concentration can be. Although vipassanā meditation also needs some periods and special modes of concentration to achieve enlightenment, it is still able to extend to all types of lives and activities.

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4. The relationship between samatha and vipassanā meditation in terms of achieving enlightenment

The argument regarding this theme can be divided into three different opinions. First of all, Buddhaghosa pointed out that samatha meditation is the tool for achieving vipassanā meditation. The character and the quality of the jhāna states, apart from the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (there, no such factors are available for investigation), bear a closer relationship to the quality of attaining the Path.^[59] Likewise, King suggested that the mind, quietened and sharpened by the jhānas, is conducive to the vipassanā process but it only requires moderate concentration.^[60]

However, Vetter (1988:36) argued that the teaching of discriminating insight in MN 22 and MN 74 asks for no support of jhāna meditation.

The aforementioned argument can be classified into three issues. Firstly, in terms of achieving liberation, whether vipassanā meditation should be supported by jhāna meditation. Secondly, if the process of vipassanā calls for jhāna meditation, what sort of meditation does it ask for? Thirdly, in what sense does vipassanā achievement not necessitate any jhāna meditation? All these three involve the term “jhāna meditation”; accordingly, we will probe into this term first. Then we will go on inquiring into the relationship between jhāna meditation and vipassanā meditation in terms of attaining enlightenment.

According to the Pāli English Dictionary, jhāna (Sanskrit: dhyāna) refers to meditation on an object or burning up anything adverse. Literally it means meditation.^[61] Vajirañña pointed out that, according to the usage in Pāli cannon and its commentaries, there are two meanings of this word.

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One means “concentration on” or “to examine closely” the characteristics of phenomenal existence. Another meaning refers to eliminating the mental intoxicants in order to attain higher progress.^[62] It is the first meaning, i.e. concentration or meditation, which is widely accepted in general.

Nevertheless, when employed as a technical term, it refers to the second meaning, and especially, denotes the four stages of meditation. [63]

Following the aforementioned jhāna definitions, we found that the above argument concerning vipassanā meditation and jhāna meditation also includes these two meanings. Buddhaghosa's view is that vipassanā is related to the stages of jhāna and, similarly, King states that it contains the jhāna stages of meditation. Vetter's definition seems to denote only the first meaning, i.e. concentration, because he wrote: ".....dhyāna-meditation, some concentration in examining the constituents.....". [64] But here we can come to no definite conclusion from this statement, and we can only assume that the jhāna meditations suggested by him includes both meanings of jhāna. In this regard, there is some resource which counters what Vetter suggested about one can achieve liberation without the help of meditation.

According to the Paṭisambhidāmagga, [65] the practitioner reaches arahantship by four paths or by one of the four paths. What four? (1) The practitioner develops vipassanā preceded by samatha. This means that

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through renunciation, the practitioner concentrates his or her mind and reaches one-pointedness and non-distraction. Then he or she contemplates the impermanence, suffering and non-self of all things. (2) The practitioner develops samatha preceded by vipassanā. This refers to the idea that, through insight into the threefold characteristics of every thing, the practitioner's mind becomes one-pointed and non-distracted. (3) The practitioner develops samatha and vipassanā coupled together. This denotes the idea that, samatha and vipassanā meditation, are coupled together in sixteen aspects, such as: supporting-object, domain, abandoning and turning away etc. [66] (4) The practitioner re-concentrates or resettles the vipassanā. Although the fourth path does not mention serenity directly, since it requires re-concentrating and resettling one's mind, it also implies a certain level of concentration involved. Accordingly, it also suggests that vipassanā and samatha interconnects mutually to some extent.

The above information makes it clear that, traditionally, in order to attain enlightenment, the practitioner is supposed to practise samatha together with vipassanā, and the issue is not of serenity preceding vipassanā or vipassanā

preceding samatha or these two working together. We can find that, Buddhaghosa and King held similar ideas to the tradition, even though they differed as to what extent of samatha the practitioner should have.

Based on the information this essay reveals in section 2.4.3, it may be suggested that complete vipassanā which can penetrate into the true nature of all things, requires the first jhāna concentrations while practicing vipassanā meditation only needs moderate concentration. As Buddhādāsa pointed out in the “Insight by the Nature Method”, “the intensity of

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concentration that comes about naturally is usually sufficient and appropriate for introspection and insight.” [67] Likewise, King (1980:93) also suggested that the concentration employed in vipassanā meditation is much lower than on the four jhāna stages. Vipassanā meditation only requires relative one-pointedness. We also found several illuminating passages in practitioners’ accounts, such as what Roger Walsh wrote in “Initial meditation Experiences” and Rod Bucknell wrote in “Experiments in Insight Meditation”. [68] However, why there are some suttas, for instance, MN22 and MN74, having been suggested to be those suttas mentioning that the practitioner obtains liberation only through vipassanā meditation and needs no jhāna meditation. [69] Here we will examine the practice mentioned by these two suttas and try to figure out in what sense the practice asks for no meditation.

The paragraphs mentioned by MN22 only briefly describe the techniques of perceiving (samanupassati) the impermanence, suffering and non-self of the five aggregates. It says, after observing in this way, the practitioner is disgusted with (nibbindate) these mental and non-mental factors and frees himself from desire and destroys rebirth. [70] It appears to be too brief to do a further investigation. Therefore, we go further to consult MN 74. This sutta mentions that Sāriputta is released from the cankers after hearing the instruction. The sutta describes it thus:

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Now on the occasion the venerable Sāriputta was standing behind the Blessed One, fanning him. Then he thought: “the Blessed One indeed, speaks of the abandoning of these things through direct knowledge; speaks of the relinquishing of these things through direct knowledge.” As the venerable Sāriputta considered (patisañcikkhato) this, through not clinging (,) his mind was liberated from the taints.

According to this information, Vetter suggests that Sāriputta freed himself from fetters by “thinking over” the instruction of the Buddha instead of going through genuine meditation. The reason why he judged that Sāriputta obtains liberation without meditation is because Sāriputta, accompanied by other people, is fanning and is not sitting quietly.

There are some problematic issues relating to the above assumption. Firstly, in terms of attaining the four stages of jhāna, it may be true that one cannot attain these stages while moving. However, it is not true if we take the practice of vipassanā into account. For, according to vipassanā meditation, the posture is not the most essential factor for achievement. It is the mind of the practitioner which is concentrated enough to penetrate into the threefold characteristics of things. Secondly, by that time, if Sāriputta did not concentrate his mind on the teaching and go on to meditate on it, it is impossible for him to eradicate his attachments and liberate himself from cankers. That is, if he cannot concentrate his mind on one-point-object (whatever is a thought or an object) to some extent, and last long enough to penetrate into the nature of that object, he cannot attain the realization. Besides, even if the realization could occur suddenly, it does not exclude that Sāriputta may have meditated constantly for quite a long time and may have cultivated and sharpened his insight powerful enough to see through the nature of all phenomena. Thirdly, if the realization can be obtained simply by “thinking over” an object by ordinary intelligent, why

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there is no case which fulfills the task of liberation even though so many people's tasks rely heavily on the intellectual activities and usually thinking things serious, such as scientists, philosophers and scholars.

Therefore, it may be suggested that in terms of liberation, it does require special meditation, i.e. vipassanā meditation, to facilitate the development of

insight and it cannot attain enlightenment barely by intellectual thinking. Even though this vipassanā meditation need not be supported by certain jhāna stages, it does require some intensity of concentration. Furthermore, the techniques, the observing object and the mode employed by the vipassanā practitioners are entirely different from the intellectual thinking per se. Therefore, even though there appears to be suttas, MN22 and MN74, mentioning that some practitioners attain enlightenment without the help of quietly sitting meditation, it does not exclude that the practitioner's mind has to concentrate enough to bring out the powerful insight to penetrate into the true nature of the phenomenal world. Moreover, the mental process which leads to the realization is vipassanā meditation, a practice employed to cultivate and bring the powerful insight rather than intellectual speculation and analysis. In this case, saying that through vipassanā meditation one attains enlightenment unsupported by jhāna meditation is only true when jhāna (meditation) refers to the four stages of dhamma but it is not true when the jhāna refers to its general meaning of meditation or concentration. Also it is not true to assume that the liberation is simply brought out by the intellectual and rational thinking.

5. Conclusion

As we mentioned at the outset, there are some controversial issues in practising vipassanā and samatha. After examining the Pāli suttas, the Visuddhimagga and the teachings of some vipassanā masters, some findings could be suggested:

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(1) The confusion of vipassanā and vipassanā meditation (vipassanā bhāvanā) leads us to discussing whether it is necessary to practise meditation in terms of obtaining enlightenment. According to our investigation, vipassanā is a sort of intuitive insight which becomes very powerful and can penetrate into the true nature of all phenomena, i.e. impermanence, suffering and non-self of everything, after it being sharpened by meditation. On the other hand, vipassanā meditation refers to a practice, which is the process of cultivating vipassanā. Furthermore, the insight (vipassanā) leading to liberation is a kind of wisdom which is brought out by vipassanā meditation, but not

vipassanā meditation itself.

(2) The main observed objects, the five aggregates, and the essential principles of vipassanā meditation suggest that the practitioner works with the things experienced by himself or herself rather than some purely abstract conceptions which are beyond practitioner's experiences. Moreover, the process of developing vipassanā shows that even although there are some subtle intellectual activities occurring in the practitioner's subconsciousness, the main techniques employed by the practitioner are "contemplating", "observing" and "being mindful of" the activities of human being's daily physical and mental movements. All these information suggest that vipassanā meditation hardly bear a relationship with those intellectual activities of rational analysis, speculation, assumption and the like.

(3) The discussion of the relationship between samatha and vipassanā meditation suggests that, in terms of attaining enlightenment through vipassanā meditation, even though it requires no jhāna stages, it does necessitate reaching a certain intensity of calm. Therefore, maintaining that by means of vipassanā meditation, the practitioner can attain enlightenment without jhāna is only true when this term refers to the four jhāna stages. However, it is not true when jhāna refers to the sense of meditation or concentration. Also the liberation can only and necessarily

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brought out by meditation. Thus, it is not true to presume that the mental activities which lead to realization can be a pure form of intellectual activity and require no help at all of either samatha or vipassanā meditation.

Bibliography

Abbreviations for names of texts (published by the Pali Texts Society)

AN = Aṅguttara Nikāya

DN = Dīgha Nikāya

MN = Majjhims Nikāya

SN = Saṃyutta Nikāya

Vin. = Vinaya

Paṭi=Paṭisambhidāmagga

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從上座部佛教的觀點探討毗婆奢那（內觀）禪法

釋自拙

伊利諾大學香檳校區東亞系

提要

就修學證道的觀點而言，毗婆奢那（內觀）的禪修法和奢摩他（止）的禪修法，有否必然的關係呢？行者是否可以不靠這兩種禪法，單以理性思考、辯證和分析推理的方式，除去所有的煩惱而證得涅槃呢？本文就是從南傳佛教的觀點來探討上述的問題。

由於這些問題涉及到 *vipassanā* 及 *vipassanā bhāvanā*（毗婆奢那禪修／內觀禪修）等內涵，本文將先探討這些用語所談的本質、特色及具體修法。接著，才探討毗婆奢那禪修法和奢摩他的禪修法間的關係。

本文所採用的方式不只是從文字、經典的角度來看這些問題，也從實修的觀點來探討這些問題。因此，本文所用的資料，除了南傳的四部尼柯耶等經典外，也參考《清淨道論》、南傳《解脫道論》以及近代南傳修學有成的幾位禪師的觀點。

關鍵詞：1.毗婆奢那（內觀） 2.毗婆奢那禪修法（內觀禪修法） 3.奢摩他 4.關係 5.理性思考

[1] Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995:38.

[2] King 1980:82ff.

[3] Gethin 1998:198-201.

[4] Gombrich 1996:96-134. In this article, although the main issue is paññā rather than vipassanā, the author made it clear in the footnote that “paññā and vipassanā have the same basic meaning but as technical terms are used in different contexts.” (Cf. Ibid., p. 113, no. 10)

[5] Vetter 1988:63ff.

[6] Gombrich 1996:97ff.

[7] A text of Khuddāka Nikāya.

[8] There is an ambiguity of whether one can say if Gombrich accepts this non-meditation practice. Although he attempted to prove that there are two Pāli suttas mentioning that one can attain liberation without meditation, he argued that it is an alteration by the sutta's compiler. Cf. Gombrich 1996:97ff.

[9] Gethin also observes that this confusion may bear some relation to the tension between forest monks and town-dwelling monk. Yet he did not explain his assumption in his book. Since so far the author can not find more information to clarify this issue, the essay will not take it into account. Cf. Gethin 1998:200.

[10] For a summary of Poussin's position on this question, see Gombrich (1996), pp. 133~134.

[11] Vetter 1988: 63.

[12] The translation employed by them are wisdom (Conze), contemplation (Poussin) and insight (Gombrich). Cf. Conze 1972:17; Gombrich 1996:113 note, and p. 134.

[13] Gombrich 1996:113.

[14] Ibid., p. 134.

[15] Ibid., p. 113.

[16] MN22=AlagaddūitakkhamSutta (Trenckner 1979:130-142);

MN74 =Dīghanakha Sutta Ibid., pp. 479~501).

[17] The essential practice of vipassanā meditation is the contemplation of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha) and non-self (anattā). Cf: King 1980: 93~94.

[18] Vetter 1988:37-41.

[19] Rhys Davids and Stede 1986:627.

[20] Paravahera Vajirañāṇa 1962: 22.

[21] Conze 1972:22.

[22] The Buddhist Dictionary, p. 177.

[23] SN XLV vol.5 p. 52, Agantukā. (Pālitext); Woodward 1979:51-52 (English translation).

[24] MN 73= Mahāvacchagotta Sutta. Trenckner 1979:494; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995:600

[25] Bhāvatabbā is a gerundive and refers to something “should be cultivated”. Bhāvehi is an imperative which means cultivate or develop. Bhāvitā is a past participle and means “was developed”.

[26] Such as SN XLV vol.5 p. 52, Agantukā; MN73, Mahāvacchagotta Sutta. etc.

[27] Ibid., pp. 25~26.

[28] Vajirañāṇa 1962.

[29] Vajirañāṇa 1962, 26~27.

[30] Rhys Davids and Stede 1986:64.

[31] Ibid., pp. 282~283.

[32] Rhys Davids and Stede 1986: 64.

[33] SN, vol.4, p. 360 Vitakka ; Woodward 1980:256-257.

[34] ANI, Balavaggo, Warder 1961:61; Woodward 1982: 55-56.

[35] In terms of Buddhist doctrine, the ignorance is the root of saṃsāra. Once the ignorance is uprooted, the practitioner can be liberated from rebirth.

[36] Ñāṇamoli 1975:479-480.

[37] Paṭisambhidāmagga I, p. 39; Ñāṇamoli 1982:22.

[38] The sutta says: In that case, Vaccha, develop further two things: serenity and insight. When these two things are developed further, they will lead to the penetration of many elements. CF. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995:600. Another sutta goes on narrating the context of penetration. It runs: (Insight Knowledge) Again, Udāyin, I have proclaimed to my disciples the way to understand thus: This body of mine, made of material form, consisting of the four great elements, procreated by a mother and father, and built up out of boiled rice and porridge, is subject to impermanence, to being worn and rubbed away, to dissolution and disintegration, and this consciousness of mine is supported by it and bound up with it. (MN 77 Mahāsakulūdāyī Sutta; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995:642~643)

[39] The Eighteen principal Insights are contemplation of impermanence, suffering, non-self, aversion, detachment, extinction, abandoning, waning, vanishing, change, unconditioned, desirelessness, emptiness, higher wisdom about phenomena, knowledge and vision according to reality, misery, turning-away and reflecting contemplation. (Paṭisambhidāmagga I, p. 39) CF. Ñāṇamoli 1982:22.

[40] Bucknell and Kang 1997:98.

[41] Ibid., p. 108.

[42] Woodward 1980:201-203.

[43] The PiṇḍapātapārisuddhīSutta says :by reviewing, he knows thus:“Serenity and insight are developed in me,” then he can abide happy and glad,training day and night in wholesome states. CF. MN 151.; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995:1145.

[44] Thesutta runs : he becomes dispassionate, he does not delight; he causes greed tofade away, he does not inflame it; he causes cessation, not arising; herehe relinquishes, he does not grasp. (Paṭisambhidāmagga I 295-297; Ñāṇamoli 1982:59).

[45] CF.MN 8, Sallekha Sutta; Bucknell and Kang 1997:29.

[46] “How manykinds of equanimity about formations (sankharārūpeti)arise through insight (vipassanā)? Ten kinds of equanimity about formations through insight..... Understandingof reflex ion on arising, occurrence, the sign, accumulation, rebirth-linking,destination, generation, re-arising, birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow,lamentation, despair, and of composure, for the purpose of attaining thestream-entry path, is knowledge of equanimity about formations.....” CF. Paṭisambhidāmagga I 325, 327; Ñāṇamoli 1982:65.

[47] The forty aspects areconcerned with the five aggregates. They are:impermanent, painful, as a disease, a boil, a dart, a calamity, and affliction,as alien, as disintegrating, as a plague, a disaster, a terror, a menace, asfickle, perishable, unenduring, as no protection, no shelter, no refuge, asempty, vain, void, not-self, as a danger, as subject to change, as having nocore, as the root of calamity, as murderous, as due to be annihilated, assubject to cankers, as formed, as Mara’s bait, as connected with the idea ofbirth, connected with the idea of ageing, connected with the idea of illness,connected with the idea of death, connected with the idea of sorrow, connectedwith the idea of lamentation, connected with the idea of despair, connectedwith the idea of defilement. CF. Paṭisambhidāmagga; Ñāṇamoli 1982:402-403.

[48] Paṭisambhidāmagga II238; Ñāṇamoli 1982:402-403.

[49] We put thequalification of first jhanā here not only because the features ofthe practitioner who possesses vipassanā similar to this state, but

also because we found in Paṭisambhidāmagga that serenity comes first then vipassanā. CF. Paṭisambhidāmagga.

[50] Bucknell and Kang 1997:98.

[51] MN 149, the Mahāsalāyatanika Sutta; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995:1138-1139.

[52] Dhamma refers to many meanings: phenomenon, mental image, nature, the Buddha's teaching. CF. Bucknell and Kang 1997:266. No. 13.

[53] Paṭisambhidāmagga XI 2 p. 93; Ñāṇamoli 1982:287~288.

[54] DN 2; Bucknell and Kang 1997:31.

[55] Bucknell and Kang 1997:97-105. "Observing Your Mind".

[56] Ibid., p. 113~122. "Insight Through Mindfulness".

[57] Bucknell and Kang 1997: 97-98.

[58] MN 10; Bucknell and Kang 1997:19ff.

[59] The Path of Purification XVIII 3,4. Ñāṇamoli 1975:679-680.

[60] King 1980:93.

[61] Rhys Davids and Stede 1986:286.

[62] Vajirañāṇa 1962:35-56.

[63] These four stages of meditation are: (1) With his mind free from sensuous and worldly ideas, he concentrates his thoughts on some special subject (for instance, the impermanence of all things). This he thinks out by attention to the facts and by reasoning. (2) Then uplifted above attention and reasoning, he experiences joy and ease both of body and mind. (3) Then the bliss passes away, and he becomes suffused with a sense of ease, and (4) he becomes aware of pure lucidity of mind and equanimity of heart. CF. Rhys Davids and Stede 1986:286.

[64] CF. Vetter 1988:36.

[65] Ñāṇamoli 1982:287-296.

[66] The other aspects are: giving up, emerging, peacefulness, sublimity, liberatedness, cankerlessness, crossing over, signlessness, desirelessness, voidness, singlefunction (taste) and non-excess.

[67] Bucknell and Kang 1997: 106-112.

[68] This essay chooses these accounts only because the authors wrote down their direct experience of vipassanā meditation. CF. Bucknell and Kang 1997:228-263.

[69] Vetter 1988:35ff.

[70] Ibid., p. 36-36. In this context, this essay employs two different words to translate samanupassati and nibbindate, as we showed in the context. Originally, the former was translated into “to regard” and the latter was translated into “has enough of”. CF. Rhys Davids and Stede 1986:683; 365.