SAMATHA & VIPASSANA are the two complementary aspects of Buddhist meditation. Since individual aspects of each have already been treated in a number of articles in this Encyclopaedia, the present article will in particular focus on their interrelation.

The term samatha can be translated as ‘calmness’ or ‘tranquillity’. Outside of a meditative context this word occurs as the ‘settling’ of legal questions, adhikarana samatha (Vin. IV, 207). In the context of meditation, to develop samatha similarly means to ‘settle’ the mind, in the sense of making it ‘steady’, ‘quiet’, ‘one-pointed’ and ‘concentrated’.

As the Buddha emphatically explained, those who dwell in seclusion and develop samatha are indeed living in accordance with the Dhamma (A. III, 86), while to neglect seclusion and the development of samatha spells decline for a monk in training (A. III, 116).

The development of samatha is in particular opposed to the hindrance of restlessmess (A. III, 449).

The term vipassana can be derived from the verb passati, to ‘see’ and the prefix vi, which in the present context connotes intensification and also a sense of analytical separation. To convey these nuances of analytical and intensified seeing, a suitable way of translating vipassana is ‘insight’.

In general, to develop vipassana is to develop vision, understanding and insight in regard to formations, and that above all to presently arisen ones. The central aspect to be ‘seen into’ is impermanence, a crucial aspect of meditative wisdom (A. IV, 4), and the basis for insight into the other two characteristics of conditioned existence, dukkha and upadana. Though concerned with what may seem to be the less appealing aspects of existence, the development of vipassana can lead to the arising of sublime forms of delight and happiness.

The discourses mention hearing and discussing the Dhamma as contributory factors for samatha and vipassana to lead to awakening (A. II, 140). This clearly indicates that some degree of theoretical acquaintance with the teaching of the Buddha is a necessary accompaniment to the development of vipassana as a meditative practice.

Concerning the relationship between samatha and vipassana, according to a passage from the Aṅguttara Nikāya the practice of vipassana has the purpose of leading to the destruction of ignorance, while the practice of tranquillity is specifically aimed at the destruction of passion (A. I, 61). This however does not entail that these two aspects of meditation
represent two different paths leading to two different goals. In fact, according to the same passage in the Aṅguttara Nikāya samatha and vipassanā are both conducive to knowledge (vijjābhiñāyā). Another passage explains that for the sake of eradicating passion and a whole host of mental defilements both samatha and vipassanā are required (A. I, 100). Thus the above distinction only intends to draw attention to the specific task or quality of these two interdependent aspects of Buddhist meditation.

The basic difference between samatha and vipassanā can be illustrated with the help of mindfulness of breathing, since this meditation practice can be developed in both modes. The difference here depends on what angle is taken when observing the breath, since emphasis on various phenomena related to the process of breathing stays in the realm of variegated sensory experience and thus is more geared towards the development of vipassanā, while emphasis on just mentally knowing the presence of the breath leads to a unitary type of experience and is thus capable of producing deep levels of samatha.

The development of samatha leads to a high degree of mastery over the mind and thereby forms a basis for the development of insight. When insight is developed by a calm and steady mind, such insights will be able to penetrate into the deeper regions of the mind and thereby bring about true inner change. In addition to its supportive function in relation to vipassanā, the development of samatha also has benefits on its own. The experience of deeper stages of samatha is one of intense pleasure and happiness, brought about by purely mental means, which thereby automatically eclipses any pleasure arising in dependence on material objects. In this way the development of samatha can become a powerful antidote for sensual desires, by diverting them from their former attraction.

Thus even though samatha on its own is not able to lead to awakening, it does have an important function to perform for the achievement of that aim. The path leading to the unconditioned requires both samatha and vipassanā (S. IV, 359), both to be developed by higher knowledge as integral parts of the noble eightfold path. To borrow from the poetic imagery found in the discourses, samatha and vipassanā are the ‘swift pair of messengers’ carrying the message of Nibbāna along the road of the noble eightfold path (S. IV, 195).

In fact, when one surveys occurrences of the terms samatha and vipassanā in the discourses, what is rather striking is that they seldom occur alone, but most often are found together. This well conveys what their relationship should be, namely one of coexistence and cooperation. A calm mind supports the development of insight and the presence of insight in turn facilitates the development of deeper levels of calmness (Dhp. 372); therefore samatha and vipassanā are at their best when developed in skilful co-operation. This is neatly summarised in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, which emphasizes the importance of appreciating the essential similarity between samatha and vipassanā in terms of their function.8 Viewed from this perspective, to speak of ‘samatha’ or of ‘vipassanā’ is less a matter of distinguishing between two separate systems of meditation than of highlighting two central qualities that are to be developed with any type of meditation practice.

Concerning the interrelation between samatha and vipassanā, the discourses indicate that there is no fixed pattern to be followed in this respect. According to a discourse in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, one type of practitioner may have gained samatha but not be endowed with the higher wisdom of vipassanā, while another one may be endowed with the higher wisdom of vipassanā without however having yet gained samatha (A. II, 92). In both cases, the Buddha recommended that an effort should be made to develop what is still lacking. In a similar way the Yugasaddhā Sutta explains that some may practice vipassanā first and then develop samatha, others may build up samatha right at the outset and only then turn to vipassanā, and still others may develop both in conjunction (A. II, 157). Any of these approaches, so says this discourse, is capable of leading to the destruction of the fetters. These passages clearly indicate that there is no need to restrict the possibility to gain awakening to one approach only, presuming that the development of one of these two meditative qualities inevitably has to precede the other one.

Concerning SAMATHA see also ADHICITTA, ARŪPA, CALMNESS, CONCENTRATION, CONTEMPLATION, EKAGGATĀ, EKOTIBHĀVA, JHĀNA, KAMMATTHĀNA, MEDITATION.
Concerning VIPASSANĀ see also ABHIÑṆĀ, ANUPASSANĀ, BHĀVANA, MEDITATION, INSIGHT, INTROSPECTION, INTUITION, SATIPAṬṬHĀNA, SUKKHAVIPASSAKA.

Analayo

References
1. A. II, 94 speaks of citam saṅgapetabbam sannisādettabbaṃ ekodikattabbam samādahittabbam in order to gain cetasamaṇa.
2. For a detailed exposition cf. Vism 84—435.
3. A. II, 94 speaks of saṅkhāra daṭṭhabbaṃ samastabbaṃ vipassitabbā in order to gain adhipatīkhihammavipassati.
5. Dip. 373, Thag. 398 = Thag. 1071.
6. Cf. e.g. M. I, 91; M. I, 504; A. III, 207 and A. IV, 411.

SAMBHOGAKĀYA See TRIKĀYA

SAMBODHI See BODHI

SAMBUDDHA See BUDDHA

SAMMĀDIṬHI, ‘right view’, is the first factor of the noble eightfold path and a quality of fundamental importance in early Buddhism. Just as the dawn is the forerunner of the sun, similarly right view is the forerunner of all wholesome things (A. V, 236).

To understand the range of right view requires some understanding of its opposite: wrong view (micchādiṭhi). Just as right view heads the path leading to deliverance, so wrong view heads the path that leads ever deeper into dukkha. Wrong view is one of the ten unwholesome courses of action (akusala kammachaya), singled out by the Buddha as those actions with the propensity to lead to an evil rebirth. No other thing is as conducive to a lower rebirth as wrong view (A. I, 31), resulting in rebirth in the animal realm or in hell (A. I, 60). Just as all growth originating from a bitter seed will be of a bitter nature, the Buddha pointed out, so whatever deeds, words, thoughts, intentions and aspirations originate from wrong view will all conduca to ill and suffering (A. I, 32).

To be of wrong view is to have a ‘perverted view’ (e.g. A. III, 114: viparaññadassana), and such perversion of one’s perspective will inevitably influence one’s action and behaviour. This same influence causes beings to arise in hell, a predicament due to their being of wrong view and having acted according to such wrong views. It almost seems as if wrong view were a necessary requirement for being reborn in hell. In fact, unless beings were blinded by a false perspective, by the fond hope that somehow or other they will be able to get away with evil acts of behaviour, they would quite probably not undertake such evil deeds as will ripen in rebirth in the nether worlds.

The discourses describe various manifestations of wrong view. Some instances of wrong view are related to karmic retribution, instances in which the wrong view consists in presuming that by behaving like a dog or a cow (M. I, 387), by being an actor and entertaining people (S. IV 307), by performing one’s duty in warfare as a mercenary (S. IV, 309) or as a cavalry warrior (S. IV, 311), one will be reborn in heaven. Such wrong views involve a misconception of karma and its fruit, mistakenly believing that a type of behaviour which has the propensity of leading to rebirth in the animal realm or in hell will meet with a heavenly reward.

Other manifestations of wrong view can be found in the Āpānaka Sutta, which examines the wrong views: ‘there is no other world’, ‘there is no action’ and ‘there is no cause’ (M. I, 402-8). Such wrong views not only misconceive, but flatly deny the existence of karmic retribution and causality, and consequently also discount the existence of other realms of existence. Several among the religious teachers living at the time of the Buddha were indeed proposing such wrong views. The Sānāthaṇaphala Sutta reports Pūrano Kassapa proposing that action has no ethical quality, in the sense that there is no real difference between killing and helping others, between destroying and giving to others (D. I, 52). According to the same discourse, Makkhali Gosāla denied causality and Pakudha Kaccāyana taught a theory