

Right Mindfulness

In

Early Buddhism

Samatha and *vipassanā*

What is the origin of the modern *vipassanā* movement?

How are *samatha* and *vipassanā* used in the EBTs?

How do the two work together?

Is modern *vipassanā* meditation compatible with meditation in the EBTs?

The origin of the *vipassanā* movement

It arose in a specific historical context

It comes from the colonial period in Burma

An interest in Buddhism becomes part of the nationalist movement

The spread of meditation to lay Buddhists

The origin of the *vipassanā* movement

The renewed interest in Buddhism is influenced by new impulses coming from abroad:

- A rejection of the supernatural, which includes aspects of *samādhi*
- An embrace of science and rationalism, which lead to an emphasis on *vipassanā*

Typical modern use of *samatha* and *vipassanā*

Samatha meditation:
watching the breath for
the purpose of calm.

Vipassanā meditation:
watching feelings to see
their changing nature.

Meaning of *samatha*

Everyday usage:

- *Adhikaraṇa-samatha-dhamma*:
“principles for the settling of legal issues”

A state, not an activity:

- *Uttama-damatha-samatha-m-anuppatta*:
“achieved the highest taming and calm”
(a description of the Buddha)
- *Lābhī hoti ajjhataṃ ceto-samathassa*:
“one who obtains mental calm internally”

So *samatha* means “calm” or “calming”
depending on context.

Meaning of *samatha*

“As for the person who sees clearly but does not have calm (*ceto-samatha*): they should approach someone who has calm and ask:

‘How should the mind be calmed?

How should it be settled?

How should it be unified (*ekodi kātabbam*)?

How should it be stilled (*samādahātabban*)?’

That person would answer from their own experience: ‘In such and such a way.’

After some time they both see clearly and have calm.”

(AN 4.94)

Meaning of *vipassanā*

A state, not an activity:

- “Possessed of clear seeing (*vipassanā*)” (MN 6)
- “You should develop two things: calm (*samatha*) and clear seeing (*vipassanā*)” (MN 73)
- “And because it was said that he was **unblinkingly watchful**, he came to be known as ‘*Vipassī*’” (DN 14)

Meaning of *vipassanā*

“Then while King Bandhuma was sitting in judgment, he’d sit Prince Vipassī in his lap and explain the case to him. And sitting there in his father’s lap, Vipassī would **thoroughly consider the case and draw a logical conclusion**. So this was all the more reason for him to be known as ‘Vipassī’.” (DN 14)

Meaning of *vipassanā*

“What is the benefit of developing clear seeing (*vipassanā*)?

Wisdom (*paññā*) is developed.

What is the benefit of developing wisdom?

Ignorance is given up.”

(AN 2.32)

Meaning of *vipassanā*

A number of the above usages shows that *vipassanā* does not just mean “insight”, which is too close to “wisdom” (*paññā*).

Because it is developed gradually at all stages of the path, it is best regarded as “clear seeing” or perhaps “discernment”.

Meaning of *vipassanā*

“As for the person who ... does not see clearly (*adhipaññā-dhamma-vipassanā*):

they should approach someone who sees clearly and ask:

‘How should phenomena (*saṅkhārā*) be seen (*daṭṭhabbā*)?

How should they be comprehended (*sammasitabbā*)?

How should they be discerned (*vipassitabbā*)?’

That person would answer from their own experience: ‘In such and such a way.’

After some time they see clearly.”

(AN 4.94)

Samatha and *vipassanā* together

The two are called a *yuga*, “a pair”:

- “These two things—calm (*samatho*) and clear seeing (*vipassanā*)—occur in him evenly paired together.”
(MN 149)
- “A swift pair of messengers: this is a designation for calm (*samatha*) and clear seeing (*vipassanā*).”
(SN 35.245)

Samatha and *vipassanā* together

They are developed together, and therefore arise together:

- “What two things should be developed? Calm (*samatha*) and clear seeing (*vipassanā*).”
(DN 34)
- “Calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) are developed in me.”
(MN 151)

Samatha and vipassanā together

Calm brings clear seeing:

- “When there is right stillness (*sammāsamādhi*), one who has fulfilled right stillness has fulfilled the vital condition for true knowledge and vision (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇā-dassana*).”
(AN 10.3)

Samatha and vipassanā together

And clear seeing brings calm:

- “They understand: ‘When I pursue, develop, cultivate, and make much of this view, I personally gain calm and quenching.’”
(MN 48)

Samatha and vipassanā together

- *Samatha* and *vipassanā* occur as a pair almost everywhere, a *yuga*.
- *Samatha* is a result, not a practice
- *Vipassanā* is a result, not a practice
- *Samatha* and *vipassanā* are developed by practicing the N8P (SN 45.159)

Samatha and vipassanā together

This means that any meditation that develops one of these also develops the other. There is only meditation, no separate *samatha* meditation and/or *vipassanā* meditation.

Right mindfulness/*satipaṭṭhāna*, or mindfulness of breathing, develops both *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

We get a much simpler idea of meditation.