

Samādhi Vipphārā Iddhi

Success Through Samadhi Intervention

[Those deep in dhyana cannot be hurt]
 (Visuddhi,magga 12.30-35/380 f)
 translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction

1.1 THE MEDITATIVE PROCESS. Meditation, on a higher level, that is, as experienced by seasoned and skillful practitioners, is an inner-space exploration and a liberating super-sensory experience. The true meditative experience begins with the stilling of the body, that is, we are comfortably seated in a still atmosphere conducive to inner focus. With the body physically calm and comfortable, the mind progressively withdraws all attention through the five physical senses, and focusses on itself, as it were.

The mind becomes more aware of its thought processes, and harmonizes with them, neither accepting them nor rejecting them, but simply letting them arise and fall away, without fuelling them further. In due course, the thought-processes are transcended. Our attention is no more mediated through words or thought, but we directly *feel* an experience or mental state. This experience becomes ever more subtle and focussed so that there comes a point when the mind transcends all thinking and feeling, attaining a blissfully equanimous state.

1.2 OBE AND NDE. An interesting way of describing such a *dhyanic* experience, a state of profound mental focus, is that of “out-of-body experience” (OBE), an experience that typically involves a sensation of floating outside of our body and, in some cases, perceiving our physical body from a place outside our body (autoscopy).¹ There are a number of explanations for this phenomenon.² It is possible that such an experience may arise through deep meditation, when we have transcended all physically sense-based attention, with the mind focusses on itself.

An OBE can, and often, occur as part of “near-death experience” (NDE),³ which often includes physiological, psychological and transcendental factors,⁴ such as impressions of being outside the physical body, visions of deceased relatives or religious figures, transcendence of ego and spatiotemporal boundaries and other transcendental experiences.⁵ Such an experience often follows a clear progression, starting with the sensation of floating above one’s body and seeing the surrounding area, followed by the impression of going through a tunnel, meeting deceased relatives, and ending with meeting a being of light.⁶

In Buddhist terms, what we experience when we die is *simply the five senses stopping and the mind manifesting itself*. The light that we see at the time of dying is no more than our own mind. As such, the meditation experience, on a deeper level, is like training for dying, or at least knowing what it is like when the five physical senses cease. If we merge into the light, that is called *dhyana* (Pali, *jhāna*).⁷

¹ For an intro and sources, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Out-of-body_experience.

² The first extensive scientific study of OBEs was done by Celia E Green, reported in her book, *Out-of-the-Body Experiences*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968.

³ For an intro and sources, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near-death_experience.

⁴ S Parnia, DG Waller, R Yeates & R Fenwick, “A qualitative and quantitative study of the incidence, features and aetiology of near death experiences in cardiac arrest survivors.” *Resuscitation* 48, 2001:149-156.

⁵ David Lukoff, David, Francis G Lu & Robert P Turner, “From Spiritual Emergency to Spiritual Problem—The transpersonal roots of the new DSM-IV category.” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 38,2 1998:21-50; Bruce Greyson, “Near-Death Experiences in a psychiatric outpatient clinic population.” *The American Psychiatric Association. Psychiatric Services* 54,12 Dec 2003.

⁶ M Morse, D Conner & D Tyler, “Near-Death Experiences in a pediatric population. A preliminary report,” *American Journal of Disease of Children*, 1985. PubMed abstract [PMID 4003364](http://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/4003364/)

⁷ See Brahmavamso 2006:197 f.

1.3 DHYANA IS LIKE A DEATH EXPERIENCE. Dhyana is the total meditation experience when the five senses have ceased, and we are simply and fully *mind*. In early Buddhism, this is the first real experience of non-duality, as **Ajahn Brahmavamso** notes:

it's non-duality because there are not two any more, there is no separate observer, the mind is unified. It is the first real experience of what they call samadhi, that centring or unification just on the one sense of mind. And it's very blissful. But it's not that one gains these states just for the sake of bliss; it's also for the sake of what these states mean.

These aren't stages of attachment; they are stages of letting go. They arise because you've let go of a great burden. (Brahmavamso 2000:142 f)

Brahmavamso goes on to relate a real-life case of dhyana experience:

One of the disciples here in Perth—I like telling this story because it's a fascinating story—managed to get into one of these states of meditation. He just fluked it by chance. He was doing meditation in the bedroom of his house. After a couple of hours his wife checked up on him because he usually only meditated for forty-five minutes or an hour. When she went into the room she saw her husband, a middle aged Australian, sitting so still she couldn't even see his chest moving. She put a mirror under his nose and she could see no sign of breath; so she panicked and called the ambulance.

The ambulance came from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and the medics stormed into the bedroom where he was sitting in meditation. They took his pulse; there was no pulse at all. So they put him onto the stretcher and into the back of the ambulance and went screaming off with all the sirens going to the hospital. They got him into the emergency room and put all the machines on him and they could see from the machines that he had no heart beat and no brain waves; he was brain dead! But the interesting thing is that the person who was looking after the emergency room that evening was an Indian doctor. He was an Australian, but his parents were from India, and he had heard his parents talking about people who go into deep meditation in India.

When he heard that was what this man had been doing he noticed a strange thing: the upper half of his body was still warm; usually if someone is dead they would be cold all over. So he decided to give him electric shocks, to try and start his heart up again. They tried several times and nothing worked. Then the man came naturally out of his meditation, sat up, and asked, "How did I get here?" Afterwards he said he was just blissed out. But the worst part of the experience was walking home with his wife because she gave him a scolding and made him promise her that he would never do it again. That was a shame because it was a wonderful experience to have and it showed just what's possible with meditation. (Brahmavamso 2000:143 f; re-paragraphed)

1.4 NATURE OF DHYANA. The Buddhist commentator, Buddhaghosa, in his work, **the Visuddhi-magga**, speaks of how the dhyanic state is, as it were, *indestructible*, or at least, untouched by external forces. He calls this phenomenon "success through samadhi intervention" (*samādhi, vipphāra iddhi*). He gives examples of the early saints who manifested such powers.

From what we have already discussed, this virtual indestructibility of the meditator's body can be explained in this manner. In deep dhyana, all the physical senses have shut down, and only the mind is operative. Since the mind is in full charge, and the body inoperative (as it were), it does not respond to external stimuli. In short, it is a real case of mind over matter.

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Success Through Samadhi Intervention

(Vism 12.30-35/380 f)

30 A spiritual distinction arising by virtue of meditative calm (*samatha*), before samadhi, or or after it, or at that moment, is known as “success through samadhi intervention” (*samādhi, vipphārā iddhi*). For, it is said,

The purpose [meaning] (*attha*) of abandoning *the mental hindrances* is accomplished [succeeds] (*ijjhati*)⁸ through the first dhyana,⁹ thus it is success through samadhi intervention....

The purpose of abandoning *zest (pīti)* is accomplished through the third dhyana, thus it is success through samadhi intervention.

The purpose of abandoning *happiness-and-pain* is accomplished through the fourth dhyana, thus it is success through samadhi intervention.

The purpose of abandoning *the sphere of infinite consciousness* is accomplished through the sphere of infinite space, thus it is success through samadhi intervention.

The purpose of abandoning *the sphere of infinite space* is accomplished through the sphere of nothingness, thus it is success through samadhi intervention.

The purpose of abandoning *the sphere of nothingness* is accomplished through the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, thus it is success through samadhi intervention.

There was success through samadhi intervention for the venerable Sāriputta, the venerable Sañjīva, the venerable Khāṇu, the venerable Koṇḍañña, the laywoman Uttarā, and the laywoman Sāmāvati.
(Pm 2:211 f)

31 SĀRIPUTTA (U 4.4). Therein, while the venerable Sāriputta was dwelling with the elder Mahā Moggallāna in Pigeon Gully [Kapota,kandāra], he (the former), with his hair newly shaven off, was sitting in the open on a moonlit night. A fierce yaksha, although warned by a yaksha companion, dealt a blow at his (Sāriputta’s) head, the sound of which is like that of a thunder-clap in the clouds.¹⁰ For, at the time of the blow, the elder was absorbed in an attainment.¹¹ As such, he suffered no harm from the blow. This was venerable’s success through samadhi intervention.

This story is found in the Udāna.¹²

32 SAÑJĪVA (M 50). Now the elder Sañjīva was in the attainment of cessation. Cowherds and others who noticed him thought that he was dead. They brought grass, sticks and dry cowdung, and set them afire. But not even a corner of the elder’s robe was burnt. This was the elder’s success through samadhi intervention by the power of the successive attainments that arose by the meditative calm that he had generated.¹³

This story is found in the Suttas.¹⁴

33 KHĀṆU KOṆḌAÑÑA (DhA 8.10). Now the elder Khāṇu Koṇḍañña was naturally profuse in his attainments. One night, he sat, absorbed in his attainment, in a certain forest. **[381]** Five hundred robbers came with the booty they had stolen. Thinking that no one had followed them, and desiring rest, they put their booty down. Thinking that the elder Khaṇu Koṇḍañña was a tree-stump (*khaṇuka*), they piled all their booty on top of him, and took their rest.

⁸ *Ijjhati* (v), “he succeeds, prospers, is accomplished”; *iddha* (adj) “successful, prosperous, accomplished”; *iddhi* (n) “success, prosperity, accomplishment.”

⁹ *Paṭhama-jjhānena nīvaraṇānaṃ pahān’attho ijjhati ti samādhi, vipphārā iddhi.*

¹⁰ The Sutta actually says: “It was a great blow. With that blow, an elephant of seven cubits [2.85 m] or of seven cubits and a half [3 m] would be felled, or a mountain peak would be split!” (U 4.4.4/40) = SD 24.9.

¹¹ *Samāpatti*, ie one of formless attainments.

¹² **Juṇha S** (U 4.4/39-41) = SD 24.9.

¹³ *Ayam assa anupubba, samāpatti, vasena pavatta, samathānubhāva, nibbattatā samādhi, vipphārā iddhi.* That is, beginning with the form dhyanas, he progresses through the 4 formless attainments.

¹⁴ **Māra Tajjanīya S** (M 50.10/1:333) = SD 36.4.

Now, the elder emerged on account of his predetermined time, when they, having rested, were about to leave, at they very moment that the one who had first put down his booty was picking it up. When they saw the elder moved, they shouted in fear.

“Fear not, laymen, I’m a monk!” he said.

They came and saluted the elder. Out of faith, they went forth, and gained arhathood together with the analytic insights.¹⁵ Here, the absence of harm to the elder, even though he was buried in five hundred bundles of booty, was his success through samadhi intervention.¹⁶

34 UTTARĀ (DhA 11.2). Now the laywoman Uttarā was the daughter of the seth¹⁷ Puṇṇaka. A prostitute, named Sirimā, jealous of her, poured a pot of boiling oil over her head. Right at the moment, Uttarā attained dhyana in lovingkindness. The oil fell off her, swirling like water-drops, off a lotus leaf.

This is her success through samadhi intervention, but the story should be told in full.¹⁸

35 SĀMĀVATĪ (DhA 2.1; AA 1:443). The rājah Udena’s chief queen was named Sāmāvatī. The brahmin Māgandiyā, aspiring to have her own daughter in the position of chief queen, put a poisonous snake in her veena. Then he told the rajah, “Maharajah, Sāmāvatī wants to kill you! She goes about grasping a veena with a poisonous snake in it!”

When the rajah found it, he was furious. Raising his bow, he was going to kill Sāmāvatī with a poisoned arrow. Sāmāvatī and her retinue radiated lovingkindness to the rajah. The rajah stood trembling, unable to shoot the arrow or to put it down.

Then the queen said to him, “What is it, your majesty, are you tired?”

“Yes, I am tired.”

“Then put down your bow.” And the arrow fell at the rajah’s feet.

The queen then advised him, “Your majesty, you should not wrong those who do not wrong you.”

The rajah’s inability to release the poisoned arrow was the laywoman Sāmāvatī’s success through samadhi intervention.¹⁹

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¹⁵ The analytic insights (*pañisambhidā*), of which there are 4: (1) analytical skill in meanings or consequences (*attha,pañisambhidā*), ie understanding the nature of reality, causality and wisdom; (2) analytical skill regarding ideas or causes (*dhamma,pañisambhidā*), ie understanding the origin or arising of such causality and wisdom; (3) analytical skill of language (*nirutti,pañisambhidā*), ie skill in defining such aforementioned truths; (4) analytic skill in ready wit or creative insight (*pañibhāṇa,pañisambhidā*), ie skill in presenting these aforementioned truths for the realization of others (A 2:160; Pm 1:119; Vbh 294). In simple terms, the first *pañisambhidā* is a proper understanding of reality, (2) is the understanding how they arise, (3) is the skill of defining such truths in conventional language, and (4) the skill in expressing these truth clearly and effectively. In **Pañisambhidā S** (A 4.173), Sāriputta says that he won the 4 analytical insights in only 6 months after his ordination. As a set, these insights are found in the wisest of the arhats, meaning that not all arhats have them, but they are all spiritually liberated in the same manner. The 4 analytic insights are discussed in detail at **Vbh 15/293-305**. See also BDict: Pañisambhidā.

¹⁶ See **Khāṇū Koṇḍanna Thera Vatthu** (DhA 8.10/2:254 f).

¹⁷ *Seṭṭhī*, a financial entrepreneur.

¹⁸ See **Uttarā Nanda,mātā Vatthu** (DhA 17.3/3:309-311; AA 1:451) = SD 3.8.

¹⁹ **Sāmāvatī Vatthu** (DhA 2.1/1:215 f; AA 1:442). In these accounts, however, it is Māgandiyā herself who hides the poisonous snake in Sāmāvatī’s veena.

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