

Theravada Philosophical Exposition of the Supramundane (*Lokuttara*) State

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Theravada Buddhist philosophy's exposition of the supramundane involves drawing a distinction between the terms mundane (*lokiya*) and supramundane (*lokuttara*). The term mundane applies to all phenomena comprising the world (*loka*) from subtle states of consciousness as well as matter to virtue as well as evil, to meditative attainments as well as sensual engagements. The term supramundane, in contrast, applies exclusively to that which transcends the world, that is, the nine supramundane states: Nibbāna, the four noble paths (*magga*) leading to Nibbāna, and their corresponding fruits (*phala*) which experience the bliss of Nibbāna.

The word *lokuttara*, supramundane, is derived from *loka* (world) and *uttara* (beyond) or transcending it. The concept of world is threefold: The world of living beings (*sattaloka*), the physical universe (*akasaloka*) and the world of formation (*sankaraloka*). That is the totality of conditioned phenomena, physical and mental. The notion of the world relevant here is the world of formations that comprises all mundane phenomena included within the five aggregates of clinging. That which transcends the world of conditioned things is the unconditioned element, Nibbāna.

The goal of the Buddhist path, complete and permanent liberation from suffering, is to be achieved by practising the full threefold discipline of morality (*sīla*) concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). The meditational absorptions, *jhānas*, comprising the four fine-material *jhānas* and the four immaterial *jhānas*, pertain to a stage of concentration, which is of an extremely intensified degree. However, taken by themselves, these states do not ensure complete deliverance, for they are incapable of cutting off the roots of suffering. The Buddha teaches that the cause of suffering, the driving power behind the cycle of rebirths, is the defilements with their three unwholesome roots - greed, hatred and delusion. Concentration at the absorption level, no matter to what heights it is pursued, only suppresses the defilements, but cannot destroy their latent seeds. Thence bare mundane *jhāna*, even when sustained, cannot by itself terminate the cycle of rebirths. On the contrary, it may even perpetuate the round. For if any fine-material or immaterial *jhāna* is held on to with clinging, it will bring about a rebirth in that particular plane of existence corresponding to its own kammic potency, which can then be followed by a rebirth in some lower realm.

A fundamental distinction that is drawn between two terms crucial to Theravada philosophical exposition, refer to 'mundane' (*lokiya*) and 'supramundane' (*lokuttara*). The term 'mundane' applies to all phenomena comprised in the world (*loka*) - to subtle states of consciousness as well as matter, to virtue as well as evil, to meditative attainments as well as sensual engrossments. The term 'supramundane', in contrast, applies exclusively to that which transcends the world, that is, the nine supramundane states: Nibbāna, the four noble paths (*magga*) leading to Nibbāna, and their corresponding fruits (*phala*) which experience the bliss of Nibbāna. According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* the meaning of the word '*lokuttara*' is that:

- i. To go beyond this world through the Eightfold Path is *lokuttarā*,¹

¹ *Ariyamaggā lokāū uttarantāti lokuttarā*, Pts, 166

- ii. Advantage resulting from Samañaship (*Sāmaññaphalāni*) and Purification (*nibbāna*) are beyond this world. So it is called as *Lokuttara*.²

Lokiya means mundane, worldly, not only of this world but all experience and knowledge of any world, any existence, and represents all that is conditioned. *Lokuttara* means supramundane, beyond worldliness, and represents the unconditioned. The meaning of the word ‘supramundane’ is usually understood as being above the world. However, ‘above the world’ is often open to interpretation, as in the meaning of something not quite ordinary, like excellent virtue and discipline. For a better understanding of ‘supramundane’ it is better to look at the doctrines that are subsumed under supramundane (*lokuttara*) state.³ They are:

- i. The four foundations of awareness or mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*),
 - ii. The four right efforts (*padhāna*),
 - iii. The four roads to power (*iddhi-pāda*),
 - iv. The five spiritual faculties (*indriya*),
 - v. The five spiritual powers (*bala*),
 - vi. The seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*),
 - vii. The Noble eight fold path (*Ariyo aññaṅgiko maggo*)
 - viii. The Four Paths (*cattāro ariyamaggā*),
 - ix. The Four Fruitions (*cattāri sāmaññaphalāni*),
 - x. Nibbāna
- Four frames of reference (*satipaṇṇhāna*)⁴
 1. Contemplation of the body (*kayānupassanā*)
 2. Contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*)
 3. Contemplation of consciousness (*cittānupassanā*)
 4. Contemplation of mental qualities (*dhammānupassanā*)
 - Four right exertions (*sammappadhāna*)⁵
 1. Exertion for the non-arising of unskillful states
 2. Exertion for the abandoning of unskillful states
 3. Exertion for the arising of skillful states
 4. Exertion for the sustaining of skillful states
 - Four bases of power (*iddhipāda*)⁶
 1. Will (*chanda*)
 2. Energy (*virīya*)

² *Sāmaññaphalāni nibbānaṅca lokato uttiñṇāti lokuttarā*. Ibid, 166

³ *Cattāro satipaṭṭhānā, cattāro sammappadhānā, cattāro iddhipādā, pañcendriyāni, pañca balāni, satta bojjhaṅgā, ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, cattāro ariyamaggā, cattāri ca sāmaññaphalāni, nibbānaṅca – ime dhammā lokuttarā. Cattāro satipaṭṭhānātiādayo sattatimsa bodhipakkhiyadhammā yathāyogaṃ maggaphalasampayuttā. Te bujjhanaṭṭhena bodhīti evaṃladdhanāmassa ariyassa pakkhe bhavattā bodhipakkhiyā nāma. Pakkhe bhavattāti upakārabhāve thitattā*. Ibid, 166

⁴ *cattāro satipaṭṭhānā Tesu ārammaṇesu okkantivā pakkhanditvā upaṭṭhānato upaṭṭhānaṃ, satīyeva upaṭṭhānaṃ satipaṭṭhānaṃ. Kāyavedanā cittadhammesu paṇassa asubhadukkhānīcānattākāragahaṇavasena subhasukhaniccaattasaññāpahāna kiccaśādhanaśasena ca pavattīto catudhā bhedo hoti. Tasmā cattāro satipaṭṭhānāti vuccati*. Pts-a, 618

⁵ *cattāro sammappadhānā Padahanti etenāti padhānaṃ, sobhanaṃ vā taṃ kilesavirūpapavattavirahitato padhānaṅca hitasukhanipphādakaṭṭhena seṭṭhabhāvāvahanato padhānabhāvakarānato vāti sammappadhānaṃ. Viriyassettaṃ adhivacanaṃ. Tayidaṃ uppannānuppannānaṃ akusalānaṃ pahānānupattikiccaṃ, anuppannuppannānaṅca kusalānaṃ uppattitṭhitikiccaṃ sādheyatīti catubbidhaṃ hoti. Tasmā cattāro sammappadhānāti vuccati*. Ibid, 618

⁶ *cattāro iddhipādā Nipphattipariyāyena ijjhanaṭṭhena, ijjhanti etāya sattā iddhā vuddhā ukkaṃsagatā hontīti iminā vā pariāyena iddhi, tassā sampayuttāya pubbaṅgamaṭṭhena phalabhūtāya pubbabhāgakāraṇaṭṭhena ca iddhiyā pādoti iddhipādo. So chandavīriyacittavīmaṃsāśasena catubbidhova hoti. Tasmā cattāro iddhipādāti vuccati*. Ibid, 618

3. Consciousness (*citta*)
4. Discrimination (*vāmamsa*)
- Five faculties (*indriya*)⁷
 1. Faith (*saddhā*)
 2. Energy (*virīya*)
 3. Mindfulness (*sati*)
 4. Concentration (*samādhi*)
 5. Wisdom (*paññā*)
- Five powers (*bala*)
 1. Faith (*saddhā*)
 2. Energy (*virīya*)
 3. Mindfulness (*sati*)
 4. Concentration (*samādhi*)
 5. Wisdom (*paññā*)
- Seven factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*)⁸
 1. Mindfulness (*sati*)
 2. Investigation (*dhamma vicaya*)
 3. Energy (*virīya*)
 4. Joy (*pīti*)
 5. Tranquility (*passaddhi*)
 6. Concentration (*samādhi*)
 7. Equanimity (*upekkhā*)
- Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariyo aññhaṅgiko maggo*)⁹
 1. Right View (*sammā ditthi*)
 2. Right Intention (*sammā saṅkappa*)
 3. Right Speech (*sammā vācā*)
 4. Right Action (*sammā kammanta*)
 5. Right Livelihood (*sammā ājīva*)
 6. Right Energy (*sammā vāyāma*)
 7. Right Mindfulness (*sammā sati*)
 8. Right Concentration (*sammā samādhi*)
- Four paths of stream-entry (*cattāro ariyamaggā*),
 1. The path of stream-entry (*sotapatti-magga*),
 2. The path of once-returning (*sakadagami-magga*),
 3. The path of never-returning (*anagami-magga*),
 4. The path of arahatship (*arahatta-magga*),
- The Four fruitions (*cattāri sāmaññaphalāni*)
 1. The fruit of stream-entry (*sotapatti-phala*),
 2. The fruit of once-returning (*sakadagami-phala*),
 3. The fruit of arahatship (*arahatta-phala*),
 4. The fruit of never-returning (*anagami-phala*),

⁷ **pañcendriyāni pañca balānī** Assaddhiyakosajjapamādavikkhepasammohānaṃ abhibhavanato abhibhavanasaṅkhātena adhipatiyaṭṭhena **indriyaṃ**. Assaddhiyādāhi anabhibhavanīyato akampiyaṭṭhena **balam**. Tadubhayampi saddhāvīriyasatisamādhipaññāvasena pañcavidhaṃ hoti. Tasmā **pañcendriyāni pañca balānī** vuccanti. Ibid, 618

⁸ *satta bojjhaṅgāti Bujjhanakasattassa pana aṅgabhāvena satiādayo satta dhammā bojjhaṅgā, Tena vuccati satta bojjhaṅgāti.* Ibid, 618

⁹ *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo niyyānaṭṭhena ca sammāditthiādayo aṭṭha maggaṅgā honti. Tena vuccati ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggoti.* Ibid, 618

There are forty six Lokuttara Dhammas in Buddhism such as the four foundations of awareness or mindfulness (satipatthāna), the four right efforts (padhāna), the four roads to power (iddhi-pāda), the five spiritual faculties (indriya), the five spiritual powers (bala), the seven factors of enlightenment (bojjhaṅga), the Noble Eightfold Path (Ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo), the Four Paths (cattāro ariyamaggā), the Four Fruitions (cattāri sāmāññaphalāni), and Nibbāna. In brief there are three Lokuttara Dhammas in Buddhism such as the Four Paths (cattāro ariyamaggā), the Four Fruitions (cattāri sāmāññaphalāni), and Nibbāna.¹⁰

Wisdom has the specific characteristic of penetrating the true nature of phenomena. It penetrates the particular and general features of things through direct cognition rather than discursive thought. Its function is to abolish the darkness of delusion which conceals the individual essences of states and its manifestation is non-delusion. Since the Buddha says that one whose mind is concentrated knows and sees things as they are, the proximate cause of wisdom is concentration¹¹.

The wisdom instrumental in attaining liberation is divided into two principal types: insight knowledge (*vipassanāñāna*) and the knowledge pertaining to the supramundane paths (*maggañāna*). The first is the direct penetration of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena - impermanence, suffering and non-self. It takes as its objective sphere the five aggregates (*pancakkhandhā*) - material form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. Because insight knowledge takes the world of conditioned formations as its object, it is regarded as a mundane form of wisdom. Insight knowledge does not itself directly eradicate the defilements, but serves to prepare the way for the second type of wisdom, the wisdom of the supramundane paths, which emerges when insight has been brought to its climax. The wisdom of the path, occurring in four distinct stages, simultaneously realises Nibbāna, fathoms the Four Noble Truths, and cuts off the defilements. This wisdom is called supramundane because it rises up from the world of the five aggregates to realise the state that transcends the world, Nibbāna.

The Buddhist disciple, striving for deliverance, begins the development of wisdom by first securely establishing its base - purified moral discipline and concentration. He then learns and masters the basic material upon which wisdom is to work - the aggregates, elements, sense bases, dependent arising, the Four Noble Truths, etc. He commences the actual practice of wisdom by cultivating insight into the impermanence, suffering and non-self aspect of the five aggregates. When this insight reaches its apex it issues in supramundane wisdom, the right view factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, which turns from conditioned formations to the unconditioned Nibbāna and thereby eradicates the defilements. For a meditator following the vehicle of serenity the attainment of jhāna fulfils two functions: first, it produces a basis of mental purity and inner collectedness needed for undertaking the work of insight contemplation; and second, it serves as an object to be examined with insight in order to discern the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. Jhāna accomplishes the first function by providing a powerful instrument for overcoming the five hindrances. As we have seen, for wisdom to arise the mind must first be concentrated well, and to be concentrated well it must be freed from the hindrances, a task accomplished pre-eminently by the attainment of jhāna. Though access concentration will keep the hindrances at bay, jhāna will ensure that they are removed to a much safer distance.

¹⁰ *Iti vitthārato sattatiṃsabodhipakkhiyacatumaggacatuphalanibbānaṃ vasena chacattālīsa lokuttaradhammā, tato saṅkhepena catumaggacatuphalanibbānaṃ vasena nava lokuttaradhammā, tatopi saṅkhepena maggaphalanibbānaṃ vasena tayo lokuttaradhammāti vedītabbaṃ. Satipaṭṭhānādīnaṃ maggaphalānaṃca lokuttaratte vutte taṃsampayuttānaṃ phassādīnampi lokuttarattaṃ vuttameva hoti. Padhānadhammavasena pana satipaṭṭhānādayova vuttā. Ibid, 618*

¹¹ Vism.438; pp.481

In their capacity for producing concentration the jhānas are called the basis (*pāda*) for insight, and that particular jhāna a meditator enters and emerges from before commencing his practice of insight is designated his *pādakajjhāna*, the basic or foundational jhāna. Insight cannot be practised while absorbed in jhāna, since insight meditation requires investigation and observation, which are impossible when the mind is immersed in one-pointed absorption. But after emerging from the jhāna the mind is cleared of the hindrances, and the stillness and clarity that then result conduce to precise, penetrating insight.

The jhānas also enter into the *samathayānika*'s practice in a secondary capacity, that is, as objects for scrutinization by insight. The practice of insight consists essentially in the examination of mental and physical phenomena to discover their marks of impermanence, suffering and non-self. The jhānas a meditator attains provide him with a readily available and strikingly clear object in which to seek out the three characteristics. After emerging from a jhāna, the meditator will proceed to examine the jhānic consciousness and to discern the way it exemplifies the three universal marks. This process is called *sammasanañāna*. 'comprehension knowledge,' and the jhāna subjected to such a treatment is termed the '*sammasitajjhāna*' 'the comprehended jhāna'.¹² Though the basic jhāna and the comprehended jhāna will often be the same, the two do not necessarily coincide. A meditator cannot practise comprehension on a jhāna higher than he is capable of attaining, but one who uses a higher jhāna as his *pādakajjhāna* can still practise insight comprehension on a lower jhāna which he has previously attained and mastered. This admitted difference between the *pādakajjhāna* and the *sammasitajjhāna* leads to discrepant theories about the supramundane concentration of the noble path, as we will see.

Whereas the sequence of training undertaken by the *samathayānika* meditator is unproblematic, the *vipassanāyānika*'s approach presents the difficulty of accounting for the concentration he uses to provide a basis for insight. Concentration is needed in order to see and know things as they are, but without access concentration or jhāna, what concentration can he use? The solution to this problem is found in a type of concentration distinct from the access and absorption concentrations pertaining to the vehicle of serenity, called 'momentary concentration' (*khanika samādhi*). Despite its name, momentary concentration does not signify a single moment of concentration amidst a current of distracted thoughts, but a dynamic concentration which flows from object to object in the ever-changing flux of phenomena, retaining a constant degree of intensity and collectedness sufficient to purify the mind of the hindrances. Momentary concentration arises in the *samathayānika* simultaneously with his post-jhānic attainment of insight, but for the *vipassanāyānika* it develops naturally and spontaneously in the course of his insight practice without his having to fix the mind upon a single exclusive object. Thus the follower of the vehicle of insight does not omit concentration altogether from his training, but develops it in a different manner from the practitioner of serenity. Without gaining jhāna he goes directly into contemplation on the five aggregates and by observing them constantly from moment to moment acquires momentary concentration as an accompaniment of his investigations. This momentary concentration fulfils the same function as the basic jhāna of the serenity vehicle, providing the foundation of mental clarity needed for insight to emerge.

¹² Vism. 607-11; PP.706-10

ABBREVIATIONS

Psm	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Psm	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭakathā</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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