

Sabba Danam Dhammadanam Jinati
(The Gift of Dhamma excels all gifts)

The White Lotus Ascetic

Chan Khoon San

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all my spiritual teachers who have helped me in one way or another, in my progress towards a better understanding of the Dhamma, in particular the following teachers:

Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre, Yangon, Myanmar

1. Chanmyay Sayadaw Bhadanta Janakabhivamsa
2. Venerable Nyanaramsi

Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre, Yangon, Myanmar

1. Chanmyay Myaing Sayadaw Ashin Indaka

Ngar Gyan Pyan Sasana Yeiktha, Yangon, Myanmar

1. Sayadaw Dr. Dhammapiya

Santisukharama Meditation Centre, Kota Tinggi, Johore

1. Venerable Sujiva

**“Ciram titthatu Buddhasasanam!
Dhamme hontu sagarava, sabbepi satta.”**
“May the Buddha’s Dispensation endure long!
May all beings show reverence to the Dhamma.”

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Cover Design: Photo shows a white lotus flower, which the Commentary to the Putta Sutta compares to the dry insight arahant. Such an arahant, bereft of jhana and supernormal powers is not complete in qualities and is therefore called a White lotus ascetic.

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Preface

About fifty years ago, when the late **Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw** of Myanmar introduced into Sri Lanka the technique of focusing one's attention on the 'rising and falling' movement of the abdomen as an object to develop mindfulness, severe criticisms were directed at his teaching method regarding 'momentary concentration' in the dry insight approach. The main objection was that the meditator must first attain purification of mind (concentration) by practicing samatha (tranquility) meditation to develop jhana before commencing Satipatthana Vipassana meditation leading to purification of view (insight knowledge).

So the late **Ven. Sayadaw Nyanuttara**, ably assisted by **Ven. Sayadaw Janakabhivamsa**, undertook the task of rebutting these criticisms. This resulted in the publication of an excellent book "**Satipatthana Vipassana Meditation – Criticisms and Replies**" (abbr. 'SVM – C & R'), [1] in which the Venerable Sayadaws competently answered all the criticisms in accordance with the Teachings of the Pali Canon.

Thereafter yogis (meditators) began to practise the Satipatthana Vipassana meditation by developing momentary concentration to achieve purification of mind, without the need to develop mundane jhana. Satipatthana Vipassana meditation became very popular among monks as well as the laity and many new Vipassana meditation centers sprang up all over the world to cater to the growing demand.

Lately a certain monk has rehashed the old debate that jhana is necessary for attaining enlightenment. One view states that **jhana is essential for all four stages of enlightenment**, while another view states that jhana is only necessary for attaining the **third and fourth stages** but not for the first and second stages of enlightenment. Both views contradict the Pali Commentaries, which assert that **mundane jhana is not necessary** for enlightenment and that the practice of ‘dry insight’ can lead right up to the final stage of arahantship.

Although this issue has been resolved in the book ‘SVM – C & R’, many Satipatthana Vipassana meditators have not read it or do not understand the explanations due to their technical nature. Therefore it is necessary to present the arguments

of the learned Sayadaws in simple language so that readers will understand and appreciate their points of rebuttal to the view that the attainment of mundane jhana is essential for enlightenment.

To make it easy to follow the points, this book is divided into two parts. Part I rebuts the two views regarding the necessity of jhana in the attainment of enlightenment. The commentarial definition of ‘**sukkha-vipassaka**’ or dry insight practitioner is then presented. This is followed by discussions of the **Susima Sutta** based on new findings from the Chinese Samyukta Agama. The last two chapters discuss the **White lotus ascetic**, who is interpreted as a dry insight arahant according to Commentary definition of “one liberated by wisdom (panna-vimutta)” given in the **Puggala Pannitti**. .

Part II is devoted to explanations of the principles and practice of Satipatthana Vipassana meditation and the various meanings of the Pali word ‘**sati**’, generally translated as ‘**mindfulness**’ in English. In the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, the Buddha defined **right concentration** (samma samadhi) as the four form jhanas. Because of this, certain scholars and monks interpret the passage directly as it stands

and hold the view that only the **four jhanas** constitute right concentration. To them, there can be no enlightenment without any mundane jhana. However, this definition of right concentration is **neyyattha** desana, teachings in which the meaning is **implicit and has to be inferred** by comparing with similar suttas to get the **correct meaning**. If interpreted directly as it stands, it will contradict the meaning in other suttas. The case of **Bahiya Daruciriya**, chief among the Buddha's disciples who are quick to attain arahantship, demonstrates clearly that jhana is not necessary for arahantship.

In the **Discourse on Analysis** (SN47:40) and the **Discourse on Neglect** (SN47:33), the Buddha has declared unequivocally that the practice of satipatthana is the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. This means that the concentration developed by satipatthana constitutes **right concentration**. The Commentary to the Sala Sutta, has identified the three types of right concentration as fixed concentration (jhana), access concentration and momentary concentration.

The importance of **virtue and right view** in satipatthana development is discussed in relation

to certain suttas in the Satipatthana Samyutta, in which the monks became arahants by practising Satipatthana Vipassana meditation based on their virtue and right view, without the need to develop any mundane jhana! Lastly, the reason why certain people choose the dry insight method is discussed.

It is hoped that after reading this book, readers will gain a clearer understanding of the method of dry insight and commence the practice of Satipatthana Vipassana meditation with the confidence that it will surely lead them to enlightenment.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to **Ven. Chanmyay Myaing Sayadaw Ashin Indaka** for his valuable advices and encouragement and **Daw Mimmi** for helping to translate our conversations. Special thanks to **Sis Toh Gaik Hoon** for reading the text and making many useful suggestions for improvement. I am grateful to **Bro. Andy Lim** for supplying the cover photo and **Sis Wooi Kheng Choo** for checking the typing errors.

With Metta,
Bro. Chan Khoon San,
Klang, May 2016

Glossary of Some Pali Terms

- **Anguttara Nikaya** (abbr. AN): The Collection of the Numerical Discourses of the Buddha
- **Digha Nikaya** (abbr. DN): The Collection of the Long Discourses of the Buddha
- **Enlightenment**: There are four stages: (i) 1st stage of sotapanna or stream-winner, (ii) 2nd stage of sakadagamin or once-returner, (iii) 3rd stage of anagamin or non-returner, (iv) final stage of the arahant. The first three are called ‘sekha’, those still under training while the arahant is ‘asekha’, one who has nothing more to learn, being perfect in knowledge.
- **Jhana**: means ‘appana’ or fixed concentration developed by samatha meditation. There are eight mundane jhanas consisting of the four form (rupa) jhanas and the four formless (arupa) jhanas.
- **Magga & phala**: Path & fruition, the experience of enlightenment at all 4 levels is sub-divided into 2 further stages: (i) attainment of Path, signifying the stage of uprooting the fetters at that particular level, and (ii) attainment of Fruition, the immediate result of the Path, signifying the stage that the fetters have been uprooted at that level.

Visuddhimagga says that it is absorption in the cessation in which the Noble Fruition consists. (For explanation of fetter, see Samyojana below).

- **Majjhima Nikaya** (abbr. MN): The Collection of the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha

- **Nibbana**: Literally ‘extinguish, blow out’, final deliverance from suffering; deliverance from greed, hatred, and ignorance is the highest goal of the Buddha’s teaching; the Sanskrit form ‘*nirvana*’ is more commonly known in the west

- **Samma**: Right or perfect is used to describe the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path

- **Samadhi**: means concentration; is divided into 3 levels, namely: momentary concentration (*khanika samadhi*), access concentration (*upacara samadhi*), and absorption concentration (*appana samadhi*)

- **Samatha**: Calmness, tranquility, serenity

- **Samyojana** means fetter that binds beings to the wheel of existence and to the rounds of misery. There are ten fetters, namely: (1) *sakkayaditthi* or the false view of a personality; (2) *vicikiccha* or skeptical doubt; (3) *silabatta-paramasa* or the adherence to rites and rituals; (4) *kamaraga* or attachment to sense objects; (5) *patigha* or ill-will/hatred; (6) *mana* or conceit/pride; (7) *uddhacca* or restlessness; (8) *ruparaga* or attachment to form

(rupa) jhana and existence in the form realms; (9) aruparaga or attachment to formless (arupa) jhana and existence in the formless realms; (10) avijja or ignorance. In terms of uprooting the fetters, the sotapanna has eliminated the first three fetters. The sakadagamin has also eliminated the first three fetters and in addition attenuated fetters (4) & (5). The anagamin has eliminated all the first five fetters and will not take rebirth in the sensuous realms. All ten fetters are completely eliminated at the final stage of arahantship.

- **Satipatthana:** The foundations of mindfulness, which means ‘firmly established mindfulness’
- **Sayadaw:** Burmese word, meaning ‘Venerable, Teacher’, is an honorific term and way of address given to senior or eminent Buddhist monks
- **Samyutta Nikaya** (abbr. SN): The Collection of the Connected Discourses of the Buddha
- **Sukha-vipassaka:** Also called “dry insight” whereby the meditator develops insight without having obtained any form-sphere jhana. It is called “dry, rough or im-moist” because of the lack of the moisture of jhana.
- **Vipassana:** Insight
- **Visuddhimagga:** The Path of Purification, a 5th century AD commentary by Ven. Buddhaghosa

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PART I

1. Is Jhana Necessary for Attaining the Four Stages of Enlightenment?

In an article entitled ‘Jhana: Commentarial & Canonical’, [2] an American monk **Ven. Bhikkhu Thanissaro**, states that there are three views regarding the role of jhana as a condition for enlightenment, namely:

1. The first view follows the commentarial tradition. It asserts that **jhana is not necessary** for any of the four stages of enlightenment and that there is a class of individuals – called “dry insight” meditators – who are “released by insight” based on a level of concentration lower than that of jhana.
2. The second view cites a passage in the Canon (AN3:88), which states that concentration is mastered only at the stage of the anagamin. It holds that **jhana is necessary for attaining the third and fourth stages**, but not for the lower stages of enlightenment.

3. The third view states that the attainment of at least the first level of **jhana is necessary for all four stages of enlightenment.**

According to Ven. Bhikkhu Thanissaro, evidence from the Pali Canon supports the third view, but not the other two. He even made the claim that “part of the controversy over this question may be explained by the fact that the Commentaries define jhana in terms that bear **little resemblance to the canonical description.**” (For a rebuttal of this claim, see Appendix pp.101-104).

The claim that “the Commentaries define jhana in terms that bear little resemblance to the canonical description” is unsubstantiated. In fact, the aims of the authors of the ancient Pali commentaries have always been to **preserve and protect the Pali Canon.** Some concepts and ideas the Buddha conveyed in the original Pali cannot be understood by mere normal linguistic skills (mere scholarship). Especially those terms associated with formal meditation practice are beyond the scope of scholarship. As it is very likely that the ancient authors of the Pali Commentaries must have been practitioners or even achievers of the

results of formal Theravada meditation, their explanations of such concepts and ideas are indispensable. Whenever their opinions are put forward, they explicitly declare them as such, and warn us against accepting them without checking the suttas and further consideration.[3]

Attainment While Listening to a Discourse

On the third view that one must possess at least the first jhana to be able to attain enlightenment, the Pali Canon contains many examples of persons who were converted by the Buddha after attaining various stages of enlightenment while listening to his sermon. His first convert **Ven. Kondanna** is said to have realized the stage of sotapanna while listening to the First Sermon at the Deer Park in Sarnath. The Buddha's chief disciple **Ven. Sariputta** became a sotapanna after listening to half a stanza containing the gist of the Buddha's teaching recited by the arahant **Assaji**. Some of them may have practiced samatha meditation under their previous teachers and even attained jhanas. **But this cannot be said for all of them especially the lay disciples.**

In Benares, the millionaire's son, **Yasa**, was so disgusted at seeing his female dancers and musicians asleep in such repulsive postures after the night's party that he ran away from his house in quest of peace of mind. He became a **sotapanna** after listening to the Buddha's preaching at the Deer Park in Sarnath. When **Yasa's parents** noticed his absence the next day, they sent their servants to look for him while Yasa's father went towards the Deer Park following the trail of his slippers. He too attained the stage of sotapanna after listening to a discourse by the Buddha. While the Dhamma was being taught to his father, Yasa realized final knowledge and became an arahant. At this juncture, the Buddha stopped using his supernormal powers to hide Yasa from his father's vision because he knew that Yasa was no more capable of returning to the lay life. Next day, during a lunch dana in Yasa's former house, his **mother and former wife** also became sotapannas while listening to a discourse by the Buddha.

There is also the reported conversion of the thirty **Bhaddavaggiya** princes who were out on a picnic in the forest with their wives. They were also converted and attained the stages of sekhas or

trainees (see ‘Enlightenment’ in Glossary on p.9) while listening to the Buddha.

The largest number of individuals who became sotapannas while listening to a discourse occurred during the conversion of **King Bimbisara** and his subjects at Rajagaha as given in pp.53-54 of the Book of Discipline, Part IV, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. XIV. It is described below.

“Then the Lord, knowing by mind the reasoning in the minds of these twelve myriad brahmans and householders of Magadha, talked a progressive talk, that is to say, talk on giving, talk on moral habit, talk on heaven, he explained the peril, the vanity, the depravity of pleasures of the senses, the advantage in renouncing them. When the Lord knew that their minds were ready, malleable, **devoid of hindrances**, uplifted, pleased, then he explained to them the teaching on dhamma, which the Awakened ones have themselves discovered: suffering, its cause, its cessation, the Way. And as a clean cloth without black specks will easily take a dye, even so as the twelve myriad brahmans and householders of Magadha with Bimbisara at their head were (sitting) in those very seats, dhamma-

vision, dustless, stainless, arose to them, that ‘Whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to pass way.’ The remaining one myriad declared themselves as lay-followers.” (Note: Dhamma vision means the path of the sotapanna).

King Bimbisara and his people of Magadha, eleven myriads or one hundred and ten thousand in total, did not attain jhana but overcame the hindrances and attained purification of mind and finally became sotapannas by reflecting on the dhamma while listening to the Buddha’s teaching.

The Four Factors for Stream-Entry

In the Dutiyasariputta Sutta or Second Discourse to Sariputta (SN55:5), The Buddha confirmed the four factors for stream-entry as follows

- (1) Association with superior persons
(sappurisasamsevo)
- (2) Hearing the true Dhamma
(saddhammassavanam)
- (3) Careful or wise attention (yoniso-manasikaro)
- (4) Practice in accordance with the Dhamma
(dhammanudhammappatipatti)

In the Discourse on Half the Holy Life (SN45:2), the Buddha emphasized that association with a good friend is the whole of the holy life. It is by associating with superior persons that one will be able to hear the true Dhamma and it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Commentary to Sangiti Sutta (DN33 - Section on Factors of Stream-Entry) explains **wise attention** (yoniso-manasikara) in this context as paying attention to **impermanence, suffering, non-self**, which essentially means the directing of the mind to the development of insight (vipassana) as opposed to the development of tranquility (samatha).

Dhammanudhammappati-patti is explained as the preliminary practice that is conducive to the supramundane state (i.e. magga, phala, nibbana). This preliminary practice is identified in the sub-commentary as devotion to insight, which is basically vipassana development.

Conclusion

From the examples provided by the suttas about various individuals becoming sotapannas after listening to a discourse by the Buddha, we can be pretty sure that jhana is not essential for attaining enlightenment, especially the lower stages of sotapanna and sakadagamin.

Among the four factors for stream-entry, the Buddha confirmed them as association with superior persons, hearing the true Dhamma, wise attention and practice in accordance with the Dhamma. There is no mention that one must possess jhana to attain the stage of a sotapanna.

Therefore the view that at least the first level of jhana is necessary for all four stages of enlightenment **contradicts the suttas and should be rejected.**

2. Is Jhana Necessary for Attaining Anagamin and Arahantship?

The **second view**, which states that concentration is mastered only at the stage of anagamin, holds that jhana is necessary for attaining the stages of anagamin and arahant, but not for the lower stages of enlightenment.

According to Bhikkhu Bodhi^[4], recently several articulate teachers have argued down the validity of the dry insight approach, insisting that mundane jhanas are necessary for successful development of insight at every stage. This view that jhana is necessary for attaining anagamin and arahantship, is mentioned by Bhikkhu Thanissaro on p.14.

In an article entitled “The Jhanas and the Lay Disciple according to the Pali Suttas”, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi cites the **Mahamalunkya Sutta** (MN 64), where the Buddha teaches the path to the abandoning of the five lower fetters, as valid grounds to justify that the attainment of jhana is necessary for attaining the third stage of anagamin. Without jhana, one can only attain the first and second stage of enlightenment.

It is likely that some may support the **second view** based on the logic that if a meditator cannot even attain the third stage of anagamin without jhana, how can he/she attain arahantship, which is the fourth and final stage of enlightenment?

In the Canki Sutta (MN 95), the Buddha cautioned against the reflective acceptance of a view based on logic. The Buddha has said that the Dhamma is beyond logic, which is reasoning or ‘sankhara (volitional activities)’. A better way is to learn and arrive at the truth, as suggested by the Buddha in this sutta, is to approach and learn from a credible teacher and to strive in the development of insight under his guidance and to keep repeating, developing and cultivating this practice until the final goal is achieved.

Two Types of Practice to Attain Nibbana

The Buddha’s discourses explaining the practice leading to Nibbana are of two types.

In explaining the practice by tranquility and insight (samatha-vipassana), **Dhammapada verse 372**, says: “There is no jhana (concentration) in one

who lacks wisdom; nor is there wisdom in one who lacks jhana. In one whom there are both jhana and wisdom, he indeed is in the presence of Nibbana.”

In **Dhammapada verses 277-279**, the Buddha teaches the path of purification by way of dry insight (vipassana), according as is said: “All conditioned things are impermanent / sorrowful / soulless: when one sees this with wisdom, one is disgusted with ill; this is the path to purity.”

The **Mahamalunkya Sutta** quoted by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi belongs to the **first category**. Here the Buddha taught that the attainment of jhana is a necessary condition of the preparatory practice for attaining the stage of anagamin should the meditator fail to reach arahantship. The Buddha has never said that arahantship cannot be attained without jhana! On the contrary, there are suttas in the Satipatthana Samyutta (see next page), where the Buddha has explicitly stated that the practice of Satipatthana Vipassana meditation based on one’s virtue and the right view of kamma can lead one to the attainment of arahantship. There is no mention of the necessity of jhana at all!

Therefore the Commentaries have not deviated from the Pali Canon by claiming that one can attain arahantship without the need to develop jhana. Such arahants are called **sukkha-vipassaka** or dry insight arahants. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, the dry insight arahant is not explicitly mentioned in the Nikayas (suttas) but gains recognition in the Commentaries, and suggests that at some point a shift had taken place in the scale of meditative attainments that was expected of an arahant.

However, when we examined Bhikkhu Bodhi's statement against the suttas in the **Samyutta Nikaya** (for details see pp.85-88) such as Bhikkhu Sutta (SN47:3), Bahiya Sutta (SN47:15), Uttiya Sutta (SN47:16), Patimokkha Samvara Sila Sutta (SN47:46) and Duccarita Sutta (SN47:7), also in **Anguttara Nikaya** AN6:25 Anussatitthana Sutta, they showed that the monks attained arahantship without the need to develop jhana. Thus it appears that the dry insight arahant is mentioned in the Nikayas! Therefore the claim by Bhikkhu Bodhi that the dry insight arahant is not explicitly mentioned in the Nikayas is open to question.

The Commentaries called those arahants who attained purification without developing any jhana as ‘**sukkha-vipassaka**’ or **dry insight arahants**. However, the Buddha did not use this term to describe such arahants and it so does not occur in the Nikayas. This has probably created skepticism among certain monks and scholars about the existence of the dry insight arahant.

Being an expert in similes, the Buddha compared himself to a lotus as follows: “Just as, brahmin, a lotus blue, red or white, though born in the water, grows up in the water, when it reaches the surface stands there unsoiled by the water, – just so, brahmin though born in the world, grown up in the world, having overcome the world, I abide unsoiled by the world. Take it that I am a Buddha, brahmin.” (AN 4:36)

According to Commentary, the Buddha compared the dry insight arahant to the **White lotus ascetic** (samana pundarika). It explains that the term “he does not attain the eight emancipations” means he is a dry insight arahant according to commentarial definition in the Puggala Pannitti. More discussion of this issue is presented in Chapter 9, pp.57-62.

Clarification

To avoid any misunderstanding, we wish to state that we agree that mundane jhana is necessary for attaining the stage of anagamin by the path of tranquility and insight should the meditator fail to reach arahantship. If insight is not steady due to delight in dhamma, then he stops at **anagamin stage** (unable to proceed further to arahantship). This is found in the teachings of Mahamalunkya Sutta. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi^[4], “while the Mahamalunkya Sutta and its parallel (AN 9:36) imply that prior attainment of the first jhana is a minimum requirement for reaching the stage of anagamin, several suttas suggest that it may be a **general stipulation that allows for exceptions.**”

We support the Commentary view that all stages of enlightenment can be attained without mundane jhana, by the path of dry insight. Normally, if insight is not strong enough, the highest stage the meditator can attain is the stage of **sakadagamin**. However, for people with great wisdom parami and strenuous effort (see p.61-62), the dry insight method can lead to the attainment of **anagamin** or **arahantship** as declared by the Buddha in the Satipatthana Sutta (pp.91-92).

3. What is the Sukkha-vipassaka [5] or Dry Insight Practitioner?

The Pali term **sukkha-vipassaka** is a compound of three words: **sukkha** + **vipassa** + **ka**. ‘Sukkha’ means ‘dry, dried up’. ‘Vipassa’ is derived from the word ‘vipassati’, which means ‘to see or to have insight’; and ‘ka’ is a suffix, which forms an adjective or noun. Thus the term ‘sukkha-vipassaka’ can be rendered as ‘one of dry insight’ or ‘**dry insight practitioner**’.

A definition of the term **sukkha-vipassaka** is found in the sub-commentary on the *Sumangalavilasini*: “Dry insight practitioner: the one whose insight is dry, rough or im-moist because of the **lack of the moisture of tranquility meditation**.”

A synonym of ‘sukkha-vipassaka’ is ‘**suddha-vipassaka**’ with the adjective ‘suddha’ meaning ‘pure’. Thus this term may be translated as ‘**one of pure insight**’. It is described as ‘pure insight’ because his insight meditation is **not mixed up with tranquility meditation**. In fact, he does not even possess access concentration.

In order to understand these definitions, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of **samatha** or tranquility. The term samatha occurs very often together with vipassana as a pair in the Nikayas, but it is never defined. The Pali commentaries provide a range of definitions. Samatha can refer strictly to the ‘eight attainments’ (eight mundane jhanas). In some cases, it includes access concentration (upacara-samadhi), which still belongs to the sensual sphere (kamavacara). Generally, it simply denotes one-pointedness of mind or concentration.

In Visuddhimagga-mahaṭṭika II 474, **Dhammapala** states: “One who has pure insight as his vehicle and **does not obtain jhana** is a dry insight practitioner. He is called ‘dry insight practitioner’ because his insight is dry and rough in the sense that it is not lubricated by the moisture of jhana”.

A similar definition of sukkha-vipassaka is found in **Sariputta’s** Manorathapurāṇi sub-commentary: “Those who abide in pure insight and attain the highest fruit without the **moisture of jhana** at a prior stage (of the path) are dry-insight practitioners by name”. Similarly in a passage

from **Patisambhidamagga Commentary**, **access concentration** is explicitly assigned to dry-insight practitioners as minimum level of concentration required for development of insight knowledge.

The pioneer in the revival movement of insight meditation in 20th century Burma, **Ledi Sayadaw**, seems to consider jhana attainment as the final criterion in deciding whether or not one's 'insight' is dry and pure. In his **Anudipanipāṭha**, Ledi Sayadaw said: "Those who have pure insight vehicle are the practitioners with pure insight-vehicle. **Pure**: not mixed with **samatha jhana**".

From the foregoing, it appears that the absence of jhana is the criterion for determining that the insight is 'dry'. So the 'sukkha-vipassaka is one who develops insight **without having obtained any form-sphere jhana**'; therefore even one who develops insight knowledge after having attained access concentration through tranquility meditation can also be called '**sukkha vipassaka**'.

The term '**suddha-vipassaka**' is usually reserved for those meditators '**who do not even obtain access concentration**' in their practice.

4. Misunderstanding the Pali Suttas: “How Insight Worsted Concentration in the Pali Canon”

The view that arahantship cannot be realized unless one possesses the jhanas may be traced to misunderstanding of the Pali suttas by certain scholars/translators, who think they can depend on their own logic to interpret the Pali texts without consulting the Commentaries. The catchphrase ‘How Insight Worsted Concentration in the Pali Canon’ was coined by Richard F. Gombrich in his book ‘**How Buddhism Began**’.[6]

On pp. 110-111 of his book, Gombrich writes: “I see the devaluation of concentration as originating in certain identifiable texts. One of them is called the Susima Sutta. This is the text, de La Vallée Poussin tells us, on which Harivarman based his position that one could attain release without entering any of the jhanas, the stages of concentration. As the text stands in Pali – and apparently as Harivarman read it – it does indeed appear to support that position. However, by

comparing it with its **Chinese version** and by scrutinizing its internal coherence, I think I have established that the extant Pali Susima Sutta is a reworking of an older text – one might almost describe it as a **kind of forgery.**”

Continuing on pp. 125-126 of his book, he accuses the redactors of the Pali Texts of changing the whole texts to make the Buddhist monks look superior: “The text itself (unlike the commentary) does not claim that Susima attained Enlightenment just by understanding a sermon, but certainly the monks make that claim, after Susima has forced them to admit, under cross examination, that they have no meditative accomplishments. It is in any case a **vinaya offence** (pacittiya 8, Vin IV, 25) to claim that one is enlightened, even if it is true. In this case, comparison with the Chinese version shows, **I believe, that they are lying.**”

(**Correction:** Pacittiya 8 states that if a monk informs one, **who is not a monk**, of his having attained Jhana, Magga or Phala even though it is true, he commits a Pacittiya offence. However, in this case, as Susima was already a monk, no vinaya offence was committed!)[7]

“ The redactor of our Pali text wanted to change the story so that the monks already with the Buddha became clearly superior to the newcomer from a non-Buddhist sect. So their enlightenment had to be genuine and his questions simply questions, not a clever cross-examination. At the same time, the things the enlightened monks had not achieved could hardly be as basic as the elimination of greed and hatred. For these the redactor substituted the supernormal powers listed in the Samañña-phala Sutta. This was an intelligent choice, in that the Buddha had suggested that the exercise of supernormal powers was unnecessary, even distasteful. The redactor did not go as far back along the standard path as to deny the four *jhanas*; but that step was taken by the Commentary. Presumably the implication anyone would draw from a lack of super-knowledges (*abhiñña*) was that the meditative attainments, which bestow those powers had not been reached. So the monks seem to claim enlightenment without having meditated.”

Gombrich concludes on p. 127 as follows:

“In this case I think that the **redefinition of *pañña-vimutti* to exclude meditation** has arisen

not as the result of debate but rather as a kind of narrative accident due to Sangha apologetics. But I cannot exclude the possibility that the author of the Pali *Susima Sutta* that has come down to us had views on the matter to put forward. What I do however feel rather sure of is that **he had no sound authority for those views**. So he may have tried, albeit obliquely, to cite the preaching of the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta* as a precedent.”

Comments

It would appear from his writing that Gombrich is unaware of the fact that there are two ways to attain enlightenment: (1) the path of tranquility and insight and (2) the path of dry insight. Jhana is not necessary in the path of dry insight, but concentration is certainly necessary to suppress the hindrances otherwise no insight can arise.

In the last paragraph, Gombrich makes the claim that the definition of *pañña-vimutti* has been changed to **exclude meditation**. It appears that he holds the lopsided view that without jhana there is no meditation. Hence his bias towards the Pali *Susima Sutta* because Harivarman based his

position from this sutta; that one could attain release without entering any of the jhanas.

In fact, he even made unsubstantiated accusations against the Sangha, without properly checking the Chinese version of Susima Sutta in the Samyukta Agama from which he based his “conclusion that the extant Pali Susima Sutta is a **kind of forgery** and comparison with the Chinese version shows, I believe, that **they are lying.**”

The true facts came to light when a letter appeared in the Internet site of ‘Yahoo dhammastudygroup’ dated 12 June 2004 regarding Bhikkhu Bodhi's comments on the Susima Sutta. In the said letter, a Chinese student from Taiwan confirmed that Gombrich’s interpretation of the Chinese Susima sutta in Samyuktagama was **completely wrong!** It is reproduced here for the benefit of readers.

Letter from Mr Tzung-Kuen Wen to Ven. Bodhi Thera Concerning the Susima Sutta

Dear Bhante,

In this letter, I wish to ask for your opinion about the meditative approach of the sukkha-vipassaka.

Hopefully, you would kindly give me some advices. When I read your new translation of Samyuttanikaya, with regard to Susimasutta, in page 783, you mention that Professor Gombrich has discussed its Chinese version, and suggest, in page 786, that ‘the suttas themselves say nothing about a system of bare insight meditation.’ However, the interpretation done by Professor Gombrich of the Chinese Susimasutta in Samyuktagama is unfortunately, **completely wrong.**

In fact, the Chinese Susimasutta of Samyuktagama unequivocally states that those arahants with whom Ven. Susima talked to did not attain any jhana. Besides, according to Mahavibhasa (T27, p.564b), the Abhidharma text of Sarvastivada and Satyasiddhi (T32, pp.367c~368a) by Harivarman, those arahants mentioned in Susimasutta are without doubt taken as non-jhana arahants. The fact that those arahants mentioned in Chinese Susimasutta of Samyuktagama do not have any jhana is well known in Taiwan because the most Ven. Master Yin-shun from time to time in his works mentioned them.

Taking the Pali commentary's comment and the Chinese sources into account, it may be clear that both northern and southern traditions regard those arahants in Susimasutta as arahants with no jhanas. This may indicate that the Pali commentary's interpretation in this case is quite reliable and may derive from an older common heritage. However, in the Vinaya of Mahasamghika (T22, pp. 362~363), there is another Chinese equivalent of Pali Susimasutta. In which, those arahants are only said to be not attaining four arupa-jhanas, divine eye and knowledge of past lives.

My question is: Do you really think that Pali suttas themselves say nothing about a system of bare insight meditation? Is there no clue for this meditative approach in the Pali Nikayas? How would you explain those arahants who are described in Anguttara-nikaya as not having eight deliverances, if we take them literally without following the Pali commentary's interpretation?

It will be my great honor if you have time to kindly give me some advices.

With metta,
Tzungkuen

Note: Mr. Tzungkuen Wen is the author of the treatise “A Study of Sukkhavipassaka in Pali Buddhism.” University of Queensland March 2009

Another Scholarly View on the Necessity of Jhana for Enlightenment

In his translation of the Susima Sutta, Thanissaro Bhikkhu added his comment as follows:

“This discourse (Susima Sutta) is sometimes cited as proof that a meditator can attain Awakening without having practiced the jhanas, but a close reading shows that it does not support this assertion at all. The new arahants mentioned here do not deny that they have attained any of the four “form” jhanas that make up the definition of right concentration. Instead, they simply deny that they have acquired any psychic powers or the formless jhanas. In this, their definition of ‘*pannavimutta* – liberated by wisdom’ is no different from that given in **AN 9:44** Discourse on Wisdom Freed, which describes the monk abiding in the first jhana and by wisdom understands it. Taken in the context of the Buddha’s many other teachings on right concentration, there is every reason to

believe that the new arahants mentioned in this discourse had reached at least the first jhana before attaining Awakening.” (For the Commentarial definition of ‘*pannavimutta*’, see p.41)

Comments

It must be pointed out that the discourse in AN 9:44 belongs to the category in which liberation is attained by the **path of tranquility and insight** while evidence from the Pali Susima Sutta and its Chinese version appears to support the view that it belongs to the **path of dry insight**.

Secondly, the view that only the four jhanas constitute right concentration is based on a literal interpretation of the definition in Mahasatipatthana Sutta which defines right concentration as the four jhanas. **This literal interpretation is not valid** because the teaching in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta is **neyyattha desana**, a teaching whose meaning needs to be inferred by comparing with other suttas on the same subject to avoid conflict. This point will be discussed in Part II, Chapter 12.

If interpreted according to Bhikkhu Thanissaro's view that only the four jhanas constitute right concentration, it will contradict other suttas taught by the Buddha, such as **AN 6:25 Anussatitthana Sutta**. In this sutta, the Buddha declared that the mind of the noble disciple who mindfully recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, Sila, Caga and Devata, is not obsessed by greed, hate or delusion. By making this thought their object some men thereby are '**purged**' (attained arahantship). The six recollections are tranquility exercises that lead only to access concentration, not to jhana. This confirms the fact that jhana is not a necessary condition for the realization of arahantship.

In fact, several other suttas such as those from the **Satipatthana Samyutta** (Part II, Chapter 15, pp.85-88) appear to confirm the view that jhana is not necessary for the realization of arahantship.

As there is much confusion created by these modern English translators over the interpretation of the Susima Sutta, it is imperative that this sutta should be discussed again in the light of new findings in the Chinese Samyukta Agama.

Notes on Pannavimutta [8]

The Pali term **pannavimutta** means ‘one liberated by wisdom’. According to the description in the Kitagiri Sutta (MN 70, 16), pannavimutta is an arahant who “does not contact with the body and abide in those liberations that are peaceful and immaterial, transcending forms, but his taints are destroyed by his seeing with wisdom.”

The Puggalapannatti defines pannavimutta arahant as “one who does not dwell in the eight emancipations but his taints are destroyed by his seeing.” Here the Commentary says that he is one who does not attain any of the eight emancipations including the four form jhanas, i.e., he is a **dry insight arahant** (see p.59).

Regarding pannavimutta arahants mentioned in Kitagiri Sutta, Puggalapannatti and other canonical texts such as AN7:15 and PTS D.iii.101, the Pali Commentaries have consistently explained them as comprising **five kinds of arahants**, namely: one is the **dry insight practitioner** and four are those who attain arahantship after emerging from **one or another of the four form jhanas**

5. Commentary on the Pali Susima Sutta (SN12:70)

The ability to attain the supra-mundane path without possession of a mundane jhana has been questioned by some Theravada scholars, but the Visuddhimagga clearly states this possibility when it distinguishes between the path arisen in a dry-insight meditator and the path arisen in one who possesses a jhana but does not use it as basis for insight (Vism. 666-67, pp.779).[9]

The **Susima Sutta** provides textual evidence of this. When the monks in the sutta are asked how they can be arahants without possessing supernormal powers and formless jhanas, they replied: “We are liberated by wisdom” (paññavimutta). The Commentary glosses this reply thus: “Friend, we are without jhana, dry-insighters, liberated simply by wisdom” (*Mayam nijjhanaka sukkhavipassaka paññamatten’ eva vimutta ti*).

According to **Sayadaw Nyanuttara** [10], the word ‘nijjhanaka’ (without jhana) is an epithet that

confirms the meaning of *sukkha-vipassaka* that it qualifies. Therefore, ‘*nijjhanaka*’ should not be construed to be of the same sense with ‘*nijjhanam*’ from the phrase ‘*nijjhanam khamanti*’ in the *Alagaddupama Sutta* (MN 22), where the word ‘*nijjhanam*’ means ‘reflecting’. It is not found in any Pali Text, Commentary and Sub-commentary where the word ‘*nijjhanaka*’ bears the same meaning as ‘*nijjhanam*’.

The Commentary (SA.ii, 117) also states that the Buddha gave his long discourse on insight in the sutta “to show the arising of knowledge even without concentration.” The Sub-commentary (ST. ii, 125) establishes the point by explaining “even without concentration to mean even without concentration previously accomplished reaching the mark of serenity”, adding that this is said in reference to one who makes insight his vehicle.

In this Sutta, it is clearly shown that the arahants who answered Susima’s questions did not attain the **five lokiya abhiññas** (mundane supernormal powers, namely: psychic powers, the divine ear, reading the mind of others, remembrance of past lives and the divine eye) and the **formless jhanas**.

However, detractors argue that the sutta only mentions that the monks did not attain the supernormal powers and formless jhanas. It does not say that the monks did not attain the **form jhanas**. Only the Commentaries say that. To them, this is not the Buddha's word. Such a dogmatic attitude will not help them in understanding the Buddha's Teachings.

According to **Sayadaw Nyanuttara**, “mundane supernormal powers are the by-products of form jhanas. When it is stated that they are not attained, it also meant that form jhanas are not attained. Due to the fact that **Susima did not put a direct question to the arahants** whether they attained form jhanas, no direct reference is made in this sutta. Even if he had done so, the arahants had no alternative but to answer: ‘We have been freed by insight.’ Read in the light of the Commentary and Sub-commentary, it is seen to affirm the existence of a ‘vehicle of bare insight’ (suddha-vipassaka), which begins directly with mindful contemplation of mental and physical phenomena according to the Satipatthana Sutta without depending on a base of concentration by means of jhana or access concentration.”

6. Comparison of the Three Extant Versions of the Susima Sutta ^[11]

In his PhD thesis at Queensland University in 2009, a Taiwanese student **Tzungkuen Wen** discusses this issue based on Chinese translations of Samyukta Agama and Mahasamghika Vinaya. Today there are three extant versions of the Susima Sutta for comparison: (1) Theravada version in Saṃyutta-nikaya (**SN**); (2) Sarvastivada version in Saṃyukta-agama (**SA**); (3) Story of Susima in the Mahasamghika Vinaya (**MV**).

According to Tzungkuen Wen, “regarding the most significant part on the relation between mundane jhana and enlightenment, **SN** and **MV** are similar to each other as neither mentions the four form (rupa) jhanas. But in **SA**, when Susima asked the bhikkhus who claimed arahantship, whether they were endowed with any of the four form and four formless jhanas, the bhikkhus **denied their attainment of any of these form and formless jhanas**. When Susima pointed out the contradiction between their announcement of arahantship and their acknowledgement of lacking

of those jhanas, the bhikkhus simply replied that they were “**liberated by wisdom**”.

The study shows that while Theravada recognizes the dry-insight arahant in the **Commentaries**, Sarvastivada went one step further by including it in the **sutta itself!** There is no commentary in the Mahasanghika story, which is not surprising. They were the first to secede from the original Sangha claiming that **arahants were imperfect [12]** so they probably did not accept the Commentaries.

Since Sarvastivada alone reveals the absence of form jhana, this part was probably inserted later, either in India when the sutta was compiled or in China when it was translated into Chinese. As the commentarial literature of Sarvastivada compiled in India confirms that the wisdom-liberated arahants mentioned in the Susima Sutta did not obtain any form jhana, this excludes the possibility that the change was made later in China. The change was most probably made when the Sarvastivadins compiled their Saṃyukta-agama during the fourth Council in Kashmir, India around the first century AD.

Although the doctrine of the dry-insight arahant in the Pali suttas might still be open to scholars' opinions, the canonical and commentarial sources preserved in the Chinese Agama and Abhidharma texts acknowledge the existence of **arahants without form jhanas**. Thus they provide a different perspective and valuable material for more thorough investigation by scholars.

According to Tzungkuen Wen, since most of the available sources related to the Susima Sutta including Theravada commentarial literature, the Sarvastivada's Susima Sutta and Sarvastivada Abhidharma texts acknowledge wisdom-liberated arahants who **lack even the first form jhana**, then it is very likely that there existed a common view among Buddhists in the early period of Indian Buddhism that one does not need form jhana to attain arahantship.

This view was most probably taught already at the time of the Buddha and then passed down through the oral commentarial tradition in the various early Buddhist schools. This teaching was later written down and systematized as the doctrine of the '**sukkha-vipassaka**' in the commentarial literature

of the Theravada and later included in the canonical sutta of the Sarvastivada. It probably originated from a very early period of Indian Buddhism (probably right from the First Buddhist Council) and cannot be taken to be an invention by later Theravada commentators.

Prof. K. R. Norman has pointed out that if Pali commentarial materials are accepted as canonical by other early Buddhist schools, they must revert to the earliest days of Buddhism, or in Norman's own words, "perhaps to the time of the Buddha himself." (Tzungkuen Wen, p.247)

This is a very significant finding that challenges the validity of the theory that at some point a **shift had taken place** in the scale of meditative attainments that was expected of an arahant!

To clear the misconception that mundane jhana is necessary for the attainment of arahantship, the discourse entitled **Yuganadda Sutta** – Discourse on Coupled/Yoked from AN 4:170 is discussed in the next chapter to show that the path to arahantship without the need of jhana is taught in the Nikayas.

7. Discourse on Coupled/Yoked (AN 4:170 Yuganaddha Sutta)

On one occasion the venerable Ananda was dwelling at Kosambi in Ghosita's Park. There the venerable Ananda addressed the bhikkhus: "Friends, bhikkhus!" "Friend" those bhikkhus replied. The venerable Ananda said this:

"Friends, whatever bhikkhu or bhikkhuni has declared the attainment of arahantship in my presence has done so by these **four ways (Note 1)** or by a certain one among them. What four?

(i) "Here, a bhikkhu develops **insight preceded by tranquility** (*samathapubbaṅgamam vipassanam bhāveti*). As he is developing insight preceded by tranquility, **the path (Note 2)** is generated. He pursues this path; develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters (*samyojana*) are abandoned and the underlying tendencies (*anusaya*) are uprooted."

(ii) "Again, a bhikkhu develops **tranquility preceded by insight** (*vipassanāpubbaṅgamam samatham bhāveti*) (**Note 3**). As he is developing

tranquility preceded by insight, the path is generated. He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.

(iii) “Again, a bhikkhu develops **tranquility and insight coupled or yoked** (*samathavipassanaṃ yuganaddhaṃ bhāveti*) (Note 4). As he is developing tranquility and insight in conjunction, the path is generated. He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.

(iv) “Again, a **bhikkhu's mind is seized by restlessness** about the Dhamma (*dhammuddhacca viggahitaṃ mānasaṃ hoti*). But there comes an occasion when his mind becomes internally steady, composed, unified, and concentrated. Then the path is generated in him. He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.

“Whatever bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, friends, has declared the attainment of arahantship in my presence has done so by these four ways or by a certain one among them.” (End of Discourse)

Notes

Samatha means tranquility, serenity, concentration developed by fixing the mind on a single object.

Mp = Manorathapurani (Anguttara Nikaya Commentary);

Mp-t = Manorathapurani-tika (Anguttara Nikaya Sub-commentary)

(1) It refers to the four ways of practice of the mundane path (pubbabhagiyo lokiyamaggo) for the purpose of attaining the higher supra-mundane paths.

(2) Mp explains this as the first supramundane path, but Mp-t says: “This is said with reference to the path of stream-entry but the meaning of this passage can be understood simply by way of the mundane [preparatory] path.”

(3) Mp says: “This is a person who naturally gains insight. Based on insight, he produces tranquility.”

This passage is explained in Paṭisambhida-magga thus: “How is the tranquility, preceded by insight, developed? Contemplation of **impermanence** (*anicca*) is insight; contemplation of **suffering** (*dukkha*).....**not-self** (*anatta*) is **insight**. At the moment (of realization of Ariyan Path), Nibbana being the object, tranquility comes about. Thus insight comes first and tranquility follows. It is therefore said, “**a man develops tranquility, preceded by insight**”. This passage also clearly shows that insight precedes tranquility.

What type of tranquility is this? Is it vipassana, jhana or supramundane samadhi?

The answer is found in the Commentary: “Here some persons contemplate the five Groups of Grasping as having the characteristics of impermanence, not-self, suffering without having previously developed access or fixed concentration (*samatha*). A person contemplating in this manner attains samadhi at the moment of realization of the Ariyan Path, Nibbana being the object. This (**magga**) **supramundane samadhi** is tranquility.”

(4) Mp says that each time he attains a meditative attainment (samatha), he explores it by way of its conditioned phenomena. And having explored its conditioned phenomena, he enters the next attainment. Thus, having attained the first jhana, he emerges, explores its conditioned phenomena as impermanent, etc. Then he enters second jhana, emerges, and explores its conditioned phenomena, and so on up to the base of neither-perception nor non-perception.

According to Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi^[13], since ‘yuganaddha’ means literally ‘yoked together’, some interpret the term to mean that in this mode of practice, **tranquility and insight can occur simultaneously**. The commentarial system does not acknowledge this possibility but several suttas might be read as suggesting that insight can occur within the jhana and does not require the meditator to withdraw before beginning contemplation.

This suggestion does not seem to be valid because in the **mundane path**, jhana and vipassana cannot occur at the same thought moment as their objects are different (see p. 84) and no insight can arise within the jhana.

In fact the word ‘yuganaddha’ also occurs in the **Mahasalayata Sutta** (MN149.10). The Commentary says that this refers to the **simultaneous arising of tranquility and insight in the supramundane path** where all the eight path factors occur simultaneously. At the path moment, tranquility is present under the heading of Right Concentration and insight is present under the heading of Right View.

Conclusion

From the explanations given in Note (3), we can conclude that the bhikkhu who attains arahantship by developing tranquility preceded by insight is the **sukkha-vippasaka** or dry-insight arahant. The tranquility is supramundane path concentration.

In the next section, we shall discuss the suttas about the White lotus ascetic, which confirm the Commentary explanation that the White-lotus arahant in the Putta Sutta is bereft of jhana.

8. The White Lotus Ascetic in the Putta Sutta (AN4:87)

As our subjects of interest are the **White lotus ascetic** (samana-pundarika) and the **Red lotus ascetic** (samana-paduma), we shall discuss those parts of the sutta pertaining only to these two individuals as described below.

(1) “And how is a person a **White lotus ascetic**? Here, with the destruction of the taints, a bhikkhu has realized for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life, the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, and having entered upon it, he dwells in it; **yet he does not dwell having contacted with the body, the eight emancipations (Note 1)**. It is in this way that a person is a White-lotus ascetic.”

(2) “And how is a person a **Red lotus ascetic**? Here, with the destruction of the taints, a bhikkhu has realized for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life, the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, and having entered upon it, he dwells in it; **and he dwells having contacted with the body the eight emancipations**.

It is in this way that a person is a Red-lotus ascetic.”

Note 1

The Pali phrase ‘*kāyena phusitvā*’ is translated literally as ‘contacted with the body’. This is incorrect. Here *kaya* is not used in the sense of the material body but rather the mental body or body of mental factors (*nama-kaya*).

The eight emancipations (*attha vimokkha*) are listed in the *Vimokkha Sutta* (AN 8. 66) as below:

- (i) *jhana* via internal (body-based) kasina practice
- (ii) *jhana* via external kasina practice
- (iii) *jhana* via colour kasina or the divine abodes
- (iv) the sphere of the infinity of space; 1st Arupa or formless *jhana*
- (v) the sphere of the infinity of consciousness; 2nd Arupa *jhana*
- (vi) the sphere of nothingness; 3rd Arupa *jhana*
- (vii) the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; 4th Arupa *jhana*
- (viii) the cessation of perception and feeling.

9. Definition of White lotus Ascetic

The Pali Commentary explains thus: “Samana-pundarika (White lotus ascetic) means a samana comparable to a pundarika lotus; a pundarika lotus means a lotus with less than a hundred petals. Samana-pundarika means ‘**sukkha-vipassaka arahant**’ (dry insight arahant); such an arahant, bereft of jhana and abhinna (supernormal powers) is not complete in qualities and is therefore termed samana-pundarika.”

In his comments on the Putta Sutta, [14] Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi stated that “contrary to the Commentary, the definition of the White lotus ascetic here is **ambiguous**; for the expression “he does not dwell having contacted with the body, the eight emancipations (*no ca kho attha vimokkhe kayena phusitva viharati*)’ could mean either:

(a) that he does not attain any of the eight emancipations, which would make him a dry-insight arahant (as the Commentary asserts), or

(b) that he attains some of the eight emancipations but not all, perhaps the three emancipations based on form but not the formless attainments and

cessation. In such a case, the meditator would conform to definition of the arahant liberated by wisdom of whom, it is said that he has eliminated the taints but does not attain the peaceful formless attainments or jhanas (Kitagiri Sutta MN 70.16).

“The commentators hold that the pannavimutta arahant can possess any number among the four jhanas or no jhana at all; only the latter is a dry-insight arahant. The dry-insight arahant is not explicitly mentioned as such in the Nikayas but first gains recognition in the commentaries. In any case, the difference in the definitions between the wisdom-liberated arahant and the White lotus arahant suggests that at some point a shift had taken place in the scale of meditative attainments that was expected of an arahant. While the arahant liberated by wisdom lacks only the formless attainments, the White lotus arahant, on the interpretation offered by the commentators, lacks the jhanas as well. The eight emancipations, defined at AN 8:66, are not exactly identical with the four jhanas and four formless attainments. It seems that the first three emancipations correspond to the four jhanas but distinguish them in terms of objects rather than mental factors.”

No Ambiguity in the Definition of Wisdom Liberated Arahant in the Puggala Pannitti

Subsequently in 2007, Bhikkhu Bodhi published an article in the Journal of the Pali Text Society entitled “The Susima-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant” [15] in which he argued that the idea of an arahant devoid of jhana might be traceable in the Pali Canon. In it, he also reviewed his earlier comments on the White lotus ascetic. He reverted to the **canonical definition** of the panna-vimutta in **Puggala Pannitti** based on the eight emancipations instead of the formless jhanas.

Following the definition in the Puggala Pannitti, the Commentators used the eight emancipations as the criterion to differentiate “one liberated by wisdom (panna-vimutta)” from “one liberated-both-ways (ubhatobhaga-vimutta).” According to them, the former is one who **does not attain any** of the eight emancipations including the four form jhanas. The latter is one who **attains at least one** of the eight emancipations. Here Bhikkhu Bodhi says that this definition “suggests that the arahant liberated by wisdom need not possess any of the eight emancipations, including the lower three, which comprise the four form jhanas.” [16]

With this definition based on eight emancipations, there is now no ambiguity over the Commentary explanation that the **White lotus ascetic** is bereft of mundane jhana. He is a dry insight arahant.

Dry Insight Approach and Arahantship

The fact that the dry insight approach is unable to lead to the attainment of the stage of **anagamin** (see p.27) may be the reason why certain people question the ability of the dry insight practitioner to attain arahantship. If the dry insight method that he employs cannot lead to attainment of anagamin, which is easier to attain than arahantship, how can this dry insight method lead to attainment of arahantship at all? This itself presents a paradox.

In the *Magganga Dipani*, Venerable Ledi Sayadaw states: “According to the method of the *sukkha-vipassaka* (dry insight practitioner), *samatha* and *anapana* (breath meditation), etc., are not practised separately. After observing the three constituents of the **morality group** of the Eightfold Path, the practice of the **wisdom group** of the Eightfold Path is undertaken. The three constituents of the **concentration group** of the Eightfold Path come along with the two constituents of the wisdom

group of the Eightfold Path and these two sets are termed **pancangikamagga** (the five constituents of the Eightfold Path). The five form one group and together with the aforesaid three constituents of the morality group of the Eightfold Path, they become the **Noble Eightfold Path**. The mental restlessness disappears. However this can only be achieved with great wisdom and strenuous effort.” So it is not necessary for a dry insight meditator to develop samatha separately as he, **established in virtue**, can begin vipassana contemplation.

According to the Path of Freedom (**Vimuttimaggā** p.310) definition on Bare Insight: “One overcomes the hindrances through **understanding-strength**. One discerns name after form has been penetrated by way of the bodily formations. Beginning with insight, he develops serenity”, i.e., a bhikkhu develops tranquility preceded by insight (see Yuganaddha Sutta on pp.49-50).

Both passages suggest that for meditators endowed with **great wisdom parami** and strenuous effort, their understanding strength can help to overcome the hindrances encountered at the higher stages of enlightenment and enable them to realize anagami

magga-phala and continue on to realize arahatta magga-phala. This way, the dry insight approach will help to fulfill their urgent desire to escape from the suffering of samsara as quickly as possible. This may help to explain how **Bahiya Daruciriya** (see pp.77-80) and others like him attained arahantship by the dry insight approach.

Conclusion

On the interpretation of the **White lotus arahant** as a dry insight arahant, this is in line with the Commentarial definition of “one liberated by wisdom (panna-vimutta)” in the Puggala Pannitti. The **Red lotus ascetic**, on the other hand, is one who attains at least one of the eight emancipations.

One reason why people do not accept that the dry insight approach can lead to arahantship is because it normally cannot lead to attainment of anagamin, which is easier than arahantship. Our explanation is that, for people endowed with great wisdom parami and strenuous effort, their **understanding strength** can help to overcome the hindrances at the higher stages and enable them to attain arahantship. Viewed in this way the idea of the dry insight arahant may become acceptable to them.

PART II

10. Satipatthana – The Only Way

In Part I of this book, we have clearly established that the practice of the dry insight method through Satipatthana can lead all the way to arahantship. Therefore it is imperative to discuss the principles and practice of Satipatthana so that the reader will understand and appreciate its prime role in the path of enlightenment.

In the Satipatthana Sutta (MN 10), the Buddha declared as follows: **“This is the only way** (ekayano maggo), O bhikkhus, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of Nibbana, namely, the four **Satipatthana**, or **foundations of mindfulness.**”

Further, in the **Discourse on Analysis** (SN47:40), the Buddha explains as follows: “What, bhikkhus, is the way leading to the development of the four foundations of mindfulness? It is this **Noble**

Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This is called the way leading to the development of satipatthana (the foundations of mindfulness).”

Satipatthana and the Noble Eightfold Path

This is how the Noble Eightfold Path is the way leading to the development of Satipatthana. In the meditation retreat, the three constituents of the morality group namely: **right speech, right action and right livelihood** have been perfected when the meditator undertakes to observe the 8 Precepts.

During the practice of Satipatthana Vipassana meditation, the meditator has to observe every object that arises. He/she must be ardent and mindful, which means **right effort and right mindfulness**. This way the mind will be fixed or concentrated on the object, which is **right concentration**. These three factors form the concentration group.

Right thought is usually explained as thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-hate and thoughts of

non-cruelty. When one is practising Satipatthana Vipassana meditation, if one engages in such thoughts, then one is just thinking, not observing the mental process that arises at that moment. **Right thought** in Satipatthana Vipassana meditation means not thinking about these things but directing the mind towards the object to be observed or right application of mind (vitakka). With the support of the concentration group, the mind will be able to “gain insight into the true nature of the object”, i.e., **experiential knowledge** that all physical and mental processes possess the three characteristics of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha) and not-self (anatta). This experiential knowledge constitutes **right view**. These two factors, right thought and right view, form the wisdom group.

Neglect of Satipatthana is Neglect of the Noble Eightfold Path

In SN47:33 Discourse on Neglect (Viraddha Sutta), the Buddha declared: “Bhikkhus, whoever neglects these four foundations of mindfulness neglects the noble path that leads to the complete ending of dukkha (suffering). Bhikkhus, whoever

cultivates energetically the four foundations of mindfulness cultivates the noble path that leads to the complete ending of dukkha.”

Therefore the two suttas, the Discourse on Neglect and the Discourse on Analysis confirm that the **practice of Satipatthana is the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.**

The Meaning of Satipatthana

In the Manual of the Requisites of Enlightenment, Venerable Ledi Sayadaw defines ‘**satipatthana**’ precisely as follows: ‘Bhusam itthatiti patthanam; sati eva patthanam satipatthanam.’ This means: “What is **firmly established** is a ‘**foundation**’; **mindfulness** itself is such a foundation.”

In his book entitled “The Four Foundations of Mindfulness”, Sayadaw U Silananda explains that the English term ‘foundations of mindfulness’ means actually ‘**setting up of mindfulness**’ or ‘**firmly established mindfulness**’. So the practice of establishing firm mindfulness is called the “foundations of mindfulness”.

11. What is Sati? (Mindfulness)

The Sanskrit root ‘smṛ’ and the term ‘smṛti’ predate Buddhism. In ancient Ṛigveda, ‘smṛ’ means ‘to remember’ or ‘keep in mind.’ Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary defines ‘smṛti’ (Pali: ‘sati’) as ‘remembrance, ‘thinking of or upon’, ‘calling to mind’, ‘memory’.

The English translation of ‘sati’ as ‘mindfulness’ is derived from the **Christian prayer** in Psalm 8.4: “Give us grateful hearts, our Father, for all thy mercies, and make us mindful of the needs of others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Although ‘sati’ derives from the Vedic root ‘sar’ meaning ‘to remember’, but as a mental factor it signifies presence of mind, **attentiveness to the present**, rather than the faculty of memory regarding the past. The **Abhidhammatthasangaha** defines sati as follows: Sati has the characteristic of not floating away from the object. Its function is the absence of confusion or non-forgetfulness. It is manifested as guardianship. The proximate cause is strong perception (thirasanna) or the four foundations of mindfulness.

Besides ‘moment to moment awareness of present events’, sati also means ‘remembering’ to be aware of something, or to do something at a designated time in the future.’ In fact, the primary connotation of the term ‘sati’ is ‘recollection’.

Similarly, in the Path of Purification XIV, 141, mindfulness is defined as follows: It has the characteristic of **not wobbling** (apilapana). Its function is **not to forget**. It is manifested as **guarding**, or it is manifested as the state of **confronting an objective field**. Its proximate cause is **strong perception**, or its proximate cause is the **foundations of mindfulness** concerned with the body and so on (see MN 10). It should be regarded, however, as like a pillar because it is firmly founded, or as like a doorkeeper because it guards the eye-door, and so on.

Examples of Mindfulness (Sati)[17]

Recollecting, remembering or heedfulness are the various definitions of mindfulness, which is known as ‘sati’ in Pali. For example, one recalls the meritorious deeds performed in the past; one listens attentively so that one can remember the

Dhamma discourses. While meditating, one is mindful not to lose the object of meditation. Sometimes we look forward to perform meritorious deeds tomorrow or in the future. We take care to observe sila or morality and not to break any precept. We recall the good advices of our teachers. We are mindful to restrain the arising of greed, anger and ignorance. Only such forms of **mindfulness concerning wholesome matters are called sati**. Such true mindfulness, vigilance, heedfulness should prevail in one's mind. Therefore, after administering precepts to lay devotees, the venerable monk will remind them with the Pali words “Appamadena sampadetha or Accomplish your duties with heedfulness”.

In fact, the Buddha has declared: “**Mindfulness, bhikkhus, I say is always useful.**” (SN46:53)

Mere Remembrance is not Mindfulness

When one remembers his relatives, when lovers yearn for each other, when friends remember to keep appointments, when one recalls some precious moments, etc., all such memories have the nature of attachment. When one remembers to

take revenge for injuries done to one, when one keeps in mind crooked plans, when one remembers to file tax returns on time, or recalls things done in the past with remorse or sorrow, such cases reveal hatred or aversion as the root. Any form of such remembrance accompanied by **attachment or hatred, is not sati**. Sati is the wholesome mental factor that guards the mind.

Memory, Recognition, Perception (Sanna) are often mistaken for Mindfulness (Sati)

Recalling one's virtuous deeds is due to mindfulness as well as memory. Remembering past events, which are unwholesome (i.e. rooted in attachment, hate or ignorance) is not mindfulness. It is just the function of memory.

The Various Meanings of Sati

The most thorough explanations of the word 'sati' are given in **Dhammasangani 14** and the **Cula Niddesa commentary** on the Parayana Vagga (chapter on the 'Way to the Far Shore', Sn 5), attributed to the Chief Disciple Ven. Sariputta.

Here, seven meanings of ‘sati’ are elaborated as follows:

1. anussati: recollect or call to mind, as in the six recollections or mindfulness of the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, Sila, Caga and Devata.

2. patissati: remember or keep in mind, e.g., having seen form, there is mindfulness remembering.

3. saranata: remind. It means to remind one of things such as that we have seen before or words spoken before.

4. dharanata: bear in mind. Here it means ‘to retain’. It is the same ‘dhara’ used as in tipitaka-dhara (one who bears in mind the Three Baskets).

5. asammusanta: not forgetful. It is similar to appamada, which means non-negligence or heedfulness

6. sati: mindfulness, applying mind on, i.e. the mindfulness that stays specifically in the present

moment. Example: Atapi sampajano satima (he is ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful.)

7. apilapanata: not floating, i.e. to sink like a fruit in water. If it floats, it is pilanapata, not staying with object. When such mindfulness is present, it presses close to the object, sinking into it. In this way the mind will be able to “**see (anupassana)**” the true nature of object, or “see things as they really are.”

Definitions No. 1-5 harkens back to the old meaning of memory, where the primary connotation of the term ‘sati’ is the ‘remembering’ of **wholesome matters**.

Definitions No. 6-7 refers to its occurrence in the four satipatthanas or foundations of mindfulness. Here it is the ‘moment to moment awareness of present events’ in order to establish firm mindfulness for the **purification of view** (insight knowledge) leading to enlightenment.

12. What is Samma Samadhi or Right Concentration?

In the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, the Buddha defined **right concentration (samma-samadhi) as the four form jhanas**. As mentioned in pp.38-39, certain monks interpret this passage directly as it stands and hold the view that only the jhanas constitute right concentration. This might have led them to think that without jhana, there is no right concentration and so no enlightenment!

Yet even within the sutta itself, there are contradictions involving this definition. Out of the twenty-one sections taught in Mahasatipatthana Sutta, **only two are capable of developing jhana**, while the remaining sections will lead only to access and momentary concentration (see pp. 90-91). Are the latter not right concentration? So how do we explain this paradox?

Explicit and Implicit Teachings

In AN2.25, the Buddha states that the discourses he teaches can allow two kinds of interpretation:

1. **Nitattha desana** are those teachings, which are to be interpreted directly i.e., a teaching with an **explicit** or evident meaning, and

2. **Neyyattha desana** are those teachings in which the meaning is **implicit** and has to be inferred. If interpreted directly as they stand, it will contradict other suttas dealing with the same subject. Therefore they must be weighed one against another to get the correct interpretation.

Part I of this book has presented irrefutable evidence from the suttas showing that **jhana is not essential** for enlightenment right up to the stage of arahantship. This means that the concentration developed by the **dry insight method**, namely, access concentration and momentary concentration are definitely **right concentration**.

Of the three types of concentration mentioned, jhana or fixed concentration is the strongest. Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw explained that when the Buddha defined right concentration in terms of the four jhanas, he was using the **superlative definition**. So the definition of right concentration as the four form jhanas is **neyyattha desana**.

The Three Kinds of Right Concentration

In the Sala Sutta (AN47:4), the Buddha exhorted the monks to practise Satipatthana in order to come to know the nature of the body, feeling, mind and mind objects, as they really are. The relevant passage from the Sala Sutta, PTS Book of Kindred Sayings, v, 143, is given below.

“Monks, those who are novices, not long gone forth (from home), late-comers into this Dhamma and Vinaya, such monks should be roused and admonished for, and established in, the four foundations of mindfulness. What four and how? (You should say this:) “Come ye, friends, do ye abide in body, contemplating body (as transient...), ardent, **(1) composed and one-pointed, (2) calmed down**, of concentrated mind for insight into the body as it really is. In feelings,...in mind,.....in mind objects

Its Commentary explains thus:

(1) “One-pointed (ekodibhuta)” means being one-pointed by **momentary concentration**.

(2) “Calmed down (samahita), of concentrated mind (ekaggacitta)” means being calmed down, of concentrated mind by **access** and **fixed** (jhana) **concentration**.

Jhana by itself is not Right Concentration

For concentration to qualify as right concentration, (samma samadhi) it must be a constituent of Noble Eightfold Path. Otherwise it is just concentration. Many non-Buddhists and some Buddhists develop jhana for the sake of tranquility or to attain psychic powers, not for the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. Such jhanic concentration by itself cannot be considered as right concentration.

In the website at www.aimwell.org - Forums dated 17/12/05, **Ven. Pesala** wrote that: “although **Alara Kalama** and **Udaka Ramaputta** attained to the 7th and 8th formless jhanas respectively, they died before they could meet the Buddha. So they were unable to practise the Noble Eightfold Path. They had concentration, but **not right concentration**. Devadatta also developed deep concentration and psychic powers. Did he have right concentration or right view? In SN47:15, **Bahiya Daruceriya** asked the Buddha to teach him the Dhamma in a brief manner so that he could practise in a place of solitude. The Buddha taught him satipatthana. On hearing the admonition, he realized arahantship instantly.” This proves that the concentration developed by satipatthana is right concentration.

13. How Bahiya Daruciriya attained Arahantship (Udana 1:10)

The case of Bahiya Daruciriya deserves special mention because in AN1:216, the Buddha declared him to be the **chief (etadagga)** among his disciples who are quick to attain arahantship.

According to Dhammapada Commentary, a group of merchants travelling in a boat were shipwrecked at sea and only one survived by holding a plank and swimming to land at the port of **Supparaka** near Mumbai. As he had lost all his clothes, he covered himself with dried twigs and bark. Hence he was called **Bahiya Daruciriya**, which means **Bahiya of the Bark Garment**. He managed to find a broken pot and went around looking for food. People who saw him in the strange attire were impressed and gave him food and drinks, and paid reverence to him saying: “This is some kind of arahant.” Some brought clothes for him to wear but he refused, fearing that by wearing clothes, people would give less to him. Besides, because some said that he was an arahant, he began to mistakenly think he was an arahant.

According to **Udana 1:10**, because Bahiya held the wrong view that he was an arahant, a Brahma deity, who was his friend in a former life, advised him to seek the Buddha in Savatthi for help. Filled with remorse and religious urgency (**samvega**), he set out immediately from Supparaka to Savatthi, a distance of 120 yojanas (960 miles), stopping only for one night everywhere (along the way).

When he arrived at Savatthi, the Buddha was on alms round. On seeing the Lord, he approached and prostrated at the Lord's feet, and said: "Teach me Dhamma, Lord; teach me Dhamma, Sugata, so that it will be for my good and happiness for a long time." Thereupon the Buddha replied: "It is an unsuitable time, Bahiya, we have entered among the houses for almsfood." A second time Bahiya pleaded: "It is difficult to know for certain, revered sir, **how long the Lord will live** or **how long I will live**. Teach me Dhamma, Lord; teach me Dhamma, Sugata, so that it will be for my good and happiness for a long time." A second time the Buddha gave the same reply. A third time Bahiya pleaded. The Buddha knew that Bahiya had made the long journey and also that he was overwhelmed with joy at seeing him. That was

why the Buddha did not teach him the Dhamma immediately but delayed until Bahiya had calmed down sufficiently to absorb the teaching properly. Still Bahiya persisted. Thereupon the Buddha said: “In that case, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In the **seen** there will only be the seen; in the **heard** there will only be the heard; in the **sensed** there will only be the sensed; in the **cognized** there will only be the cognized.”

“When, for you, Bahiya in the seen there will only be the seen; in the heard there will only be the heard; in the sensed there will only be the sensed; in the cognized there will only be the cognized; then you, Bahiya, are ‘**not with that**’ (= ‘**na tena**’ means no connection with the sense object). When you, Bahiya, are ‘not with that’, then, you, Bahiya, are ‘**not therein**’ (= ‘**na tattha**’ means not being enmeshed in those sense objects). When you are ‘not therein’, then you will ‘**neither be here in this world, nor there in the other world.**’ This being not anywhere in both worlds means the end of suffering.” By this brief teaching, the mind of Bahiya was immediately freed from the asavas and he **became an arahant**. Then the Buddha, having instructed Bahiya in this brief manner, went away.

Not long after, a cow with a young calf attacked Bahiya and killed him. Later on, when the Buddha found that Bahiya had passed away, he instructed the monks to cremate the body and make a stupa for it. When they had completed the tasks, they reported to the Buddha and asked: “Lord, what is his destiny, what is his future birth?” The Buddha answered: “Bhikkhus, Bahiya Daruciriya was a wise man. He practiced according to Dhamma and did not trouble me by disputing about Dhamma. **Bahiya Daruciriya has attained final Nibbana.**”

The **Bahiya Sutta** in **SN47:15** simply mentions that Bahiya approached the Buddha and asked to be taught the Dhamma in a brief manner so that he could practise and attain Nibbana. The Buddha advised him to purify his virtue and straighten his view of kamma first and then develop satipatthana. It complements the earlier account in **Udana 1:10** because Bahiya held the wrong view that he was an arahant without practising the Noble Eightfold Path and wore bark garment to make people think he was a holy man. Both suttas state that Bahiya became an arahant by practicing satipatthana without any mention of the need to develop jhana!

14. Momentary Concentration in Satipatthana Vipassana Meditation

According to Ven. Henapola Gunaratana,^[18] the **pure insight practitioner** (see p.28 on **suddha-vipassaka**), does not rely on access concentration or jhana. So what kind of right concentration can he use? The solution to this is found in a type of concentration distinct from access and jhana concentrations, called **momentary concentration** (*khanika samadhi*). Despite its name, momentary concentration does **not signify a single moment of concentration** amidst a current of distracted thoughts, but a **dynamic concentration which flows from object to object** in the ever-changing flux of phenomena, retaining a constant degree of intensity and collectedness sufficient to purify the mind of the hindrances.

While **momentary concentration** arises in the jhana-attainer simultaneously with his post-jhanic attainment of insight, but for the pure insight practitioner, it develops naturally and spontaneously in the course of his insight practice without his having to fix the mind upon a single

exclusive object. Thus the pure insight practitioner does not omit concentration altogether from his training, but develops it in a different manner from the practitioner of samatha.

Without gaining access concentration or jhana, he goes directly into **contemplation on the five aggregates** and by observing them constantly from moment to moment, acquires momentary concentration as an accompaniment of his investigations. This momentary concentration fulfills the same function as the samatha access concentration by suppressing the hindrances, providing the foundation of mental clarity needed for insight to emerge.

The Three Types of Right Concentration in Satipatthana Vipassana Meditation

As stated in the Commentary to the Sala Sutta, a meditator can practise Satipatthana Vipassana meditation with any of the three kinds of concentration, namely:

- (1) jhana or fixed concentration,
- (2) access concentration, or
- (3) momentary concentration.

The **jhana-attainer** first develops jhana and after attaining jhana, **withdraws** from it to contemplate on the jhana mental factors or any other mental states or physical processes that occur in the mind and body. Alternatively, the meditation can take the form of **alternating episodes**, one following the other, involving jhana and vipassana. Both methods are given in pp.49-50, Yuganaddha Sutta.

Access concentration is that gained while one is meditating on a fixed object. It is the concentration that precedes the attainment of jhana. However, the yogi who uses access concentration to practise Satipatthana Vipassana meditation need not wait to attain jhana. Without reaching jhana he begins to practise the four foundations of mindfulness once he reaches the level of access concentration.

The **pure insight practitioner** (suddha-vipassaka) can begin to practise the four foundations of mindfulness by **first establishing virtue** and **right view** because without virtue, concentration or purification of mind cannot arise. Here the concentration is momentary concentration. When fully developed, the momentary concentration of the pure Vipassana meditator is equivalent in

strength to access concentration. Momentary concentration, when it occurs without a break, becomes so powerful that it can overcome the five hindrances, thus bringing about purification of mind, which can enable a meditator to attain all the insight knowledge (vipassana) up to the level of arahantship.

Insight is the Key to Enlightenment

Momentary concentration takes **ultimate realities** as objects, namely, the five aggregates or physical and mental phenomena that are constantly arising and dissolving. They cannot serve as a basis for samatha but serve as a basis for the **arising of insight** into the three characteristics of existence, namely: impermanence, suffering and not-self.

Therefore the jhana attainer (jhanalabhi) must utilize **momentary concentration** either by emerging from the jhana or by alternating one following the other, involving jhana and vipassana. This is because access concentration and jhana takes a fixed samatha object or concept (pannatti), which **cannot serve as a basis for the arising of insight**.

15. The Role of Virtue and Right View in Satipatthana Development

In the Satipatthana Samyutta, the Buddha exhorted his monks to commence practice of satipatthana by first establishing their **virtue and right view of kamma**. Without these wholesome states, right concentration cannot arise (see note below). This means the monks need not develop mundane jhana for the successful practice of satipatthana, the four foundations of mindfulness.

(**Note:** Right concentration is not possible without virtue and the right understanding of the law of kamma. Virtue restrains one from wrong actions, words and livelihood while the right understanding that all beings are owners of their actions (kamma), constitute right view. Thus four constituents of the Eightfold Path – right speech, right action, right livelihood and right view are established this way.)

In the **Bhikkhu Sutta (SN47:3)**, the Buddha said thus to the bhikkhu asking for contemplation instructions: “Well then, monk, you must purify

the rudiments in good states. And what are the rudiments in good states? **They are virtue that is truly pure, and straight view** (of kamma). Now, monk, when your virtue shall be truly pure and your view straight, thenceforth, monk, leaning on virtue, you can cultivate the four foundations of mindfulness in a threefold way. What four?

Herein monk, as regards your own self, in contemplating body in body (as impermanent, suffering and non-self) do you abide ardent, fully comprehending and mindful, overcoming the dejection (ill-will) in the world that arises from coveting (sensual desire). Or, as regards externals, contemplating body in body.....in contemplating feelings in feelings.....in contemplating mind in mind.....in contemplating mind-objects in mind-objects, do you abide ardent, fully comprehending and mindful, overcoming covetousness and grief that arises in the world.....**And that monk was yet another one of the arahants.**

Again in the **Bahiya Sutta (SN47:15)**, the Buddha said: “In such case, Bahiya, you must purify the rudiments in good states. What are the rudiments in good states? They are virtue that is truly pure,

and straight view. Now Bahiya, when your virtue shall be truly pure and your view straight, thenceforward, leaning on virtue, established in virtue, you can cultivate the four foundations of mindfulness... and **Bahiya became another one of the arahants.** The Buddha said likewise in the **Uttiya Sutta (SN47:16)** when addressing Ven Uttiya, who also attained arahantship by following this advice.

In **Patimokkha Samvara Sila Sutta (SN47:46)** and **Duccarita Sutta (SN47:47)**, the Buddha said that the disciple ought to **develop virtue** by avoiding evil conduct, and by cultivating good conduct, and having established in virtue, to develop the four foundations of mindfulness. In both cases, it is reported that the **monk who carried out the Buddha's instructions attained arahantship.**

Interestingly, all five suttas mentioned involved monks who approached the Master individually and **asked for brief instructions** to practise in a place of solitude in order to realize Nibbana. In the Bhikkhu Sutta, Bahiya Sutta and Uttiya Sutta, the Buddha advised the monks to purify their sila and

develop the right view of the law of kamma first before developing Satipatthana. In the Patimokkha Samvara Sila Sutta and Duccarita Sutta, the Buddha advised the monks to develop sila by restraint according to the Patimokkha and abandon wrong physical, verbal and mental conduct and develop right physical, verbal and mental conduct first before developing Satipatthana.

The Meaning of the Pali term “vineyya”

In teaching the monks to cultivate the four foundations of mindfulness, the Buddha would exhort them to be “ardent, fully comprehending, and mindful, **overcoming** covetousness and grief in the world” or in Pali: “atapi sampajano satima **vineyya** loke abhijjha domanassaṃ.”

(**Note:** Covetousness stands for sensual desire and grief for anger. As sensual desire and anger are the principal hindrances, the abandoning of hindrances is achieved by overcoming of covetousness and grief. “In the world” means this mind and body.)

According to Sayadaw Nyanuttara,^[19] the word ‘ya’ in ‘vineyya’ is used to denote a verb **prior** or **concurrent** with the main verb. Therefore in the

particular context of the pure insight practitioner, it does not denote ‘prior’ but ‘concurrent’ because the **practice of satipatthana** and the **overcoming** of covetousness and grief take place **concurrently**. In the Pāli grammatical usage the word ‘**vineyya**’ here means ‘**overcoming**’.

However, certain translators translate the word ‘**vineyya**’ as ‘**having overcome**’. The latter translation gives the impression that satipatthana can only be developed after ‘**having overcome**’ the hindrances and is **inappropriate** for the case of the pure insight practitioner, who begins the practice without prior jhana or access concentration.

This is supported by the suttas mentioned earlier, where the Buddha advised the monks to purify the very starting point of wholesome states, which is **virtue that is well purified and view that is straight**. Having done that, they should develop the four foundations of mindfulness. The Buddha **did not teach** his monks to develop the four foundations of mindfulness after ‘**having overcome**’ covetousness and grief in the world through jhana or access concentration.

Overcoming the Hindrances through Satipatthana Vipassana Meditation

The Satipatthana Sutta (MN10) enumerates twenty-one sections for contemplation as follows:.

1. Contemplation of the Body (14 sections)

- (i) Mindfulness of Breathing
- (ii) The Four Postures
- (iii) The Four Kinds of Clear Comprehension
- (iv) The Repulsiveness of the Body
- (v) The Elements (Dhatu)
- (vi-xiv) The Nine Types of Corpses

2. Contemplation of Feeling (1 section)

3. Contemplation of Consciousness (1 section)

4. Contemplation of Mind Objects (5 sections)

- (i) The Five Hindrances
- (ii) The Five Aggregates of Clinging
- (iii) The Six Internal and Six External Sense-bases
- (iv) The Seven Factors of Enlightenment
- (v) The Four Noble Truths

The sections on the Four Postures and the Four Kinds of Clear Comprehension in contemplation of the **Body**, the contemplations of **Feeling**, **Consciousness** and all five sections of **Mind Objects** lead only to momentary concentration.

That purification of mind can be attained by contemplation on these nine subjects of meditation has been definitely confirmed in the Satipatthana Samyutta.

Only two exercises, Mindfulness of Breathing and Repulsiveness of the Body are capable of producing jhana while contemplation on the Elements and Corpses can lead to access concentration. Therefore, the hindrances can be abandoned by means of contemplation of any of the twenty-one sections of the Satipatthana Sutta. The system as a whole seems **oriented towards dry insight rather than towards the jhanas.**

The Fruits of Satipatthana Development

In the conclusion of the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha declared as follows

“Bhikkhus, if anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge (arahantship) here and now; or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return (anagamin).

“Let alone seven years, if anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for six years....five years.....for four yearsfor three years.....for two years....for one year, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now; or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.

“Let alone one year, if anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for seven months....for six months.....for five months....for four months.....for three months for two months.....for a month....for half monthfor seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now; or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.

“Because of this, it was said: “This is the only way, Bhikkhus, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of Nibbana, namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.”

16. Why Do People Choose the Dry Insight Approach?

Although the Commentaries acknowledge two approaches to enlightenment, namely: the path of tranquility and insight and the path of dry insight, no reason was given why some meditators choose the first method while others choose the second. A reason given in the *Visuddhimagga-Mahatika* I 459-60, is that people choose to follow the dry insight approach because they want to escape from the suffering of samsara as soon as possible: “Because that [opportunity for receiving the teachings of the Buddha] is hard to obtain, the person who is repeatedly stirred with religious urgency, not desiring even to obtain absorption, practices meditation after having stood at access concentration [thinking], “I shall quickly cross over the suffering of samsara.”[20]

In fact, the reason why the Buddha taught the dry insight method to Bahiya may be found in **Udana 1:10** (pp.77-80). The second time Bahiya pleaded with the Buddha, he said: “It is difficult to know for certain, revered sir, **how long the Lord will**

live or how long I will live. Teach me Dhamma, Lord; teach me Dhamma, Sugata, so that it will be for my good and happiness for a long time.”

This confirms the reason given by Commentary, that people choose the dry insight approach because they want to escape from the suffering of samsara as quickly as possible, is valid.

In fact, those monks who approached the Buddha individually (see pp.85-88) and asked for brief instructions to practise in a place of solitude in order to realize Nibbana, were probably stirred by religious urgency to escape from the suffering of samara as quickly as possible. The compassionate Buddha understood their aspirations, temperament and the maturity of their faculties. So he taught them to purify their virtue first and in some cases, also to develop the right view of kamma. Then leaning on virtue, they should develop the four foundations of mindfulness. All the individual monks mentioned in these five suttas attained arahantship by practicing satipatthana without the need to develop any mundane jhana.

17. Conclusions

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha described two types of practice leading to Nibbana, namely: the path of tranquility and insight (samatha-vipassana) and the path of dry insight (vipassana).

The view that the attainment of at least the first level of jhana is necessary for all four stages of enlightenment denies the path of dry insight. It contradicts the teachings found in several suttas discussed in Chapter 1, which show that jhana is not necessary in order to attain enlightenment. **This view has no merit and should be rejected.**

In Chapter 6, a comparison of three extant versions of the **Susima Sutta** reveals that the doctrine of the **dry insight arahant** originated from a very early period of Indian Buddhism, probably taught in the Buddha's time and cannot be taken to be an invention by later Theravada commentators. In 2007, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi published an article in Journal of the Pali text Society titled "The Susima-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant", in which he argued that the idea of an arahant devoid of jhana may be traceable in the Pali Canon itself!

In Chapter 7, we discussed the discourse entitled **Yuganaddha Sutta**, which shows that the path to arahantship without the necessity of developing mundane jhana is taught in the Nikayas contrary to claims otherwise.

In Chapter 9, we note that the expression “he does not dwell having contacted with the body, the eight emancipations” conforms to the Commentary definition of the dry insight arahant in the **Puggala Pannitti**. So the interpretation of the White lotus arahant as a dry insight arahant is valid. The fact that the highest level a dry insight trainee (sekha) can normally attain is **sakadagamin**, may be the reason why people question his ability to attain arahantship. Since the dry insight practice cannot lead to attainment of **anagamin**, which is easier to attain than arahantship, how can this dry insight practice ever lead to the attainment of arahantship?

A passage in the Vimuttimagga suggests that for people endowed with **superior wisdom parami** and strenuous effort (e.g. Bahiya Daruciriya), their **understanding strength** can help to overcome the hindrances encountered at the higher stages of enlightenment and enable them to realize anagami

magga-phala and continue on to attain arahantship. This might help the skeptics to understand how arahantship is attained by the dry insight approach.

Regarding the definition of **right concentration** in Mahasatipatthana Sutta, Chapter 12 shows that it is **neyyatha desana**, teachings whose meaning is **implicit** and has to be inferred by comparing with other suttas on the same subject to get the correct meaning. If interpreted directly as it stands, it will cause **contradictions** among the suttas. The fact that enlightenment is attained by the dry insight method proves that besides mundane jhana, access and momentary concentration also constitute **right concentration** in Satipatthana meditation.

Right concentration is not possible without virtue and the right understanding of the law of kamma. Virtue restrains one from wrong action, speech and livelihood while right understanding that all beings are owners of their actions (kamma), constitute right view. Thus, four constituents of the Eightfold Path – right speech, right action, right livelihood and right view are established, and the meditator can begin to develop satipatthana.

The reason why certain people choose the dry insight approach is because of their **urgency to escape from the suffering of samsara** as quickly as possible. To those who came to him to ask for the Dhamma to be taught in a brief manner (pp.85-88), the Buddha advised them to establish their virtue and right view first. Thereafter they should develop satipatthana. The suttas record that all the individual monks attained arahantship. There is no mention of the need to develop mundane jhana.

This book has presented **ample evidence** from the suttas to support the Pali Commentary view that arahantship can be attained without the necessity of developing any mundane jhana. The most famous example of the dry insight arahant must surely be **Bahiya Daruciriya**, whom the Buddha declared to be the chief (etadagga) among his disciples who are quick to attain arahantship. Clearly, if Bahiya had to spend some time in order to develop mundane jhana first before practising satipatthana, it is not likely that he would be able to achieve this **etadagga distinction!**

Some of the individuals whom we identified in the Nikayas as dry insight arahants, provide **concrete**

evidence to the view that the dry insight approach can lead to arahantship. Besides the famous case of **Bahiya Daruciriya**, another well-known monk who attained arahantship in his old age by the dry insight approach was **Ven. Malunkyaputta**.

The **Malunkyaputta Sutta** (SN 35:95) records how Venerable Malunkyaputta, in his old age, approaches the Buddha for a “**teaching in brief**” (satipatthana) for his solitary retreat. The Buddha reproaches him for doing it so late, yet praises him as an example to other monks. The Commentaries say that in his youth, Malunkyaputta was negligent and loved possessions, thus neglecting the detailed teachings. Now in his old age, he decided to dwell in the forest and meditate. After hearing a brief discourse on the **six sense-bases** (Contemplation of Mind Objects, Section iii, p.90) from the Buddha, he went into solitary retreat and attained arahantship. The brief teaching that the Buddha taught to Malunkyaputta is the same “**Bahiya teaching**”, so called because it is the famous cognitive training in satipatthana that the Buddha taught to **Bahiya.Daruciriya** (Chapter 13, pp.77-80).

On a practical note, it is heartening to draw from the suttas that jhana is definitely not necessary for attaining the stages of sotapanna and sakadagamin. From the prospective of lay disciples who do not have the time to spend months or even years to develop mundane jhana in a place of solitude, the dry insight approach offers a great opportunity for them to develop **satipatthana** and realize magga-phala as quickly as possible within this life. Even if one does not attain enlightenment, one can still have the opportunity to realize the various stages of **insight knowledge**, which is **hard to obtain**, except during the period of a **Buddha Sasana**. **Dhammapada Verse 113** summarizes as follows: “Though one should live a hundred years without comprehending how all things rise and pass away, yet better, indeed, is a single day’s life of one who comprehends how all things rise and pass away.”

Although this book deals with a difficult topic and some points I raised may not be relevant to the issue, I am convinced that its publication is timely. This is because evidence from Chinese Samyukta Agama reveals that the idea of dry insight arahants probably originated during the Buddha’s time. Yet it is only now that certain skeptics appear to accept

the idea of the dry insight arahant. To the writer, what is important is that the reader can now have a clearer understanding of the dry insight approach to begin the practice of Satipatthana Vipassana meditation, which the Buddha has declared to be the practice of the **Noble Eightfold Path**.

18. Appendix

Is the definition of jhana in Visuddhimagga different from that in the Pali Canon?

To support his view that the attainment of at least the first level of jhana is necessary for all four stages of enlightenment, Ven. Bhikkhu Thanissaro has claimed “that part of the controversy over this question may be explained by the fact that the **Commentaries define jhana in terms that bear little resemblance to the canonical description.**” He further adds that the description given in the **Visuddhimagga** about the arising of a **nimitta** or countersign applies to the method called ‘kasina’. According to him, in breath meditation, no nimitta occurs in practice. With the other methods, the stronger one’s focus, the more vivid the object and the closer it is to producing a countersign; but with

the breath, the stronger one's focus, the more subtle the breath and the harder it is to detect.”

Is what he says about the breath meditation taught in Visuddhimagga being different from that taught by the Buddha valid?

Regarding the concentration countersign (samadhi nimitta), the Buddha has mentioned about it in the **Nimitta Sutta** (AN 3:102). In his book “Light of Wisdom”, **Ven. Pa Auk Tawya Sayadaw**[21] states: “a nimitta will arise for a meditator who practices **anapanasati** (breath meditation) by concentrating on the in-breath and out-breath that is touching the nostril or upper lip. One should **meditate only on the in-breath and out-breath** that is touching and **not on the touching**. Only by concentrating on the in-breath and out-breath is samatha meditation and a nimitta will arise.

Due to **present effort in concentration and past parami**, a nimitta will arise. It can appear in different ways to different meditators because it is produced by perception (sanna). It can look like a white thread, a long white light, a star, a cloud or white cotton wool. One needs to try to make the mind **calm and concentrate on the nimitta only**.

If he tries so, the nimitta will change from white stage to the very brilliant stage. Such an image is called **Patibhaga nimitta**. If the mind is calm and concentrated on the nimitta for one to two hours, most meditators can easily discern the jhana factors if they reflect on them at that time.”

Ven. Chanmyay Sayadaw^[22] clarifies that in the Visuddhimagga, breath meditation is mentioned as **samatha** meditation while in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta it is mentioned as **vipassana** meditation. How can we distinguish between the two aspects? If we are mindful of the **absolute reality** of breathing that will be **vipassana**. If we are mindful of the **concept** regarding breathing, it will be **samatha** meditation.

So in Visuddhimagga, it mentions the method of concentrating on the touching sensation whenever one breathes in and breathes out. When one concentrates the mind on the coming-in and going-out of the breath, then it is **samatha meditation** because one has to concentrate on the coming in and going out, **not on the wind or air**. When it is coming in, one notes ‘in’; when it is going out, one notes ‘out.’ ‘In, out, in, out.’ One’s mind is not on

the breathing air but on the ‘coming-in’ and ‘going-out’, which is just a **concept** regarding breathing. Since concept is the object of meditation, a **countersign** will arise as explained. However, if one focuses the mind on the point where the **breath touches** whenever it comes in or goes out, it touches the nostrils. When one observes this **touching sensation and is mindful of it, then it is (ultimate) reality**. That touching point is composed of the **four primary material elements**: earth (hard or soft); water (liquidity or cohesion); heat (hot or cold); wind (movement or vibration). These four elements are there whenever one focuses one’s mind on the touching sensation. The object is absolute reality and **no countersign** will arise. This is **vipassana meditation**.

From the foregoing explanations, we can surmise that failure to obtain the countersign in breath meditation can be due to these reasons:

- (1) Practising the breath meditation as a **vipassana exercise** and so no countersign can arise, or
- (2) According to Pa Auk Sayadaw, **poor effort** in concentration and/or **lack of past parami** may be the reason why no countersign appeared when practicing breath meditation as a samatha exercise.

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