

# SAMĀDHI IN BUDDHISM

Phra Bramgunaborn  
(Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto)

Lecture delivered  
at Wat Dhammaram, Chicago, U.S.A.  
on May 6, 1996

Translated by  
**Janet Chan**

Edited by  
**Susan Kirchoff**

# Contents

|                                                                                  |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Samādhi in Buddhism .....                                                        | 1  |
| I. The Correct Way of Practicing Meditation .....                                | 3  |
| 1. Samādhi for Mental Energy .....                                               | 6  |
| 2. Samādhi for Happiness and Tranquillity .....                                  | 12 |
| 3. Samādhi for Clear Mind and Cultivation of Wisdom .....                        | 16 |
| Attendant Benefits .....                                                         | 19 |
| II. Techniques to Prevent and Overcome<br>the Potential Misuses of Samādhi ..... | 25 |
| 1. Maintaining the Five Controlling Faculties in Equilibrium .....               | 25 |
| 2. Attuning the Practice to Conform to the Threefold Training .....              | 28 |
| Contentment .....                                                                | 29 |
| The Foundation of Mindfulness .....                                              | 33 |
| Conclusion .....                                                                 | 35 |
| Appendix .....                                                                   | 38 |

## SAMĀDHI IN BUDDHISM\*

As I have learned from different sources, people in the West have shown an increasing interest in Buddhism and particularly in *samādhi*. For this reason I feel it necessary for us to have a clear comprehension of the subject and would like to talk about in a general way today.

Let us start by taking a look at the vocabulary related to the subject. The Pali terms have been loosely translated as follows:

*bhāvanā*: meditation or, more faithfully, development

*samādhi*: concentration

*kammaṭṭhāna*: subjects of meditation; meditation exercises

We frequently hear the word *meditation* being used for *samādhi*. But it does not really convey the actual meaning. People use it out of habit and for lack of understanding. I have talked with an American professor who taught Buddhism in America. He said that there was no practice of *samādhi* in the West in the same sense as in Buddhism. The closest kind of such a practice would probably be the one of the Quakers. When the Quakers come to a meeting, they sit quietly and calmly, and if someone experiences some thoughts, he will stand up and tell the people at the meeting what his thoughts were. Still, this cannot be compared to our practice in Buddhism because the two are far different.

---

\* Based on a lecture given at Wat Dhammaram, Chicago, Illinois, on May 5, 1996. This slightly abridged version of the text was translated into English by Janet Chan, and the translation was edited by Susan Kirchoff.

When the scholars who studied Buddhist scriptures through English translations and those of other English-speaking Buddhist communities decided to use a word more precise than *meditation*, they came up with the word *concentration*. When we use the English word *concentration*, we have a clearer conception. In whatever we do, like when we study, our mind has to concentrate. When we say concentrate, we mean the mind has to focus on one point. If we do not concentrate, it will be difficult to understand the subject. The meaning of the word concentration is closer to that of the Pali term *samādhi*.

*Bhāvanā* means development in reference to the mind. When translated literally, it has the meaning of growth, cultivation. When our mind does not have a wholesome quality, we develop it; this is called *bhāvanā*. The development of anything of a wholesome nature is called *bhāvanā*, like developing faith, loving-kindness, *samādhi*, wisdom, understanding, and so forth. The word *meditation* is loosely used to stand for *bhāvanā*. But it has to be understood that these are simply words that we use to explain.

When we talk about *bhāvanā* or development of the aspects of the mind and wisdom, it is sometimes also called *kammaṭṭhāna*. There are two main kinds of meditation:

1. Tranquillity meditation (*samatha-bhāvanā*) and
2. Insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*).

Tranquillity meditation is aimed at developing inner peace, which calms the mind in order to attain *samādhi*. Insight meditation cultivates wisdom, which will enable us to see the true nature of life and the world, to see that all compounded things are impermanent—they arise, proceed, and dissolve. They cannot remain static in their original form; they have to follow the metamorphic process and evolve according to cause and condition. The knowing of this truth is called *insight*.

# I. The Correct Way of Practicing Meditation

Now, let us take a closer look at *samādhi*, which means—when interpreted in a simple way—the state of a steadfast mind. We remember well *sammā-samādhi* in the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*). *Sammā-samādhi* means “Right Concentration.” The mind is steadfast when it is tranquil, smooth, and strong, when it is focused on one point. When the mind is centered on one object, it stays with the object—stable, at ease, not distracted, not agitated; it is firmly grounded. When it contemplates, it stays with the object and no other thoughts can arise. If we put it in a general term, it is when the mind is at the place where we want it to be. When put in a technical term, it is when the mind is one-pointed. That is to say when the mind is anchored on one point, it stays with the object and is not distracted or lost. When the mind can stay with the object of its choice, it is called *samādhi*.

If we want to really understand *samādhi* well, I suggest that we do not spend too much time on the meaning, but rather, we will place emphasis on the benefits. When we look at the benefits, we will see the meaning more clearly as well.

There are three important, beneficial characteristics of a concentrated mind. We shall look at these major benefits as outlined in Buddhism:

1. A concentrated mind is a mind that has power; it has a lot of energy.

2. A concentrated mind is lucid—like clear water. As it is calm, it enables us to see things with clarity. This second point is conducive to wisdom.

3. The third benefit follows as a result of the first and second benefits. When the mind is calm with nothing to disturb it, to confuse it, the mind is at ease, stable, not agitated. It is in a

peaceful state. Such a mind is happy. Therefore, people with a concentrated mind are calm and so they are happy. This is also a desirable quality.

These are the three main characteristics of a concentrated mind. We can see here the purposes of practicing *samādhi*. Let us examine more closely each beneficial characteristic to determine which one has the benefits that the Buddha wants us to pursue.

**1. Mental Energy.** The following is an analogy by the Buddha:

*"Like a river springing from the mountain in a long stream, its swift current drifts away anything that it can carry along. If we close up the openings on both sides of the river, the current in the middle will not spread out, wobble, or go off its course. It will flow speedily and will carry along with it whatever it can sweep away ..."*<sup>\*\*</sup>

This saying of the Buddha is aimed at showing the benefits of using mental energy to fortify the strength of wisdom. But generally people like to use mental energy to perform miracles only. When meant for this use, mental energy can be developed to be very strong. Some people in the West find interest in parapsychology. They perform experiments in psychokinesis to show that a concentrated mind can influence the motion of a remote object. It can also make the person look at one point far away and have clairvoyance, or hear remote sounds and have clairaudience. Some people are interested in this kind of benefit that is derived from *samādhi*.

**2. Happiness and Tranquillity.** The Buddha exhorted the monks (*bhikkhus*):

*"O Bhikkhus, the development of samādhi, when well-cultivated and regularly practiced, will conduce to a happy life here and now. What does this mean? O Bhikkhus, when free from desires, free from all*

---

\* A.III.64

*unwholesome states, one enters the First Absorption ..., the Second Absorption ..., the Third Absorption ..., and the Fourth Absorption ...*<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

This benefit is also sought after by many people especially in the present-day societies, where emotional problems prevail. In a society which has its structure based on competition, struggles for benefits cause stress to people. People's minds become tense and in time suffering arises. It is true that the more a society is materially developed, the more people in that society suffer. When people suffer, they want to find release and they find the way of *samādhi* from Buddhism, Hinduism, and yoga in the East. They turn to *samādhi* as a means to happiness and tranquillity, a solution to the troubled mind.

### **3. Clear mind and Development of wisdom.**

Here is another analogy by the Buddha:

*"O Bhikkhus, like a water reservoir that is clear, not muddy, a person with good eye sight standing on the shore will see snails, mollusks, stones, and pebbles, even fish that are swimming or lying still in the reservoir. Why is this so? It is because the water is not muddy. Likewise for the Bhikkhus, with a mind that is not muddy, they will know what is beneficial for themselves, beneficial for other people, and beneficial for both parties. They will be able to realize a superior intuitive attainment beyond a normal person's capability. This is nānādassana (vision through wisdom) which can lead a person to become a noble being ...*<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

The foremost benefit of *samādhi* is a clear mind. When the mind is lucid, it sees what it wants to see with clarity. This is related to wisdom—a mental phenomenon. *Samādhi* is a quality of the mind. We practice *samādhi* to bring serenity to the mind. When the mind is serene, it is clear. When it is clear, it is conducive to wisdom. Wisdom can be put to full use and this will enable us to see things with clarity. Many people can

---

\* A.II.44

\*\* A.I.9

remember well what the Buddha said: *“Samāhito yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti.”*<sup>\*\*</sup> This means that he who has a steadfast mind will see things clearly as they are. When *samādhi* is developed, insight—the ability to see the truth—will follow. *Samādhi* is a foundation, an aid, a supporting factor, a tool to develop and increase wisdom. This benefit is sometimes overlooked, and precisely this is the most important goal, the benefit that we aim to obtain in Buddhism.

Now that we have reached some understanding, let us investigate the subject further to see the underlying purposes of the practice.

## 1. Samādhi for Mental Energy

Many people are interested in the mental energy aspect of *samādhi*, in psychic power and marvels. If *samādhi* were good for these only, Buddhism would not have been born. In India, they had a long history of experience in this; the practice of yoga existed before Buddhism. The Buddha went to different yoga masters before his Enlightenment; he practiced *samādhi* and attained the highest realm of *jhāna* (absorption).

There are eight levels of *jhāna*: four *jhānas* of the Fine-Material Sphere and four *jhānas* of the Immaterial Sphere. The Buddha’s first master, *Ājāra Kālāma*, attained the seventh level of *jhāna*—*Ākiñcaññāyatana* (Sphere of Nothingness). The Buddha went to study with him and also attained this level. But the Buddha was not satisfied, he left and went to study with Master *Uddaka Rāmaputta*. This master attained one level higher: the eighth level of *jhāna*—*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana* (Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception). The Buddha attained this level as well. His master informed him that he had completed the knowledge that he could obtain from him and invited him to stay and teach

---

\* A.V.313



the followers. The Buddha considered the proposal but concluded that this was not his goal. He left again, this time to search on his own.

Many yogis, ascetics, hermits before the Buddha era had psychic power and attained *jhānas*. But the Buddha was not satisfied. If our goal is to have psychic power and to attain *jhāna* only, we do not need Buddhism, because other people have achieved them already. This is a point to which we have to pay attention. Please note that after the Buddha attained Enlightenment, he discouraged the use of *samādhi* for the purpose of attaining psychic power and for the marvels of performing miracles.

The Buddha outlined the three **Marvels** (*pāṭihāriya*) in connection with *samādhi* as follows:

1. **Marvel of psychic power** (*Iddhi-pāṭihāriya*): the ability to use different kinds of psychic power: to fly, to walk in the air or on the water, to go beneath the earth, etc ...

2. **Marvel of mind-reading** (*Ādesanā-pāṭihāriya*): the ability to read the minds of others: what they think, how they think, what they intend to do, or how the state of their mind is.

3. **Marvel of teaching** (*Anusāsani-pāṭihāriya*): the teaching of the way to cultivate wisdom, to know the truth by oneself.

Only the third Marvel is praised by the Buddha; the first and second Marvels are discouraged. Why so? One important reason is that with the first and second Marvels, when someone is able to do these things, the ability belongs to him only. Other people will simply be interested to view them as miracles and come to rely on him. When people rely on others, they are dependent and are not free. In the case of the third Marvel, the Buddha taught people to cultivate wisdom. It is a marvel in the sense that when they achieved wisdom, they saw the truth for themselves. When they saw the truth for themselves, they knew how to do by themselves whatever they were taught to do and thus became independent of the Buddha. In the same way that

he himself came to see the truth, the Buddha taught others to cultivate wisdom. When wisdom was developed, people were able to see the truth, just as the Buddha saw it. They became free and did not have to rely on the Buddha any more. But with the first and second Marvels, they had to count on the Buddha and hoped to depend on him continuously. The Buddha wanted them to be independent. Therefore, he discouraged the attainment of the first and second Marvels, which are good in some particular cases only. We have to be careful when they are used in the long term, they can lead to carelessness. When we see people with supernatural power, we respect them, we are drawn to them and tend to depend on them. We wait for them to give us what we wish to obtain. As a result, we do not know how to face problems, how to solve problems, how to move on in life. We are bound to stay in place without making any progress. The Buddha did not want this to happen.

We can see that the Buddha exceeded everyone else in psychic power. Even though he only praised *anusāsani-pāṭihāriya*, he was also supreme in *iddhi-pāṭihāriya* and *Ādesanā-pāṭihāriya*. It should be noted that during all of the 45 years that the Buddha taught Dhamma (the laws of nature), he never used his psychic power for anyone to gain anything. This is an important observation which is often ignored. Why is it that the Buddha never used his psychic power for anyone to obtain what he wanted during those 45 years? It is because the Buddha did not want anyone to depend on him. If people kept relying on him, they would become careless; they would not think of standing on their own feet, not learn to cope with problems on their own. If we do not face problems ourselves, we will not learn. So, if we are interested in psychic power, we have to be careful not to go astray from the doctrines of Buddhism. Any interest that we have in it should not be a hindrance for us to stand on our own feet. We should discipline and cultivate ourselves and work

diligently to gain the right results. This is one of the important doctrines of Buddhism.

Buddhism transcends the practices of ascetics and hermits. In the ancient times—as a matter of fact, even today—ascetics and yogis in India like to compete with each other in the matter of psychic power. But the Buddha did not like this. He said that if people were concerned solely with psychic power, they would not make progress. Under what circumstances then would the Buddha use his psychic power? He would utilize psychic power when he chose to have people who were proud of their personal psychic power accept his superiority and be ready to listen to his teaching. In the Buddhās time, people considered psychic power as very important; whoever did not have it would not be considered an Arahant (one who has attained *nibbāna*). They believed that an Arahant must have psychic power. But the Buddha did not think of it as a criterion of being an Arahant. The Buddha was living in a society which had this belief, and as a supreme master—one who proclaimed a great religion—he had to have this kind of power in order for others to believe in him in the first place. The Buddha used his psychic power as a tool to proclaim Buddhism. At that time, when people with powers met together, they challenged each other’s ability. If you did not have the powers, people would not believe in you.

We look at the example of the Buddha’s meeting with matted-haired ascetics (*jaṭila*). These ascetics possessed super psychic power and were very respected by the public who held that Arahants should have psychic power. For this reason, the Buddha went to see them first. The Buddha reasoned that if he did not prove he was more advanced, people would not listen to him. They would say no one could be compared to their chief ascetic. When the Buddha went to see the chief ascetic, he was put to the test for several nights, but each night he prevailed. In the end, the chief ascetic realized that the Buddha was more highly developed. When he realized this and surrendered, he

was willing to listen to the Buddha. Before that time he would not listen and boasted that he was the number one, others were no match for him. When the chief ascetic was willing to listen, the Buddha started to teach him with *anusāsani-pāṭihāriya*. He realized the truth and accepted the Buddha's views on psychic power and the Buddha stopped using it himself. We see how the Buddha used psychic power to conquer the unbelievers. Once they surrendered, he stopped using it. He never used it as a means to give special favors to anyone.

Another critical point that we have to bear in mind besides the ones mentioned earlier in using *samādhi* as a way to gain psychic power is that when someone has this kind of power, other people will come to rely on him. He will not be free. More importantly, this kind of power does not eliminate mental defilements (greed, hatred, and delusion), nor can it put an end to suffering. There is no warranty of purity and freedom for people who use *samādhi* merely for this purpose. The best one can achieve is a calm mind with the mental defilements also calm temporarily under the power of *samādhi*, which is called *vikkhambhana-vimutti* (temporary deliverance by suppression). But when there is something to stir up the mind, the defilements can reassert.

There is a story of a senior monk who was a meditation master after the time of Buddha. Being an experienced master, he attained a high level of *samādhi*. As he had been practicing meditation for a long time, his mind was calm, his defilements were suppressed and calmed; so there was no chance for them to surface. He thought he had attained the Arahantship. A master who is not an Arahant can teach disciples to attain the Arahantship, because the ability to succeed depends on one's own development; the master only teaches them the principles and techniques.

This senior monk had large numbers of disciples who came to study with him; they learned the techniques and

practiced by themselves and some of them were able to realize Arahantship. One of the disciples knew that his master had not attained the goal and wanted to warn him. But he did not want to tell him directly because being the master, he might not like it. If he became angry or resisted, it could be dangerous to his practice. This disciple found a way by creating a vision of an elephant. One day while the master was sitting, taking his ease, an elephant was made seen to be charging in. Taken aback and caught off guard, the master got up at once and was ready to leap away. His Arahant disciple seized the tail of his robe and gave it a sudden pull. The master was thus able to regain his mindfulness.

The reason why the master was able to regain his awareness was that he had been practicing for a considerable time, and it was just that his mindfulness was not sharp at that very moment. When his disciple pulled his robe abruptly, his mindfulness came back. And with this, he realized that he had not achieved Arahantship. Arahants no longer experience any feeling of fright because they have no more defilements that will give rise to fear. Fear befalls people who still have greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Those who have craving (*taṇhā*) have fear. When there are no defilements, there is no fear. The master knew this; he knew he still had defilements and turned to his disciples for help. He continued his practice and eventually attained Arahantship.

What I want to point out here is that the possession of supernatural power, the attainment of *jhāna* or *samādhi* in the sense of mental energy does not help to make one an Arahant, nor does it help to end defilements and suffering. It only helps to calm the mind and the defilements will then settle down temporarily. This is also good and useful in one way. For some people who have attained a certain level of *samādhi* but still have defilements, there is a chance that they will become imbued with a sense of their own importance. If this is the case,

the situation can become worse. Because when we do not have authority or power, even though we have defilements, they are not powerful. But once we know that we have some kind of authority and power, we may feel presumptuously arrogant. The same goes with people who have psychic power. If they still have defilements and feel proud of themselves, they can do worse things.

An example can be seen in the case of the monk Devadatta. Devadatta attained a high level of *abhiññā* (superknowledge) though still at a worldly level. He became conscious of his power and came to think of gain, honor, and so forth. He made use of his psychic power to get what he wanted and what he got in the end was his own ruin.

As we can see from the above, the use of *samādhi* for the sole purpose of producing psychic power and marvels can become a hindrance in our pursuit of the highest goal. Hence, we have to exercise caution to prevent us from falling into carelessness.

## **2. Samādhi for Happiness and Tranquillity**

Before talking about the last point on *samādhi*—clear mind, I would like to go over the use of *samādhi* for happiness and tranquillity. The use of *samādhi* as a means for happiness and tranquillity is also very beneficial—not only is this a good way for relaxation, but also a way to prevent and remedy emotional problems such as stress, restlessness, confusion, disturbance, anxiety, loneliness, forlornness, and so forth. The mind will thus be at ease and happy.

However, to aim for merely these purposes in *samādhi* is not enough according to the principles of Buddhism. This is still not the goal of Buddhism. This is only using *samādhi* to address mental problems and deal with suffering up to a certain level. Moreover, such a usage may become a detriment and has to be applied with wisdom. If we are not careful and keep using *samādhi*

for these purposes only, it may be turned into a tranquilizer which may cause heedlessness leading to loss and may become a hindrance to attaining the goal of Buddhism.

There are only certain beings who can fully use *samādhī* for happiness and calmness with safety, without running into the hazard of its becoming a tranquilizer, they are the Arahants. This is because Arahants have already reached the goal of Buddhism; they do not have to go further on the path. For them, heedlessness does not exist. Thus, they can use *samādhī* as a means for rest between work; this is called *diṭṭhadhamma-sukhavihāra* (an immediate happy state of mind). People, in general, can do likewise, but it must really be kept within limits as with the Arahants and not overdone to such an extent that it becomes a tranquilizer.

A tranquilizer is something that soothes and makes people comfortable. We may use it even as medicine that calms the mind when we have emotional problems. Like when we are excited, depressed, uptight, or cannot sleep, we take medicine to help us go to sleep. The medicine does help, but it also has its limits; it has its negative side effects. We can use it to momentarily relieve our stress, to overcome the conditions. But if we count on it to save us from our predicaments on a long term, it is really not a good idea.

There are many kinds of tranquilizers available. The more people strive for happiness from material consumption, the more problems they will encounter. Since material comfort can provide happiness to a certain extent only, sometimes boredom follows after happiness is gained. There is also another kind of people who are always on the run for happiness through material acquisitions but are never satisfied. Life that is full of competition brings about a tense mind. People strive in every way to get what they want, and at the same time, they fear losing the fortune that they have accumulated. The expectation to gain happiness through material possessions entices the mind in

different ways, to the extent that some people come to identify happiness with abundance in material goods only. Material comfort can produce happiness as well as boredom. When we identify our hope for happiness with material goods only, our life will have meaning in material consumption only. When we are tired of material goods, we become tired of life. When we are disappointed with material goods, we become disappointed with life. When there is no meaning in material goods, there is no meaning in life.

This has become a predominant issue in developed societies that are affluent in material goods and that stress material wealth. A society that is developed and rich in material goods does not necessarily have a basis for happiness. It is true that such a society has a high rate of suicide. People in a poor society rarely commit suicide. In America, the rate of suicide that is increasing is suicide among the youth. According to the statistics of USA Today, during the last 30 years, the rate of suicide among the American youth increased by 300%. These are statistics produced by the American National Institute of Mental Health. How is this possible for young people between 15-19 years old? People are stunned when the youth commit suicide in a society that is prosperous with everything that could be desired. Normally young people are at a prime age of joy; they have the strength to look for happiness. Why then do they want to resort to death and miss out on happiness?

A society that is rich and progressive does not provide a warranty in the matter of securing happiness. In such a society, happiness tends to be identified with material wealth. As this trend continues, people who get bored with material goods become bored with life as well. This has become a serious threat to society and civilization in the present time. People in the past did not so much identify happiness with material goods because they did not have that much to consume. Their happiness came from other sources. Material comfort is not the only source of



happiness. But now with people opting for economic prosperity or material progress, the society is turned into a consumer-oriented society. People seek only to consume; happiness comes only from consumption. And so the meaning of life is being attached to material consumption. This is the tendency in the developed societies now and the situation is getting more complicated. Such an unhealthy environment poses threats and hazards to a civilization that has followed the wrong path.

I would like to go back to where we were talking about the use of *samādhi* as a tranquilizer. In societies where emotional problems prevail, people look for happiness in material comfort but meet with failure, or they get what they want but it does not bring them the happiness expected. What do they do? Life no longer has any meaning for them. One way is to commit suicide out of disappointment; another way is to put their hope on tranquilizers. As a consequence, a choice of exit for people who have not found happiness is *tranquilizer*, starting with drugs. Hence, the use of drugs is widespread in these societies.

People who may not take drugs sometimes engage in habits such as drinking, gambling, or things that are more delicate like music, various forms of entertainment, or sports. The tranquilizer that is more refined for the mind is *samādhi*. We do not need to depend on addictive substances or even on music; when we have problems and troubles, we go to *samādhi* to relieve us from worries and anxieties. *Samādhi* helps to achieve happiness and peacefulness.

But if we keep using *samādhi* in this way without proper attention, it can also be turned into a tranquilizer. What does a tranquilizer do? It relieves us from our stress, suffering and troubles; we are happy to be temporarily free from our frustration and misery. But in reality the actual problems are not solved; the defilements deep underneath are still there. The real issues in family and in society are not dealt with. If whenever

we are unhappy or when we suffer, we simply turn to *samādhi* for some peaceful moments, the problems will not be solved and there may even be new ones. Therefore, it is wrong to be interested in *samādhi* merely as a tranquilizer in view of the following:

1. The possibility of falling into carelessness. When people are soothed and comfortable, they can escape temporarily from their problems and suffering. But the real problems are not solved. To avoid problems is to become negligent and attached to comfort. When people are comfortable, they do not want to do anything. Things that need to be done are not done; issues that need to be addressed are not taken care of. They have no diligence and perseverance to do what should be done; they stop and become careless.

2. An obstacle to the practice of the Threefold Training System. What is more important is that in Buddhism, all doctrines of the Dhamma are covered under the Threefold Training (*ti-sikkhā*): morality (*sīla*), mental qualities (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). This training calls for discipline and practice to cultivate oneself in order to enable life to proceed to its goal which is the complete extinction of suffering. So long as the goal is not reached, we cannot stop. *Samādhi* being part of the process of the Threefold Training has to be a means for us to advance to a higher state, not to soothe us and leave us basking in comfort.

### **3. Samādhi for Clear Mind and Cultivation of Wisdom**

The Threefold Training system gathers all important Dhammas under one roof. These Dhammas work together to proceed to the ultimate goal—the liberation from suffering. All Dhammas in the system act as factors and connect to each other in such a way that they follow the process of factor and effect. Thus, in Buddhism, every practice of Dhamma is part of the process of the Threefold Training. Each Dhamma serves as a

factor to condition, induce, assist, or support the next one. If we practice Dhamma and do not progress, that means something is wrong. This is an important rule that we use for evaluation.

No matter which Dhammas you choose, be they loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, or concentration, they are all in the Threefold Training. When they are in the Threefold Training, they are in the process; that is to say, they are progressing toward the same goal. Every factor passes its effects on to the next one in the system in one way or another. If we practice any one Dhamma and we stop without going on to the next one or are left floating in the air without a destination, we are on the wrong path.

If when we practice *samādhi*, it soothes us, leaves us impaired, we are lost in the calmness, stay there and we are not led to the next step in the process—this is wrong practice. If we practice correctly, we will move forward to accomplish the desired result in the Threefold Training.

*Samādhi* is a factor for what? As a general rule, *samādhi* is a factor for wisdom. *Samādhi* makes the mind serene, clear, and powerful. The characteristic of a serene mind or a clear, powerful mind is that it is ready for work. The Buddha calls a mind that has *samādhi kammaniyarāṃ*. It is this characteristic of the mind that the Buddha wants us to have. As soon as the mind enters *samādhi*, it attains the state of *kammaniyarāṃ*. *Kammaniyarāṃ* means “ready or appropriate for work.” We have to make use of it. If when our mind attains *samādhi*, we feel comfortable and become attached to the feeling, that means we have missed the whole point. What the Buddha wants is the state of mind that is *kammaniyarāṃ* and to make use of it, not for you to just sit back and relax. When you have *samādhi*, if you just sit back and enjoy it, that means you are not doing the right thing. What work should such a mind do then? The Threefold Training consists of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Concentration (*samādhi*) gives support to wisdom, therefore, it is to be used to cultivate

wisdom. This is the second benefit that I mentioned earlier. The most significant characteristic of the mind is here—a clear mind. Without anything to muddle or disturb it, it can be fully used to cultivate wisdom.

When we work on something, the more delicate and profound the subject is, the more solid a mind we need. When the task is not so detailed, we do not need wisdom that much. In whatever we do, even when we listen to the teacher, if we do not have *samādhi* at all, we will not understand. Wisdom will not be developed. Therefore, wisdom can only work with the support of a concentrated mind. How concentrated a mind we need depends on the task at hand.

We have come to the conclusion that in Buddhism, the benefit of *samādhi* that we want to attain is the one of making the mind ready for work. The important task of such a mind is to cultivate wisdom—wisdom to know, to understand the truth of everything, to the point of understanding the truth of nature. And what is this truth of nature? It is to know things as they are. It is this ability *to know the truth of all things* that we want. If we do not know up to this point, we still have defilements. Therefore, *samādhi* has to be connected with wisdom.

So far, what I would like to point out is that, even on the subject of *samādhi*, we have to be careful. If we do not understand the principles in Buddhism clearly, we can go off the track. For as we have already seen from above, each of the three kinds of benefits to be acquired from *samādhi* has its own use. Let us now summarize what has been discussed so far, namely, the three principal qualities or benefits of *samādhi*:

1. *Samādhi* makes the mind steadfast and energy is produced as a result. This mental energy can be used to produce miracles and marvels.

2. *Samādhi* makes the mind clear, enables it to see things with clarity. This is favorable to wisdom.

3. *Samādhi* makes the mind tranquil and brings forth happiness.

In today's society, mental problems caused by the menaces of materialism are prevalent. To find an alternative, people resort to *samādhi* for happiness. This benefit, however, is not the goal in Buddhism.

Please remember the important principle in Buddhism which states that, if the practice of Dhamma leads to carelessness, it is wrong. If the practice of Dhamma does not lead us to the next factor in the process of the Threefold Training until we realize the true nature of reality, it is also wrong. We have to be careful and keep this crucial point constantly in mind.

### **Attendant Benefits**

Let us now look at some of the attendant benefits of *samādhi* which may be beneficial to the world in the present day. These are, however, only side benefits and cannot be considered as the main purposes of Buddhism.

A concentrated mind is a mind that is stable, firmly centered. It is different from our ordinary mind which is usually busy, incoherent. The latter thinks about this, thinks about that, does not stay on one point. Some scriptures say it is like a monkey. Monkeys do not like to stay in one place; they are restless, constantly running and swinging from one branch to another. Our mind also is like that—it goes from one thought to another. It has so many things to think about. Often it picks up the wrong things, such as things in the past that upset and irritate us; it makes them repeat themselves over and over again or builds up stories around them to make us angry. Sometimes it worries about things in the future that have not yet happened. A mind like this is not at ease. When the mind is not firmly

established, mental suffering follows. The mind works together with the body. We have to always remember this point.

Our life is made up of body and mind. Mind and body are interrelated; they work together, one affects the other. If the mind is not firmly established, the body will be affected. The working of the body will not be smooth. For example, when in a state of anger, how is the body? The heart beats fast. The angrier a person is, the louder his heart pounds, like a person climbing up a mountain. How about when fear arises? When fear arises, the face turns pale; sometimes breathing stops, the blood circulation does not flow normally. What follows is that the body gets weak and physical ailments occur. If this happens often, the mind is tense all the time. When the mind is tense, so is the body. The state of mind and body is at a critical point now. Mind and body are at their meeting point when both are tense. When the mind is strained, so is the body. And it follows that the functioning of the body becomes abnormal; health deteriorates and sicknesses occur.

From this we can see an important attendant benefit. When we practice *samādhi*, our mind works properly; it is at its proper place, smooth and stable. The mind is in a balanced state and lucid. The functioning of the body, like breathing, is also well-maintained at the normal state. If the mind goes deeper into *samādhi*, it will become more delicate and very calm. When it becomes very calm, it needs less energy.

The working of the mind depends on the brain. The working of the brain needs blood; blood needs oxygen, and oxygen comes from breathing. When the mind is deep in *samādhi*, the heart is calm, light, and not tired; its need for energy is lessened. The burning of energy in the body is reduced. The need for oxygen becomes less and the breathing becomes more delicate. The rule states that when someone attains the fourth *jhāna* realm, he does not breathe. That means when measured by the standard of an ordinary person, breathing does not take place.

When we put our hand near the nose, we do not feel the breathing because it is very delicate. Very little oxygen is needed. With this small amount of oxygen that it gets, the body can go on for a long time. A person deep in *samādhi* has a very peaceful mind, smooth breathing and needs little energy. The burning of energy is kept at a minimum and this has an impact on the body—it keeps the body healthy with smooth blood circulation. This is favorable to longevity. There are various types of *samādhi*, such as the cultivation of the Four Holy Abidings (*brahmavihāra*): loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Meditating on these virtues can refresh and temper the mind and give the person a delightful, joyous, and ageless appearance.

As we have said, body and mind are interrelated. Now let us take a look at the other side of the situation. When a person gets angry, physical problems will follow immediately. Because the body needs more energy, breathing becomes heavier. The heart beats faster and the lungs are hard at work; more air is needed, like the person climbing up a mountain. If we tend to get angry easily, our mind and body will deteriorate fast.

When we understand the underlying relationship between *samādhi* and health, we can use *samādhi* as an aid in healing. In America, they have started to use *samādhi* to treat diseases, even those that are considered incurable. At the University of Massachusetts, they opened up a clinic which provides treatments using *samādhi* combined with physical exercises. The clinic was accepted by the University and became a part of the hospital. It is managed by experts who are experienced in *samādhi*. This is another example of the attendant benefits of *samādhi*.

In fact, when we look at *samādhi* in an overall picture, we see that all these benefits are really just one single thing. We see that when the mind reaches the state of *samādhi*, it is

balanced, centered; nothing can come to bother it. For people whose mind is not disturbed by anything, isn't it a wonderful thing? When there is nothing to bother it, the mind is at a peaceful state; the function of the body also is well-tuned in harmony with the mind. Everything goes smoothly; the body is in a healthy condition, not tense, with nothing to block its proper functioning. The blood circulation is smooth. As a result, health is well-maintained. Hence, *samādhi* can be used to boost physical health and to treat diseases.

Even in our daily life, *samādhi* can be used in a simple way. Whenever we feel uptight, angry, frightened, or we lose our self-confidence, if we have mindfulness and remember, we take a few deep in-breaths and long out-breaths; our breathing will then become well-regulated, balanced and we will feel better immediately. The tension in our body will be alleviated. A simple action of breathing, which is within our reach anytime, can come in handy to redress our negative emotions.

Breathing is another example of the close relationship between body and mind. Like the body of the person climbing up a mountain, when the body gets tired, the breathing becomes labored. But even when one is not climbing up a mountain, not using any physical energy, if one gets angry, one breathes like a mountain climber. This shows that body and mind are closely related.

Now we look at the reverse action—using the body to regulate the mind. When our mind is not in a favorable state, our breathing becomes abnormal. We regulate our breathing to a steady rhythm and mindfulness will follow suit. When we breathe this way, we have to have mindfulness. When mindfulness is present—mindfulness is a mental quality—body and mind work together to improve the state of the mind, and anger is dissolved. Free of hindrances, the mind of wisdom starts to see things more distinctly and is able to investigate the matter.



Mindfulness is a virtue, a quality of the mind. Body and mind work together to regulate the state of the mind and to alleviate the negative emotions. Wisdom is not clouded and is given a chance to develop, and we are thus able to see things clearly. If an angry person lets go of his emotion without realizing it, does not try to control it, he is bound to go the wrong way. The Buddha said that a person with anger is a person without wisdom. Wisdom is lost. An angry person does not care about right or wrong, good or bad. A person in anger can even kill his own mother. This is one of the outcomes of anger.

With this understanding in mind, when anger arises, we can use a simple technique like breathing to help us. At that moment, we do not even know whether we have stopped breathing or whether we are breathing heavily. So we regulate our breathing by taking steady deep inhalations and long exhalations. Our mood will be relieved, our mind calm, mindfulness sharp, and wisdom will follow in due course. In this way, we are able to think clearly.

*Samādhi* is not confined simply to the period of time when we are actually sitting in meditation; we can practice *samādhi* anytime, anywhere. We do not have to wait until we are angry or tense to make use of it. For instance, when we are not occupied in any activities, our mind will become restless. So we look at our breath—breathing in and out evenly, with full awareness. Let our mind stay with our breath; this alone is already helpful.

As we can see, regular practice of *samādhi* is essential. The benefits derived from *samādhi* come at different levels as cited above. And the ultimate benefit according to the Buddhist principle is its role as a factor to support wisdom leading to the achievement of the final goal in the Threefold Training. When *samādhi* is developed, the mind is appropriate for work. Its work is to cultivate wisdom—wisdom to investigate, to realize the

Three Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) of impermanence (*aniccatā*), suffering (*dukkhatā*), and non-self (*anattatā*). The ability to know the true nature of all things with a liberated mind will lead us to the ultimate goal of Buddhism—this is the real purpose that we pursue.

Now that *samādhi* has become a popular subject, we have to be aware of what people have in mind when they talk about *samādhi*; which value or benefit they look for, and whether it is right according to the Buddhist principle. As a reminder, people in the West tend to look at *samādhi* as a means to cope with stress and suffering caused by emotional problems. If one is not careful, *samādhi* can be turned into a tranquilizer as discussed above. Once used in this way, it can bring harm to life and to society. *Samādhi* can be misused.

## II. Techniques to Prevent and Overcome the Potential Misuses of Samādhi

It is stated in the scriptures that *samādhi* can produce both positive and negative effects. What negative effects can *samādhi* produce? The scriptures say that *samādhi* can lead to sloth (*kosajja*). Once *samādhi* is attained, the mind becomes calm. Calmness can bring idleness; idleness can bring laziness—having no desire to do anything. It is usual that when one is happy and comfortable, one does not want to do anything. Such being the case, care has to be exercised in the practice—it has to be in equilibrium. The scriptures teach us to keep our five controlling faculties in balance.

### 1. Maintaining the Five Controlling Faculties in Equilibrium

The Five Controlling Faculties (*indriya*) are important Dhamma constituents in the practice. They are: faith (*saddhā*), effort (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

a. **Faith and Wisdom.** Faith is belief. Our heart is oriented to the object of belief, easily influenced. This is a quality that builds up energy. People who have faith have confidence, and confidence brings strength. If we do not have faith, we will not have the strength to come to the temple. When we have faith and the stronger our faith is, the more strength we will have. Even if the temple is far away, 100 miles or 500 miles away, when we have faith, we will go. Faith brings energy. But if we lose faith, we will not go even if the temple is very close.

When faith is lost, energy is nowhere to be found. Faith brings strength and is an essential quality.

The Buddha warns, however, that faith needs support, and this support comes from wisdom. One who has wisdom examines the cause and effect, correctness, appropriateness, whether the matter is true or false, right or wrong. If faith stands alone by itself, it is prone to deception and errors in judgment, easily influenced by emotion. Without wisdom we may believe whatever people tell us, no matter whether what they say is right or wrong. Faith may give us the strength to do anything, even something evil. This we can see from some religions that stress only faith. With the mighty strength that comes with faith, people can even kill fellow beings of different religions or engage in religious wars. With faith being so powerful, we are reminded to keep it under the control of wisdom to be in proper balance.

On the other hand, in the case of wisdom without faith, we want to know everything but nothing earnestly in particular. We may have a scattered superficial knowledge. We know this, we know that, but we do not know anything in depth to get access to truth or to be of real use. This is not good either. When we combine wisdom and faith, we are on the right path. Faith leads us directly to our object of belief and sustains it. Energy is then generated and our goal becomes clear. Wisdom and faith support each other. When we have faith in one matter, our faculty of wisdom will investigate it meticulously. For instance, when we have faith in one particular Dhamma doctrine, we use wisdom to study it sincerely. Faith supports wisdom by guiding it in a steady direction and sustaining it with perseverance. These two partners then work together toward the goal. Once the goal is reached—the truth is known—wisdom prevails. Faith does not need to support wisdom any more. But during our practice, we still need faith. It would be wrong to say that we do not need it when we have not reached our goal.

We can see that faith plays the following roles:

1. to point out directions to the faculty of wisdom
2. to anchor this wisdom to the object
3. to provide (the search for) wisdom with strength

The faculty of wisdom plays the discriminating role of thoroughly investigating what faith brings to it, shedding light on the matters until they become clear.

There are, nevertheless, cases where faith lacks wisdom or blocks wisdom, such as faith without inquiry. In some religions, you can only have faith, you cannot ask questions; it is wrong to ask. The Buddha does not want something like that. He says that such faith obstructs wisdom; it is blind faith. Blind faith is an obstacle to the development of wisdom and can even cause conflicts. Hence, faith has the duty to support wisdom. It helps to bring about wisdom. When wisdom is fully developed, faith's job is finished. One uses wisdom to penetrate into the truth of the matter, sees and knows it by oneself with clarity. One does not have to depend on faith anymore.

b. **Effort and Samādhi.** Effort is diligence. *Samādhi* is the state of mind that is solid and tranquil. These two support each other to maintain balance.

*Viriya* (effort) comes from *vira* which means “bravery.” This faculty has the tendency to go forward as in bravery, to conquer and challenge whatever opposes it. It is like wanting to win in all the battles, having the determination to succeed. This characteristic of effort—being to go forward continuously—can lead us to anxiety or lack in stability and we can miss our goal. The Buddha, therefore, recommends *samādhi* to support effort. *Samādhi* brings calmness and stability. In this way, there is balance between this pair.

On the other hand, *samādhi* without effort slows things down, makes people sit back and relax to enjoy the pleasure. The result may be that they fall into laziness. The Buddha warns that too deep a *samādhi* can cause harm in that it may bring

sloth. As such, it needs effort to drive it. With the presence of effort, sloth has no chance to surface; there will be progress. But if there is only effort and no *samādhi*, the movement will be fidgety with anxiety and impatience. With effort pushing forward and *samādhi* giving effort a steady hand, these two partners can move together reassuringly.

From the above, we can see that these two teams are mutually supportive:

1. **Faith** and **Wisdom** have to join hands together to stay in balance.

2. **Effort** and **Samādhi** have to be teamed together to support each other to be in equilibrium.

And all this goes on under the watchful eye of **mindfulness** which will give out signals when our practice is not in balance. It makes us aware that this one is loose, we have to tighten it; that one is in excess, cut it down.

Mindfulness comes as the third point and stands by itself. However, it is active in all cases. In our daily life, this rule also applies. When our Five Controlling Faculties are working in equilibrium, our practice of Dhamma and our work will advance surely and smoothly to success.

## 2. Attuning the Practice to Conform to the Threefold Training

What has just been presented is a further explanation of the role of *samādhi*. We can see that *samādhi* is an important constituent in Buddhism and is of enormous value. Its position in Buddhism is clear—an integral part in the process of the Threefold Training. This training is a practice in progression—all factors in the process are interrelated; the attainment of each one is a necessary factor to the next. The process has its ultimate goal; until the goal is reached, one does not stop.

The practitioner should know the relationship between the factors, the chain of succession, and how the previous factor

supports the next one. If this is not comprehended, it means one does not understand the Dhamma. This is significant because, as we have said, this is how the Threefold Training system works.

Each Dhamma factor is a part in the progression of the practice; it has to pass its effects to the next factor in line in order to reach the goal. Regrettably, this critical point is very often neglected. When we look at the purpose of the Dhamma, we tend to treat each factor as an isolated part and have it standing alone. When the factors are thus viewed, we fail to see the interrelationship between them. Then even the meaning of that particular factor will not be clear to us.

## Contentment

Contentment (*santosa* or *santuṭṭhi*) is an important factor which supports the development of *samādhi*. In fact, it does not support merely *samādhi* but also all other practices of Dhamma, including our routine performance of duties.

Why do we practice contentment? A contented person finds happiness in the few things that he has; he is satisfied with whatever he has. On the other hand, a discontented person does not know happiness; he is not happy with what he already has. That means his happiness is based on what he has yet to possess. Therefore, he is never happy.

Happiness, however, is not the purpose of contentment. If we take happiness as the goal of contentment, we are again heading in the wrong direction as is possible in *samādhi*. *Samādhi* that does not move forward in the process of the Threefold Training leaves one indulging in happiness. In the same way, contentment which is satisfaction with what one has also leaves one indulging in happiness. So we enjoy the happiness and we do not have to do anything else since we are content. This is unacceptable. The practice is to keep progressing in the Threefold Training.

What is the role of contentment in the Threefold Training? We start by looking at the way it affects the next factor in the process. Happiness is simply an attendant benefit of contentment, a gift that comes in and of itself. When we are content we are happy. Contentment means satisfaction and it makes our mind calm, not agitated, not rigid. At this point, if we know how to use it, contentment can become a support in return. When we can become happy easily with the little that we have, our heart will be at peace and not tormented. We are ready to orient our heart into the process of our practice.

What effect does contentment have in the process of practice? Let us first look at someone who has no contentment. He who is not content seeks for happiness in what is not yet in his possession, so he is always on the search. He is therefore never happy. This will bring about the following consequences:

1. Happiness through material goods is still not yet within his reach.

2. He is always running after it:

- a. Time spent on the search for material consumption
- b. Physical energy wasted in the search
- c. Mental energy lost in thinking of ways to acquire material to enjoy

As such, the discontented person wastes time, physical and mental energies in trying to find happiness through material possessions. When he does not have enough time to spare, he takes it from his work hours. Sometimes he has to pay for his acquisitions. If he does not have enough money, he may be forced to get funds through dishonorable channels. With the money that he gets improperly, he looks for enjoyment. This surely is not a good thing to do. More importantly, when he is at work, his mind is not with his work; he is thinking of things to acquire. The fact that he has not found the happiness he seeks may affect his interest in his work. His work becomes some kind of suffering and torture to him. *Samādhi* is not developed. In the



end, not only has he failed to find happiness, but at the same time, he has to work against his wishes, fighting with suffering and torture. Time, physical and mental energies are wasted in the pursuit of pleasures and material comfort. Everything is lost along the way for the man who is not content. Moreover, he may be lured into acting dishonorably.

On the other hand, a contented person knows he already has his material needs met. He does not have to waste time, physical and mental energies seeking happiness through material acquisitions. And precisely, these three precious items—time, physical and mental energies—are what we want to conserve. We want to use them for good causes. Lay people can use them in a meaningful way in their work and duty. Monks can apply them in the study, in the practice, and in the search for ways to perpetuate the Dhamma. Practitioners can devote themselves wholeheartedly to the cause of the Dhamma. We can carry out our work thoroughly and at the same time, we find happiness in doing our work and in performing our duty because we love our work. We like what we are doing. Our heart is set on wholesome deeds and we are satisfied in doing beneficial actions. We gain happiness through our work and are content with our material possessions. After all this, we still have time, physical and mental energies left to devote ourselves to wholesome causes. Everything turns out to be for the good.

One point that we need to remember is that contentment has the danger of not having a goal and thus may become a handicap—if we choose to rest here, it can sidetrack us in our practice. This happens when feeling content and happy, we may not want to do anything, we may only want to enjoy an easy life. Contentment as such leads to laziness, something that is not productive. Contentment as meant here has to pass along its effects in the process of the Threefold Training. As we have seen, when we are content in the right way, we are ready to perform good deeds because we have more time and energy at

our disposal; and we use these to do beneficial works. As a result, we progress in our practice of the Threefold Training.

Here again we see how the main Dhamma components relate to one another. When the Buddha teaches contentment, he does not make it stand by itself. He shows us how the practice of contentment should be carried on. As is stated in the Fourfold Traditional Practice of the Noble Ones (*ariyavaṁsa*) for the monks:

1. Bhikkhus have contentment as regards robes
2. Bhikkhus have contentment as regards alms-food
3. Bhikkhus have contentment as regards dwellings
4. Bhikkhus delight in eliminating unwholesome qualities and in developing wholesome qualities

The first three attitudes support the last one. When the monks are content, they have more time and energy to practice the fourth point—such as the development of *samādhi* and insight, or to devote themselves to the study of scriptures for the perpetuation of the Dhamma.

When the Buddha does not team contentment with the development of wholesome qualities (*kusaladhamma*) and the elimination of unwholesome qualities (*akusaladhamma*), he teams it with effort. In any group of the Dhamma doctrines, wherever there is contentment, there is effort. This is a general rule because the two support each other. A person who is content is ready to practice diligently. The Buddha goes one step further—*do not feel readily content with your good achievements*. Our task is not finished; there is still more to do. This is a significant point that has to be kept in mind.

We should remember that the Buddha does not teach contentment only. Some people understand this in a narrow and obscure way. We have to be more analytic (*vibhajjavāda*). The Buddha teaches us to be content with what we possess, but not to be content in doing good. Because the Buddha was not content with the good already accomplished, he was able to attain Enlightenment. The Buddha himself said that he had

realized the benefits of two qualities which he recommended to us:

1. not being content with good achievements
2. being unfaltering in effort

The Buddha explained to us what he meant by non-contentment and continuous effort: if the Buddha had been content, he would not have become enlightened. As cited above, the Buddha went to study with Master *Ājāra Kālāma* and attained the seventh level of *jhāna*; and with Master *Uddaka Rāmaputta*, the eighth level of *jhāna*. If the Buddha had been content and satisfied with what he had achieved so far, he would have achieved simply *samādhi* and not the Enlightenment. But the Buddha was not content, not satisfied with merely good achievements. He was determined not to stop until he reached the goal. For this reason, he left the two masters to pursue his own spiritual search which led him to wisdom, to the realization of bodhi (the supreme knowledge) which is the ultimate goal—the Enlightenment.

To sum up, when we find contentment in our material possessions, we have more time and energies to devote ourselves to the cause of humanity. And when we do not rest, content with our progress, we can practice the Dhamma with unfaltering effort.

## **The Foundation of Mindfulness**

The next discussion will be on the Foundation of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) which follows the same principle. When the correct level of *samādhi* is attained, it becomes a support to wisdom. In Buddhism, the goal of the Dhamma is to be realized in the process of the Threefold Training. *Samādhi* (*samatha*) serves as a factor in making use of the faculty of wisdom; thereupon, we proceed further to the development of insight (*vipassanā*).

Insight development has a significant practice technique called *the Foundation of Mindfulness*. We use the faculty of mindfulness to catch up with the six external sense-fields (form,

sound, smell, taste, touch, and mind-objects). When we have mindfulness, we are aware of whatever arises in our mind and pass this along to our faculty of wisdom for examination. Mindfulness and wisdom work together as a team. In this context, wisdom denotes clear comprehension (*sampajañña*). An example of this occurs when we compare our eyes to wisdom. In order to see an object, it has to be in front of our eyes. If the object is not present, we cannot see it. Likewise, our faculty of wisdom examines what is present in our mind. For the object to be present in our mind, it has to be held fast—this is a function of mindfulness. Our mindfulness makes us aware of the object to be examined through the eyes of wisdom.

In the practice of insight development, mindfulness is a foremost element—being the one that holds the object in awareness for wisdom to examine. Mindfulness, as it were, captures everything that is happening at the present moment, without fail, and presents the data to the wisdom faculty to study. A quality of wisdom is to “know it as it is”. Mindfulness is aware of everything that happens to the body—the movements of the body: standing, sitting, sleeping, eating, drinking, and so forth. Wisdom perceives the happenings as they truly are. Whatever goes on in the mind, be it sensations of happiness or of sadness, is likewise a subject for mindfulness and wisdom to observe. At the very moment a thought appears in our mind, we are aware of it through mindfulness; our faculty of wisdom is free to examine it. With wisdom, one perceives the nature of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. This happens when we follow the evolution of phenomena closely as they unfold in front of us. We see the way things arise, sustain, and vanish. Such is the nature of impermanence. When we are able to look at the happenings without impediments, we will see them as they really are, in their real nature. That is to say that we see how all compounded things are changing, conditioned, and soulless.

## Conclusion

What we have discussed today is simply a fundamental overview of *samādhi* intended to familiarize us with the underlying purposes of *samādhi* in Buddhism, its benefits and values, both the attendant benefits and the real goal that we want to pursue.

Before the Buddha era, *samādhi* had been in use for a long time already by yogis, hermits, and ascetics to gain psychic power, to perform miracles and marvels. Even so, they still had defilements because *samādhi* does not dispel defilements. *Samādhi* helps the mind to be momentarily free from defilements and gets it ready for work. The mind has to be put to work to eliminate defilements. It is not *samādhi* that eliminates defilements.

Some people use *samādhi* as tranquilizer, a means to become comfortable and happy. The ascetics and yogis before the Buddha time isolated themselves from society to dwell alone in the forests. They savored the pleasure acquired from *samādhi* and enjoyed *jhāna* games. However, they were not concerned with the real life, with the rest of the society. This way is not really beneficial either.

The Buddha did not accept these practices and went his own way. Buddhism is very different from the sects of ascetics, yogis, or hermits. We have to make a clear distinction. Sometimes we mix up Buddhism with these other practices. This is a delicate issue that has to be well understood for us to make the distinction. Even the Buddhist monks are not ascetics; their rules of conduct are very different. The Buddha set strict rules for the monks not to become ascetics. The Buddha had tried all ascetic practices and concluded they were not the right ways; he therefore left the ascetics to practice on his own. If we are not careful, we may fall into the way of ascetics.

We have seen the benefits that *samādhi* gives, the correct method of practicing *samādhi* according to the principles of

Buddhism, as well as the attendant benefits that *samādhi* gives. If we have a right understanding of the attendant benefits, we can make use of them. It does not mean that we cannot use *samādhi* as tranquilizer or for mental energy. We have to know the limits so that we will not become careless and stop halfway before we reach the goal. We can use *samādhi* to address our immediate problems on a temporary basis, like the medicine that cures diseases, but not be addicted to it. We can use it also for mental energy. At least our mind is not scattered at that moment. More importantly, we should not forget to move on to take advantage of the real benefit in the long run. The real benefit according to the principles of Buddhism is to end defilements and to know the truth of nature—that all compounded things are impermanent, subject to suffering, and are not-self. With this knowledge, we come to perceive this world and our life as they truly are until we have the right attitude toward them and do not cling to them. Our mind then becomes serene and smooth; no more defilements or happenings in the world can disturb it, for we are able to see the truth through the wisdom we have developed. This is what we want to achieve and which can be realized when we practice according to the integrated progressive process of the Threefold Training.

In brief, there are two main kinds of meditation: tranquillity meditation and insight meditation. We can join these two practices together by bringing forth the result obtained from the tranquillity meditation to support the cultivation of insight. And with the development of insight, we will come to realize the true goal.

We have discussed *samādhi* enough to provide a guideline. It is now about time to end this talk. Congratulations for coming to the Dhamma talk today, not only for listening to the talk but also for supporting Buddhism. This will benefit not only yourselves but also society as a whole. You have done what the Buddha advises us to do: practice for your own benefit

and for the benefit of others. As you practice in the right way, may you have satisfaction and joy in the virtues you develop in generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*)—the three areas of practice for lay people. When you have joy and satisfaction in your heart, the state of your mind is conducive to *samādhi*.

Lastly, I would like to mention that the Buddha recommends the practitioners to always evoke the following five states of mind:

1. joyfulness (*pāmojja*)
2. rapture (*pīti*)
3. tranquillity (*passaddhi*)
4. bliss (*sukha*)
5. concentration (*samādhi*)

We need to become “one” with these five states of mind and to practice them continuously. This will bring us happiness in life and enable us to progress in our Dhamma practice. Let *samādhi* lead us to wisdom and, with diligence, we will reach the supreme goal of Buddhism.

## Appendix

(Extract from another Dhamma talk)

In general, *samādhi* is practiced in the two main kinds of meditation: Tranquillity Meditation and Insight Meditation. It is commonly believed that we have to go to a temple or to forests to practice. In fact, we should not delay. We should practice meditation in our daily life as the state of our mind is like the movement of our body, it gets used to what we do regularly as a habit. Like the way we walk, the way we do things, when we always do them in a certain manner, they become a habit. Similarly, our mind has the tendency to respond to the way we usually organize our thoughts. If we let our mind wander around, dig up negative emotions, and pick up unskillful matters to build stories around, we will become uptight and filled with anxiety. If this happens often, our mind will become out of control easily; no matter where we are, we will be prone to get tense immediately. This kind of mind lacks in *samādhi* and is not happy.

When we understand this issue, we will want to practice. We can use anything for our mind to contemplate on—something that unites body and mind. It can be as simple as the breath. When the breath is smooth, it can regulate the body and improve the working of the mind as well. The mind that has mindfulness as a supervisor will have stress loosened. These simple techniques can be very effective. If we do not want to use the breath, there are other objects we can use; anything that is positive, we can present to the mind.

As Buddhists, we revere the Triple Gem (*raṭanattaya*). We can take the *Buddha* (the Enlightened One), the *Dhamma* (the teaching of the Buddha), and the *Saṅgha* (the Order) as objects of contemplation. We recollect their virtues. Other examples can be generosity, merit, virtuous acts, and the various points of the



teaching. We can also investigate and reflect on the Dhamma. This will help calm our mind. As a result, wisdom will be born and stress dissolved.

In the beginning, let mindfulness come first. When the mind is invaded by unfavorable state leading to stress, we recollect ourselves. Mindfulness is remembering that this is not the right direction, we have to stop and change course. We should pick up something good instead. We shift to a favorable state of mind such as by contemplating on the breath. The state of mind changes and is thus regulated. We can concentrate on our in-breath and out-breath and at the same time, mentally saying something like

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| (in-breath) <b>Bud</b> | (out-breath) <b>dho</b> |
| (in-breath) <b>in</b>  | (out-breath) <b>out</b> |

There are a variety of meditation techniques that we can use. In terms of happiness, they are means to create happiness. It should be noted that there are two kinds of happiness: happiness with formation and happiness beyond formation. For ordinary people like us, if we practice *samatha* we will achieve happiness with formation—happiness that is still dependent on the formation of mental qualities. But if we go beyond this step to *vipassanā*, we will realize happiness beyond formation—an experience of freedom, independent of volitional activities. Nonetheless, both kinds can loosen stress.