SAKYAMUNI See EPITHETS, SAKYA

SĀLISTHAMBA SŪTRA: A Mahāyāna Sūtra written in Sanskrit containing a discourse giving a detailed exposition of the formula of causal genesis (pratītya-samutpāda). Here it is presented as a discourse by Bodhisattva Maitreyo to Venerable Sāriputra at a great assembly of monks and Bodhisattvas held on the mountain Grdhakūṭa in Rājahra, presided over by the Buddha.

Venerable Sāriputra opens the dialogue by referring to a terse statement made by the Buddha on that day at this assembly regarding the formula of conditioned genesis. The statement runs as follows:

“He who sees conditioned genesis sees the Dharma. He who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha.”

This statement is actually an elaboration by one additional line of the statement made by the Buddha to Venerable Vakkali who was in the habit of admiring the physical form of the Buddha as recorded in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (S. III, 120) that “he who sees me sees the Dharma” (Yo dharmam passati so maṁ passati). This statement contains the Buddha’s advice to Venerable Vakkali that he should try to understand the dhamma and see the Buddha through the dhamma without developing an attachment to and concentrating on his physical form. It is the Buddha’s teaching that is really significant and helpful and not his physical form, he was told. Here the dhamma referred to by the Buddha is his fundamental teaching of human suffering and its eradication, as synoptically presented by the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths.

Noble Truths because the former is the detailed explanation of the latter in a general sense. However in the Sālisthamba Sūtra this main teaching is given a slightly different treatment in that the doctrine of conditioned genesis is equated with the dharma which in turn is equated with the Noble Eightfold Path. The text then goes into explain and elucidate these doctrines in detail. This shifting of emphasis, however, does not violate the spirit of the Pali tradition in that the Pratītya Samutpāda actually covers the first two Noble Truths of suffering and its origin, while the third and the fourth truths are covered by the Noble Eightfold Path which has been incorporated into it in the present Sūtra. Thus this is only a different presentation in greater detail. Accordingly, the text goes on elaborating on these doctrines in great detail after the style of the usual Mahāyāna Sūtras.

The name of the compiler of the Sūtra is not recorded. As regards the designation given to the Sūtra it seems to be based on the simile of the sheaf of rice plants (Sāli-stambha) which the Buddha here introduces as an illustration when he makes the afore-mentioned terse statement leading to the preaching of the discourse. The implication seems to be that in the two-fold application of the Pratītyasamutpāda as internal and external as explained in the text, the latter application is symbolised by the causal activity operational in the seed in its process of transformation into a full-fledged plant with flowers, fruits etc. The rice plant is chosen as the illustration.

The text is edited as Ārya Sālisthamba Sūtra by N. Ariyaswami Sastri in the Adyar Library Series number 76, Adyar Library, 1950.

A.G.S. Kariyawasam

SAMĀDHĪ is usually translated as ‘concentration’ and represents a mental quality or a state of mind that is quite literally ‘put together’ or ‘collected’ (sam + ā + dhā).

In the Pali discourses the term samādhi occurs in a variety of contexts, covering not only the realm of tranquility (samatha) proper, but also the development of insight. Thus samādhi can refer to the practice of walking meditation (A. III, 30), for example,
or to contemplating the arising and passing away of the five aggregates (A. II. 45). A passage from the Aṭṭhakakaccana Nikāya treats even the four satipaṭṭhānas as a form of samādhi (A. IV. 300).

The breadth of meaning of the term samādhi becomes evident in the fact that the discourses distinguish between various types of concentration. Thus the Saṅgīti Sutta (D. III. 222) differentiates between samādhi leading to a pleasant abiding by attaining the jhānas; samādhi leading to knowledge and vision by developing the perception of light or clarity (ālokasaññā); samādhi leading to mindfulness and clear comprehension by contemplating the arising and passing away of feelings, perceptions, and thoughts; and samādhi leading to the destruction of the influxes by contemplating the arising and passing away of the five aggregates.

The same Saṅgīti Sutta (D. III. 219) presents another set of three samādhis by distinguishing between concentration that is empty (susīna), signless (animitta) or desireless (appāpajīta). The commentary relates these three to the attainment of path and fruit. The difference between them, so the commentary, is due to different modes of developing insight, depending on whether not-self (anattā), or impermanence (anicca), or unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) has been particularly emphasized.

Out of these three types of samādhi, the signless concentration (animmitta samādhi) occurs frequently in the discourses on its own. To develop such signless concentration is to direct attention away from any possible ‘sign’ (M. I. 298). In the present context, ‘sign’ stands for those aspects or marks of phenomena with the help of which one is able to recognize.

The Saṅgīti Sutta (D. III. 219) has still another threefold distinction of samādhi to offer, concerned with concentration with initial and sustained application of the mind (savātākka saviccāra), without initial but still with sustained application of the mind (savātākka vicāramatta), and finally without both (savātākka aviccāra). The first of these represents levels of samādhi up to and including the first jhāna and the last the other three jhānas, while concentration without initial but still with sustained application of the mind occupies a position between the first and the second jhāna.

This intermediate level of absorption has found its way into the Abhidhammikī scheme for listing the jhānas, which treats this level of samādhi as second jhāna and the three remaining levels as third to fifth jhāna (Dhs. 20). In this way, the Abhidhammikī scheme counts up to altogether five jhānas, whereas the discourses cover the same range of concentration with a scheme of only four jhānas.

Not only the discourses, but also the commentaries distinguish between several types of concentration. Thus the Visuddhimagga differentiates between the type of concentration present during awakening, the ‘supramundane’ (lokuttara) samādhi, and its ‘mundane’ (lokiya) counterpart (Vism. 85). Another distinction found in the same work is between access (upacāra) concentration, an expression referring to levels of samādhi bordering on but not yet corresponding to the level of jhāna, and absorption proper (appanā samādhi). The difference between these two, so the Visuddhimagga explains (Vism. 126), is that though with access concentration the hindrances are already left behind, the jhāna factors are still weak. With absorption proper the jhāna factors will be strong and firmly established, resulting in an experience during which the mind process is no longer interrupted by occurrences of the life continuum (bhavañca), but consists entirely of moments of active cognition (javāna).

The later part of this explanation is based on the commentarial model of the cognitive process (cittavāhī), according to which during everyday sensory experience such moments of active cognition count up to a maximum of seven mind moments, followed sooner or later by a relapse into the stream of the Life continuum. Once this relapse has taken place, several intermediate mind moments are required before another series of active cognitions can take place. Thus the above explanation from the Visuddhimagga indicates that the attainment of absorption concentration is markedly different from other types of mental experience, since it consists of outstandingly long periods of pure active cognition.

In addition to access and absorption concentration, the Visuddhimagga introduces a third type of samādhi (Vism. 144). This is the so-called ‘momentary concentration’ (khaṇika samādhi), a type of concentration that lasts only for a short fraction of
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time. The Pali Abhidhamma (cf., e.g., Abhs. II. 2) goes a step further by suggesting that unification (ekaggata) of the mind belongs to those seven mental factors present in any state of consciousness (sabbacittasādhāraṇa). When evaluating this suggestion it needs to be taken into account that the Cādaśāvatara Sutta (M. I, 301) defines samaśhi to be ‘unification of the mind’ (cittassā ekaggata), while the Athasāsilinī (Dhs. A. 118) defines ‘unification of the mind’ to be samaśhi. Taken together, this indicates that the two terms are near synonyms, both from the perspective of the discourses and from the perspective of the commentaries. Thus the Abhidhammikic proposition concerning ekaggata would imply that some form of samaśhi is present in any state of mind.

The point made with this presentation could be that the seeds out of which real samaśhi grows can be found even in the most ordinary state of mind. Nevertheless, this presentation is not unproblematic, and the Kāṇḍāvavutto has recorded a critique in this position, which argues that if unification of the mind were indeed present in all states of mind, then it would follow that jhāna could be attainable for a brief moment during normal sense-cognition or even when lust or hatred are present in the mind (Kv. A. 458). Though this criticism may seem a little overdrawn, it does draw attention to the fact that the Abhidhammikic usage of ekaggata differs from the usage of this term in the early discourses, where both samaśhi and ekaggata represent specific mental qualities that require development, rather than being the given constituents of any state of mind.

Returning to the discourse, the Dāsuttara Sutta (D. III. 277) presents another set of four types of concentration by distinguishing between concentration that is conducive to decline (hānabhāgiyo), to stability (gūṭiṣṭhāgiyo), to distinction (vissabhāgiyo) and to penetration (nibbaddhābāgiyo). According to the explanation found in the commentary and the subcommentary to this passage, the first three are related to the development of jhāna. If someone has gained the first jhāna, for example, but slight traces of sensuality should arise, then such samaśhi is ‘conducive to decline’, in the sense that the first jhāna will be lost. If no sensuality arose and the jhāna can be maintained, such samaśhi is ‘conducive to stability’, and if concentration deepens and the second jhāna can be developed, such samaśhi is ‘conducive to distinction’. The fourth type of samaśhi, then, pertains to the development of insight, when on emerging from a jhāna one develops detachment in regard to it.

Another set of four samaśhis forms part of the standard presentations of the four roads to power (iddhi-pāda) in the discourses (S. V. 268). These four roads to power share in common the need for effort and will power (padhānasaṃkhāra), while the difference between them is due to the type of concentration employed. Such concentration can be based upon (wholesome) desire (chandasaṃādhi), upon energy (viriyasaṃādhi), upon inclining the mind (cittasaṃādhi), or upon investigation (vimaṇasā samādhi).

The notion of iddhi underlying these four roads to power points to one of the manifold benefits of deeper levels of samaśhi, namely the possibility to develop supernormal powers. Before however turning to such possible fruits of samaśhi, first those factors required for its development need to be treated. These factors can conveniently be covered by examining central aspects of the gradual path of training, whose dynamics are closely related to the development of samaśhi.

The foundation for any mental culture is morality (sīla), and its relevance for samaśhi finds expression in a standard qualification of moral conduct as samādhisamvattanika, ‘conducive to concentration’ (e.g., M. I, 322). The development of morality covers also the area of speech, in relation to which friendly forms of communication are expressly related to concentration, since harsh speech is asamādhisamvattanika, ‘not conducive to concentration’ (M. I, 286). Not only harsh speech, but also quarrelsome speech will obstruct samaśhi (A. IV, 87).

An important aspect of the gradual path of training is restraint of the sense-doors (indriya samvara), a practice especially aimed at overcoming sensory distraction and thereby constituting an important condition of developing samaśhi. Another step in the gradual path of training is contentment (santuṭṭhi), significant in the present context since one who is not content with external circumstances will not be able to gain concentration (Dhp. 249). A related feature is moderation in regard to food (bhūjane mattaṭhā), given
that overeating will cause drowsiness (bhattasammana) and thereby obstruct concentration (S. V. 64).

With these basics put into practice, the gradual path of training moves into those areas of the noble eightfold path which fall into the category of the samādhihikkhandha or ‘aggregate of concentration’ proper. This samādhihikkhandha comprises, besides right concentration itself, right effort and right mindfulness.

As the Cūladatta Sutta (M. I, 301) clarifies, samādhi requires the development of the four right efforts, which are its ‘requisites’ (parikkhāra), and of right mindfulness in form of the four satipaṭṭhānas, which are the ‘signs’ (nimitta) of samādhi. The close relationship between mindfulness and concentration can be inferred from a statement by Anuruddha (S. V. 298), in which he attributed his outstanding concentrative abilities to his development of satipaṭṭhāna.

In the context of the gradual path of training, right effort finds its expression in the practice of wakefulness (jāgariyam anuyutta), which according to the standard descriptions is to clean the mind from obstructive states (āvarapiyehi dharmehi cittam parisodhethi), a necessary condition for being able to gain samādhi. Concomitant with such overcoming of obstructive states is the cultivation of mindfulness, exemplified in the gradual path scheme through the development of clear comprehension in regard to any bodily activity (satisampajjāna). Out of the various bodily activities to be conducted with mindfulness, the walking posture is particularly capable of leading to a stable form of samādhi (A. III. 30).

With a mind endowed with wakefulness and mindfulness the five hindrances can be overcome. To develop the mental collectedness and composure of samādhi is equivalent to overcoming these hindrances, which scatter and agitate the mind. Once they are overcome, delight (pārājita) and joy (pīti) arise, followed by tranquility (passaddhī) and happiness (sukha), four factors whose arising naturally leads to samādhi (cf. e.g. D. I, 73).

For the purpose of overcoming the five hindrances and developing deeper levels of samādhi, the discourses often recommend that one withdraw into seclusion. The standard descriptions of the type of environment conducive to the development of samādhi recommend places such as the roots of a tree or an empty place. The relationship between seclusion and samādhi is reciprocal, since not only does seclusion facilitate samādhi, but one who is bereft of samādhi will also not be able to derive benefit from living in seclusion (A. V. 202).

For those intent on the development of absorption concentration, the Upakkilesa Sutta (M. I, 111: 158) offers a detailed list of those mental obstructions that may prevent the deepening of one’s samādhi. The obstructions (Upakkilesa) mentioned in this discourse are set not encountered elsewhere in the discourses and specifically related to the development of samādhi. The mental obstructions listed are doubt, inattention, sloth-and-torpor, consternation, elation, unease, excessive energy, deficient energy, longing, diversified perceptions and excessive meditation on forms. A closer examination of this list reveals that this set of mental obstructions are various manifestations of the last three hindrances. This indicates that even before attempting to develop samādhi, the first two hindrances of sensual desire and ill-will have to be removed, while the overcoming of the remaining three hindrances is what leads to a gradual deepening of concentration until the first jhāna can be gained.

In regard to the first jhāna, the meditator has to develop skill in attaining (samāpattikasalo), in maintaining (iṭṭikasalo) and in emerging (vussiṇakasalo) from samādhi (A. IV, 34). This much accomplished, the second jhāna comes into view, a mental experience qualified in the standard descriptions as being ‘born’ of samādhi (samādhijja). This qualification points to the fact that with the attainment of the second jhāna the meditator has moved beyond the subtle mental ripple caused by the presence of initial (vimutti) and sustained application of the mind (vīcāra), two factors of the first jhāna that need to be left behind in order to gain the second jhāna.

Further deepening of samādhi leads via overcoming of joy (pīti) to the third jhāna and by gaining perfect equanimity to the fourth jhāna, with the attainment of which the aim of the development of samādhi has been reached. With the imperturbable (āneśa) level of samādhi gained in this way the possibility of gaining
the immaterial attainments comes into view, refined mental experiences that employ the concentrative strength gained with the fourth jhāna to develop increasingly subtle types of perceptions.

With the experience of the deep levels of samādhi gained through the jhānas not only the common world of experience is left behind, but also potential powers and abilities of the mind can be accessed that go beyond the confines of common experience. Once samādhi has reached the depth of the fourth absorption, the possibility to develop supernormal abilities and knowledges opens up. The discourses mention a standard set of six such supernormal knowledges (ābhiññā), which include various magical powers of transformation, supernormal audition and vision, telepathy and powers of recollection beyond one’s present life. The last and supreme of these supernormal knowledges is the destruction of the influxes, and it is in order to develop this insight which leads up to the gain of this particular knowledge that samādhi has such a central place in the Buddhist path scheme.

The role of samādhi as a crucial factor for the gaining of insight is a frequent theme in the discourses, which reiterate again and again that no insight can be gained without concentration. Samādhi precedes knowledge (A. I, 219) and it is only with a concentrated mind that things can be seen as they really are. The role of samādhi in this respect also underlies its inclusion among the seven factors of awakening (bojjhāṅga).

As a factor of awakening, levels of samādhi with and without initial and sustained application of the mind can be employed (S. V, 111). The awakening factor of samādhi is the result of tranquility and happiness and in turn leads to equanimity, a balanced state of mind resulting from concentration (S. V, 69).

The two factors especially related to samādhi as a factor of awakening (S. V, 105) are the ‘sign of tranquility’ (sammāthanimittā) and the ‘sign of non-distractions’ (āvagyagamanītta). Following an explanation found in the Visuddhimagga (Vism. 134), both can be understood to represent the same, namely the need to develop mental tranquility and avoid distraction.

The Visuddhimagga offers a survey of those factors that help to develop the awakening factor of samādhi.

These range from cleanliness and avoiding distracted people, to knowing the right time for inciting, restraining, gladdening and not interfering with the mind. In addition to these, the Visuddhimagga recommends to cultivate a keen interest in and to repeatedly reflect on the development of concentration, to acquire skill in developing the ‘sign’ of concentration and to balance the five faculties (Vism. 134).

Balance among the five faculties as an aid in developing the awakening factor of samādhi reminds of another important set of mental factors where samādhi also plays its part: the five faculties (indriya) or powers (bala). A definition found frequently for samādhi as a faculty (e.g. S. V, 197) speaks of gaining concentration by “making relinquishment the object” (vossaggavātārīma). In the context of the five faculties, the role of samādhi is to counterbalance the faculty of energy (vīrya), thereby avoiding the arising of agitation and excitement.

Samādhi is not only of relevance to the roads to power, the awakening factors and the faculties, but it also has a crucial role to perform in the context of the noble eightfold path, of which it forms the last and culminating factor. The discourses define ‘right concentration’ (sammā samādhi) in two complementary ways. The definition found most frequently enumerates the four absorptions (jhānas). Since the development of the noble eightfold path, and with it of the path factor ‘right concentration’, is a prerequisite for awakening, this definition clearly accords a central role to the development of absorption concentration in the early Buddhist scheme of deliverance.

Since some discourses describe the gaining of full awakening based on the first absorption, it would seem that probably not all four jhānas have to be developed to win full awakening. All four jhānas would however be needed to gain the threefold higher knowledge (tevijjā).

Another definition of right concentration, found in a few discourses, does not mention the absorptions. One of these discourses is the Mahācattārīkheka Sutta, a discourse which defines right concentration as unification of the mind (c cittasamagga) developed in interdependence with the other seven path-factors. This definition highlights the fact that in order for
concentration to become ‘right’ concentration, it needs to be developed as part of the noble eightfold path.

Judging from other discourses, the expression ‘unification of the mind’ is not confined to absorption concentration since the same expression occurs in relation to walking and standing (A. II, 14) or to listening to the Dhamma (A. III, 175), activities which would not be compatible with jhāna attainment. This suggests that this second definition of ‘right concentration’ would also include levels of samādhi that have not yet reached the depth of absorption concentration. In fact, this second definition makes it clear that the decisive factor qualifying samādhi as ‘right’ is not merely the depth of concentration achieved, but the purpose for which concentration is employed.

A similar nuance underlies the qualification samma, ‘right’, which literally means ‘togetherness’, or to be ‘connected in one’. This thus indicates that the decisive criterion for describing samādhi as samma as ‘right’, is whether it is developed ‘together’ with the other factors of the noble eightfold path.

According to numerous discourses (e.g. A. III, 423), the development of the path factor of ‘right concentration’ is indispensable for eradicating the fetters and gaining awakening. This brings up the question whether it is necessary to develop samādhi to the level of absorption in order to win stream-entry, once-return, non-return or to become an arahant.

Concerning stream-entry, the qualities mentioned in the discourses as essential for the realisation of stream-entry do not stipulate the ability to attain absorption (cf. S. V, 410). Nor is such an ability included among the qualities that are characteristic of a stream-enterer subsequent to realisation (cf. e.g. S. V, 357). A necessary condition for winning stream-entry is a state of mind completely free from the five hindrances (A. III, 63). Such a removal, however, can take place during walking meditation (It. 118) or while listening to the Dhamma (S. V, 95); activities which are not compatible with jhāna attainment. This indicates that the ability to gain absorption concentration may not be required for stream-entry.

The same seems to apply to the realisation of once-return. Once-returners are so called because they will be reborn only once again in ‘this world’ (i.e. the kāmatokā). On the other hand those who have developed the ability to attain absorption are not going to return to ‘this world’ in their next life (A. II, 126), but will be reborn in a higher heavenly sphere (i.e. the rūpalokā or the arūpalokā). This certainly does not imply that a once-returner cannot have absorption attainments. But if all once-returners were absorption attainers, the very concept of a ‘once-returner’ would be superfluous, since not a single once-returner would ever return ‘to this world’.

When considering the realisation of non-return however, the situation seems to be different. Some discourses point out that the non-returner, in contrast to the once-returner, has fulfilled the development of concentration, thereby indicating that the difference between the two is related to differing levels of concentrative ability (A. I, 232 and A. IV, 380). Other discourses relate progress towards the higher two stages of the path, non-returning and arahant-ship, to having had the experience of the first or higher absorptions ⁷. Judging from this, the development of concentration up to the level of absorption appears to be required for the realisation of non-return and thereby also of arahant-ship.

The development of deeper states of samādhi is thus indeed an important aspect of the meditative training of the mind in early Buddhism. This importance is expressed vividly in some discourses, which explain that one who has respect for the Buddha and his teaching will automatically hold samādhi in high regard (A. IV, 123). On the other hand, one who looks down on the development of samādhi thereby only approves of those who have an unsteady mind (A. II, 31). Lack of regard for the development of concentration, so another discourse explains, constitutes one of the causes for the disappearance of the true Dhamma (S. II, 225). In short, as the Buddha once said: samādhi is the path and its absence is the wrong path.

See also APPANĀ, CONCENTRATION, EKAGGAṬĀ, EKOTĪBHĀVA, JHĀNA, SAMATHA.

Anālayo.
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