

A Comparison of Hindu and Buddhist Techniques of Attaining Samādhi

Eddie Crangle

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TECHNIQUES OF ATTAINING SAMĀDHI

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Yogaś cittavṛtti-nirodyah

'Yoga is the cessation of mind- movement.'

Thus wrote Patañjali at the beginning of his Yoga-sūtra, relating to his technique of attaining final emancipation (moksa). Both Yogic and Buddhist schools of thought share fundamental presuppositions about yoga. Included, among others, are: a.) the equation; existence equals suffering, and b.) the doctrine of the possibility of obtaining transcendental knowledge (jñāna, prajñā). In addition, both schools stress a form of self-discipline for obtaining release. The growing preoccupation of contemporary western studies in religion and the therapies etc., with the nature of consciousness, the essential characteristics of human suffering, and the freedom from such, leads invariably to the examination and theoretical consideration of the individual's efforts to master consciousness.

Our editors, in the Introduction, understand such expertise to encompass '... a greater capacity to deploy various forms of attention in a host of ways towards any particular objects, thoughts, and feelings which make up the whole of our sensory environments.' Yogic practices, however, aim also to reduce those aspects of the consciousness flow which are viewed as hindrances to attaining the '... ideal of perceptual and cognitive freedom', i.e., the final emancipation of highest samādhi. It is my intention, in this essay, to compare Hindu and Buddhist techniques of achieving samādhi and thus to contribute, hopefully, a little to the clarification of some consciousness studies in Eastern traditions of philosophy, psychology, and religion.

In particular, I will examine the method relating to the samādhi of Patañjali's Yoga-sūtra and to that of

the Buddhist P. Rūpa and Arūpa Jhānas\* In these cases, technique refers to the gradual removal of hindrances, to the refinement of consciousness, until the psychic flux is arrested and the experience of complete fusion of the subject and object of meditation ensues: then, '... the true nature of the object shines forth not distracted by the mind of the perceiver ...'<sup>2</sup>

In Patañjali's system of yoga there are eight steps (aṣṭāṅga) or stages: two, namely moral restraints (yama) and disciplines of the body and psyche (niyama), are considered to be necessary preliminaries to the remainder: three are necessary to mind control by governing the disciplining of body (āsana), vital force (prāṇayāma) and senses (pratyāhāra) and the final three stages are the process by which the experience of unification occurs. These are concentration (dhāraṇā), meditation (dhyāna) and ecstasy (samādhi), described as stasis and conjunction.<sup>3</sup> Three steps are known as 'saṁyama'. The eighth stage, enstasis, is the final phase of the unification process.

Dhāraṇā is '... holding the mind in a motionless state...' by fixing it to some mental or external object by repeated effort. Eventually, an even current of thought (dhyāna), undisturbed by other thoughts, is directed towards the object, thus allowing the yogin '... to intercept the flux of ordinary mental activity,' (citta-vṛtti)<sup>4</sup> which gradually diminishes as the absorption deepens. The result is samādhi.

When samādhi is obtained with the aid of an object of concentration, this is called 'samprajñāta-samādhi'; the lower form of samādhi which is 'the accurate knowing of distinguishables'.<sup>5</sup> In samprajñāti-samādhi are eight ontological levels of the contemplated object and degrees of fusion attained. Each level has its own mode of function or logic. It may be that the states are not discrete but are differences discerned on a continuum. These are: a. vitarka, b. vicāra, c. ānanda and d. asmitā, each of which have two forms: 'sa' forms and 'nir' forms. 'Sa' forms are 'propertied' when the object of meditation is associated with deliberation and reflection: the mind names the object (śabda), gives it significance (artha) and '... properties by comparison with some other thing (smṛti) on the basis of remembered past experience.'<sup>6</sup> They have

\* Sanskrit has been used throughout except in cases where the Pāli seemed appropriate. These are marked with the letter 'P.'

a sense of 'I'.

'Nir' forms are those without deliberation and reflection: the mind does not interfere and so there is no 'I' sense.

Both types are 'seeded' (sabija); that is, they are '... in relation with a 'substratum' (support) and produce tendencies that are like 'seeds' for the future functions of consciousness.'<sup>7</sup>

Sa-vitarka samādhi, then, is enstasis when the mind has a gross (sthūla) aspect of the object of concentration as its base, while being accompanied by deliberation and reflection. It is a direct perception of the object that extends into the past and future. Nir-vitarka samādhi is the moment when the object is empty of name and meaning: when the mind ceases linking verbal and logical associations with it and the object is '... grasped directly... as a concrete and irreducible datum.'<sup>8</sup>

Sa-vicāra samādhi is the level of knowing the subtle (sūkṣma) or inner aspect of the object of concentration accompanied with deliberation and reflection. However, in nir-vicāra samādhi, when absorption deepens and supramental reflection ceases '... thought then becomes one with these infinitesimal nucleuses of energy which constitute the true foundation of the physical universe.'<sup>9</sup>

At this same point of enstasis are found two other forms of contemplation; Ānanda-samādhi, associated with supreme joy - unspeakable bliss. This becomes the object of concentration, and all perception, including that of the subtle aspect, is abandoned. This leads to asmita samādhi: the stage at which the self becomes the sole object of reflection and '... the yogi reaches his true self and understands 'I am (asmi) other than my body'.<sup>10</sup>

This level of knowing is also called 'dharmamegha-samādhi': the 'cloud of dharma' in which the yogin '... feels that he is saturated (with virtues) and... has a feeling of 'Enough' in respect to all knowledge and all consciousness...' and so precipitates the subject orientated enstasis - asamprajñāta-samādhi.<sup>11</sup>

Asamprajñāta samādhi, procured by supreme detachment or abandonment (para-vairāgya) of all worldly ob-

jects, still remains seeded with subconscious impressions (samskāras) but these are burnt up with repeated practise<sup>12</sup> until the yogin attains the nirbija (without seed) state of Kaivalya - '... the enstasis of total emptiness, without sensory content or intellectual structure.. in which the yogin is actually all Being.'<sup>13</sup> Emancipation!

The samādhi of Buddhism is considered to be similar to that of the Yoga-sūtra<sup>14</sup> and the meditation-al techniques bear some similarity, as I hope to show. In this instance, I will examine, mainly, the different Buddhist Raptures (P.jhāna) in relation to samprajñata and asamprajñata samādhi.

The Noble Eight-fold Path of the Buddha, like Patañjali's astāṅga-yoga, is concerned also with moral, bodily, and mental discipline. The last three members of the Path are directly related to the unification process. These are: a. 'right exertion' (P.sammā-vāyāma), which, by controlling the emotive reactions to external activity, wards off unwholesome mental activity; b. 'right mindfulness' (P.sammā-sati), which is the cultivation of awareness in order to keep the mental contents under constant control and to produce relaxation of body and mind. This is done by choosing a certain body function, such as breathing, and following it with the mind, and c. the development of 'right unification' (P.sammā-samādhi) which comprises of eight meditative phases named P. 'jhāna'.

These phases of consciousness are progressively refined until all false ideas of life, matter and the hindrance of thought are dispersed. Like the levels of samādhi in the Yoga-Sūtra, these are divided into two main types: the P.Rūpa Jhānas which are attained by concentration and meditation on a mental or external form and b. the P.Arūpa Jhānas: the 'formless attainments.'

The four P.Rūpa Jhānas, the practise of mind-object contemplation, possess five psychological elements which are reduced as the concentration of mind intensifies. These are: 1. investigation (vitarka, P.vitakka), 2. reasoning (vicāra), 3. zest (P.pīti), 4. happiness (P.pīti-sukha) and 5. one-pointedness of mind (P.ekaggatācitta).<sup>15</sup>

The first P.jhāna is the state of mind in which the meditation is disassociated from sense desires and the

five psychological factors, previously mentioned, arise in him. The object of reflection is taken up and considered at length.<sup>16</sup> This seems, to me, to be similar to the 'sa' forms of samprajñati samādhi in which the object of concentration, in its gross and subtle aspects, is considered in similar light.

However, as concentration and bliss intensifies, the second P.jhāna is entered and the obstacles of applied and discursive thinking are dispensed with.<sup>17</sup> The 'nir' forms of nir-vitarka and nir-vicāra samādhi bear a resemblance to this state in the sense that the gross and subtle aspects of that meditation are experienced without reflection.

When the third P.jhāna is entered, zest is dispensed with, leaving happiness and one pointedness of mind. In this state '... the sense of self is still further diminished... the there supervenes a clear, unruffled, perfectly conscious bliss...'<sup>18</sup> Ānanda samādhi resembles this experience because of supreme joy being its object of concentration. However, the tranquil, all satisfying happiness (P.pīti) of the third P.jhāna gives way to the subtle joy of tranquil mindfulness<sup>19</sup> which probably bears a greater resemblance to the transition towards asmita samādhi.

The last stage of the P.Rūpa Jhānas is reached when any kind of emotion is stopped and all that remains of the five psychological factors is one-pointedness of mind; consciousness of opposites is transcended creating perfect equanimity<sup>20</sup> and consciousness passes beyond to the first of the P.Arūpa Jhānas; the formless attainments. I am reminded, here, of the renunciation of dharma-megha-samādhi and the entry to the subject orientated ecstasy of asamprajñata samādhi by supreme detachment and abandonment of all worldly objects.

It is at this point of the essay that I would like to draw attention, again, to seeded consciousness and consciousness without seed. When it is seeded, consciousness is affected by suppressed ideas and feelings which remain as tendencies within the mind: these tendencies lose their power to germinate in the higher realms of consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

I feel that the P.Arūpa Jhānas resemble the sabiya-asamprajñata-samādhi, which is seeded, at least, due to the inclination to sustain this samādhi. The formless attainments are seeded to the degree that they owe their

HINDU

SAMPRAJÑĀTA - Subject-Object Orientated.  
'seeded'

SA VITARKA SAMĀDHI  
'With Deliberation & Reflection'.  
'Gross Object of concentration is 'Propertied'

SA VICĀRA SAMĀDHI  
'With Deliberation & Reflection'  
'Inner' Aspect of Object of Concentration is  
'Propertied'.

SA ĀNANDA SAMĀDHI  
'With Deliberation & Reflection'  
Bliss as Object of concentration is 'Propertied'

SA ASMITA SAMĀDHI  
'With Deliberation & Relection'  
Self as Object of Concentration is 'Propertied'

NIR VITARKA SAMĀDHI  
NOT 'With Deliberation & Relection'  
Gross object of concentration is NOT 'Propertied'

NIR VICĀRA SAMĀDHI  
NOT 'With Deliberation & Reflection'  
'Inner' Aspect of Object of Concentration is NOT  
'Propertied'

NIR ĀNANDA SAMĀDHI  
Bliss as Object of Concentration  
NOT 'Propertied'

NIR ASMITA SAMĀDHI  
'Self' as Object of Concentration  
NOT 'Propertied'

DHARMA-MEGHA-SAMĀDHI

ASAMPRAJÑĀTA - Subject Oriented 'seeded'  
Burning up subconsciousness impressions

KAIVALYA - Without Seed.

BUDDHIST

4 RŪPA JHĀNAS (P.) - Subject-Object Orientated.  
'seeded'

1st JHĀNA (P.) - 5 Psychological Factors Present  
1. Investigation/Application of Thought  
(VITARKA, P. VITAKKA)  
2. Reasoning/Discursive Thought (VICĀRA)  
3. Zest  
4. Happiness  
5. One-Pointedness of Mind.

2nd JHĀNA (P.) - 3 Psychological Factors Present  
1. Zest  
2. Happiness  
3. One-Pointedness of Mind

Feeling of Bliss Intensified

3rd JHĀNA (P.) - 2 Psychological Factors Present  
1. Happiness  
2. One-Pointedness of Mind

4th JHĀNA (P.) - 1 Psychological Factor Present  
1. One-Pointedness of Mind

4 ARŪPA JHĀNAS (P.) - Subject Orientated

1st Formless Attainment "Seeded"  
2nd " " "  
3rd " " "  
4th " " Limit of Karmic Action  
NIRVĀNA - Without Seed P. NIBBĀNA

movement, through the levels of consciousness, to karmic momentum and that the fourth P. Arūpa Jhāna is the stage of transition to consciousness without seed. As consciousness becomes increasingly purified '... the complete removal of one (arūpa) stage constitutes the attainment of the next.'<sup>22</sup>

The first formless attainment is when the meditator abandons form as his object of concentration and practices space concentration<sup>23</sup> to realize the sphere of space-infinity (P. ākāśāyatana). Even so, he '... sees that his attainment is shadowed by the rupa-Jhāna (and) wishes to attain the state of infinite consciousness, considering it to be even more tranquil.'<sup>24</sup> By continuing this practice, he passes beyond the sphere of infinite space and enters the sphere of infinite consciousness: the second formless attainment (P. viññāṇānañcāyatana).

This, also, is seen as an imperfection so '... the consciousness lets go of every concept... and enters a sphere where no-thing at all exists, not even the perception of nothingness (P. ākiñcaññāyatana) Self-consciousness is eliminated and '... the knower and known are merged in unity.'<sup>25</sup>

Yet, the bliss of its tranquility is felt as subtle perception and this can only be neutralized by entering the sphere of neither-perception nor non-perception (P. nevasaññānasaññāyatana). Thus, '... the limit of all karmic action is reached;'<sup>26</sup> the yogin is at the final and transitional stage to the attainment of Nirvāṇa '... which is the total suspension of mind, mental properties, and the mental qualities associated with mind.'<sup>27</sup>

There is similarity between Yogic and Buddhist techniques of attaining samādhi but in each case the emancipation is thought to be different. While admitting that yogins and non-Buddhist ascetics could have access to the eight transic states (P. jhānas), the Buddhists denied the authenticity of any claim by non-Buddhists to the attainment of the ninth state which is the release of Nirvāṇa: the destruction of consciousness and sensation which was specifically a discovery of the Buddha.<sup>28</sup> Whilst Buddhists (and others) would argue that Kaivalya and Nirvāṇa are completely different, the argument is perhaps not so clear cut. There is a striking correspondance between Kaivalya and Nirvāṇa in that both are thought of as pure, free of

of defilements, uncompounded, infinite, and eternal. Both are profoundly concerned with unconditioned consciousness. Furthermore, some doubt exists as to what is implied by the 'destruction' of consciousness; i.e., when consciousness 'stops' or 'ceases' on the attainment of Nirvāṇa.

It is not said to be annihilated. It no longer transmigrates.<sup>29</sup> What happens to it? Perhaps this is the essential difference between Kaivalya and Nirvāṇa: the fact that Buddhism makes no positive statement about the final state of the released. Buddhist doctrine declares: 'In the dead man, not only are the three formations (verbal, bodily and thought formations) stilled but vitality is cut off, heat is cut off, the faculties are cut off. In a man who has entered the attainment of the dissolution of perception and sensation, although the (three) formations are stilled, vitality, heat and the faculties are not cut off. This is the difference.'<sup>30</sup> It could be that this difference applies equally to the achiever of Kaivalya and that Nirvāṇa equates with the nirbija state of Kaivalya.

In conclusion, I note that both Hindu and Buddhist yogins, after a period of moral and physical discipline, developed proficiency at attaining a degree of enstasis with the object of their concentration and, by the gradual removal of hindrances to consciousness, managed to intensify the degree of enstasis; eventually, object-orientated enstasis was transcended and a degree of formless attainment/subject-orientated enstasis ensued. This however, was still liable to subtle partiality but was eventually surpassed to attain liberation and '... the knowledge of the ultimate reality of all objects, material and phenomenal.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isherwood & Prabhavananda, How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali, (N.Y.: New American Library, 1969), p.11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.122.

<sup>3</sup>Mircea Eliade, From Primitives to Zen, (London: Collins, 1967), p.500.

<sup>4</sup>Georg Feuerstein, Textbook of Yoga, (London: Rider, 1975), p.130.

<sup>5</sup>Ian Kesacodi-Watson, Samādhi in Patañjali's Yoga-Sūtras, (Australia: an unpublished manuscript, 1980), p.13.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.15.

<sup>7</sup>Mircea Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1958), p.83, quoting Vijnānabhikṣu's Yogasāra-saṃgraha.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp.81-83.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.83.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.84, quoting Viśnānabhikṣu's Yogasāra-saṃgraha.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.84.

<sup>12</sup>Feuerstein, op.cit., p.132.

<sup>13</sup>Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, op.cit., pp.93-95.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.170.

<sup>15</sup>Mahathera Vajirananda, Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice, (Colombo: Gunasena, 1962), p.332,

Robert M. Gimello, 'Mysticism and Meditation', in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, (ed.) S. Katz, (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), p.182, abstracted from Samaññaphala and Paṭṭhapāda Suttas of the Pāli Dīgha Nikāya.

<sup>16</sup>Christmas Humphries, Concentration and Meditation (London: Watkins, 1973), p.180.

<sup>17</sup>Edward Conze, Buddhist Meditation, (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1956), p.117.

<sup>18</sup>Humphries, op.cit., p.180, quoting Bhikkhu Silacara.

<sup>19</sup>Feuerstein, op.cit., p.58.

<sup>20</sup>Mahathera Vajirananda, op.cit., pp.272-279.

<sup>21</sup>Humphries, op.cit., pp.183-184.

<sup>22</sup>Mahathera Vajirananda, op.cit., p.332.

<sup>23</sup>Upattissa, Vimuttimaggā, (The Path of Freedom) (Colombo: Dr. Weerasuria, 1961), p.113.

<sup>24</sup>Mahathera Vajirananda, op.cit., p.459.

<sup>25</sup>Humphries, op.cit., p.182.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.183.

<sup>27</sup>Mahathera Vajirananda, op.cit., p.465.

<sup>28</sup>Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, op.cit., pp.173-174.

<sup>29</sup>Edward J. Thomas, The History of Buddhist Thought, (N.Y.: Barnes and Noble, 1971, 1st. publ., 1933), p.132.

<sup>30</sup>Upatissa, op.cit., p.325.

<sup>31</sup>Lama Thubten Zopa, The Wish Fulfilling Golden Sun of the Mahayana Thought Training, (an unpublished manuscript), p.121.

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