

In what ways can formal meditation, chanting and study inform and support each other in moving towards Buddhist goals? To what extent are any of these dispensable with?

In this essay I will argue that formal meditation, chanting and study are inextricably connected and mutually supporting on the Buddhist path to *Nirvāṇa*, acting as reflecting jewels in the ‘multi-dimensional holographic’¹ net of the *Dhamma*. I will focus my exposition on the interpenetrating correspondences between these three elements, which create a religious synaesthesia² from the conditioned path towards the unconditioned fruit. I will attempt to illustrate how none of these aspects is truly dispensable with, as each one is implicitly included in and analogically referring to all the others. For the sake of this paper, I will mostly gloss over seemingly bewildering and potentially contradictory differences between various Buddhist traditions over philosophical, doctrinal or practical interpretations, emphasising the overall harmony and multi-faceted unity on the importance of meditation, chanting and study to cultivate the Path to/of Freedom.

Buddhist goals

Before commencing my analysis of the symphonic interdependence between formal meditation, chanting and study, it is necessary to attempt to elucidate an understanding of the Buddhist goals towards which these elements are supposed to inform and support each other.

¹ Harvey, 2008f: section 13.

² For this concept, applied to poetry, see for example: *Correspondances*, by Charles Baudelaire, <http://www.doctorhugo.org/synaesthesia/ baudelaire.html>

Arguably the most universally beloved description of the Buddhist aspiration is encapsulated in this famous verse from the *Dhammapada*:

Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ - kusalassa upasampadā

Sacittapariyodapanaṃ - etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ³

I would agree with Buswell and Gimello⁴ that the central theme of Buddhist teachings can be illustrated by the metaphor of the path, in the sense of a soteriological transformation of humankind through Buddhist religious practice: the path as ‘existential and experiential embodiment of Buddhist truth.’⁵ The path to the Unconditioned (*Nirvāṇa*) is the living and lived integration of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, a truly (w)holistic, vigilant journey in preparation for the event⁶ of Awakening. Key to the Buddhist salvific enterprise is the practice of *citta-bhāvanā*: the cultivation and purification of mind/heart⁷. Following the above-quoted *Dhammapada* verse, the path requires effort and determination to avoid, undermine and relinquish the presence and future arising of unskillful (*akusala*) states, ultimately working to completely purify the mind from various negative latent tendencies (*anusayas*)⁸ and

³ *Dhammapada*, 183, in <http://www.tipitaka.org/romn/> : not doing any evil – doing good – purifying one’s mind – this is the Teaching of the Buddhas. It is interesting to note that in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in the Sōtō Zen Tradition, this formula (slightly amended) represents the Three Pure Precepts taken by a Bodhisattva (see Maezumi and Glassmann, 2002: 68-9). My teacher, Rev. Fausto Taiten Guareschi (www.fudenji.it), translates this formula as: Not doing any evil, doing all good, serving all beings with a pure heart.

⁴ Buswell and Gimello, 1992: 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶ The emphasis is here on *Nirvāṇa* as being un-produced, un-conditioned, un-caused.

⁷ *Citta-bhāvanā* is here taken in its broad sense, rather than in the more technical Abhidhammic and commentarial meaning of *citta-bhāvanā* as different from *paññā-bhāvanā* or *metta-bhāvanā*.

⁸ ‘Seven latent proclivities (*anusayā*): sensuous greed (*kāma-rāga*), resentment (*paṭigha*), views, doubt, conceit, craving for becoming (*bhava-rāga*), ignorance,’ D.III.255, in Walshe, 1995: 503.

defilements (*upakkilesas*)⁹, counteract hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*)¹⁰, totally uproot the ten fetters (*saṃyojanas*)¹¹ and finally destroy the taints/corruptions/cankers (*āsavas*)¹². In parallel to this, the path entails the development of skilful (*kusala*)¹³ states, a process of mastering the *citta*'s radiant potential, its natural ability to be brightly shining¹⁴, its pure and original¹⁵ potential for awakening. The Buddhist aspiration is to cultivate a boundless, limitless, integrated *citta*¹⁶, yoking wisdom and compassion to alchemically transmute (borrowing from Tibetan Buddhist metaphors) the ego-centred delusory self into a great selfless being (the *arahat* ideal of a *mahā-*

⁹ In discussing the defilements of the “brightly shining *citta*”, the commentary on A.I.8-11 (A.A.I.60) says “attachment (*rāga*) etc.”, i.e. attachment, hatred and delusion, while M.I.91 speaks of greed, hatred and delusion as *upakkilesas of citta*’, in Harvey, 2008a: section 7.2.

¹⁰ ‘A passage at S.V.92-3 and A.III.16 on the other hand, reduces such long lists of defilements to that of five the hindrances: sense-desire [*kāma-cchanda*], ill-will [*vyāpāda*], dullness-and-drowsiness [*thīna-middha*], restlessness-and-worry [*uddhacca-kukkucca*], and vacillation [*vicikiccā*],’ in Harvey, 2008a: section 7.

¹¹ Views on the existing group, vacillation, clinging to precepts and vows, sense-desire, ill-will, attachment to the form realm, attachment to the formless realm, conceit, restlessness and ignorance.

¹² ‘A detailed view of *āsavas* and how to overcome them is the *Sabbāsava* or “All the *āsavas*” *Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* no 2, M.I.6-12,’ Harvey, 2008a: section 11.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the meaning of the term *kusala*, especially from the Theravādin commentaries, see Harvey, 2008g, section 1- *kusala* as: *arogya* (wholesome), *anavajja* (blameless), *kosala-sambhūta* (skilful), *sukha-vipāka* (producing contentment).

¹⁴ “Monks, this *citta* is brightly shining (*paḥassaram*), but it is defiled (*upakkiliṭṭhan*) by defilements which arrive (*āgantukehi upakkilesehi*). Monks, this *citta* is brightly shining, but it is freed (*vipamuttan*) from defilements which arrive,’ *Āṅuttara Nikāya* I.8-11, cited in Harvey, 2008a: section 7.

¹⁵ The Theravāda concept of ‘brightly shining *citta*’ as seed of purity will be expanded within the Mahāyāna framework, especially with the concept of *Tathāgata-garbha*, and heavily drawn upon by Eastern Buddhism.

¹⁶ Here *citta* - following the *Abhidhamma* analysis - is understood not as ‘unchanging underlying substance... [but as] the centre of mental activity whether in terms of thought or emotion. It is awareness or consciousness of an object, it is that which knows, equivalent to *viññāṇa*, “consciousness” or “discernment”. *Citta* can be seen as the centre of one’s being, in the form of a **stream of constantly changing mind-sets** [bold mine], many of which are unaware of the others: a collection of alternative “selves”, each of which thinks it is “in charge” when it is occurring!’ in Harvey, 2008g: section 2.

attā), by experientially awakening to the reality of *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anattā* (not-Self).

Formal meditation

In line with our perspective of the Buddhist *mārga* as focusing on *citta-bhāvanā*, it seems appropriate to begin with an analysis of formal meditation as the quintessential form of *citta* development and purification, highly commended and discussed in the Pali Canon, as well as illustrated in all non-Theravāda Buddhist traditions, albeit with different emphasis, focus and details.

The English word ‘meditation’ is an attempt to translate the Pali/Sanskrit term (*citta*) *bhāvanā*, a noun which comes from the causative of the verb *bhū* (to be), entailing an idea of ‘causing to be’, ‘becoming’, ‘making to be’: an active, creative and productive process which is much larger in scope than the formal practice of ‘*jhāyati*’ (thinking/meditating upon, from which ‘*jhāna*’, though *jhāna* does not use ‘thinking’ in the normal sense of this word). Meditation could therefore be defined as any formal, intentional practice devoted to developing skilful mind states and purifying one’s *citta* from unskilful ones.

Traditionally (especially following the Theravāda school as represented in the Pali Canon and in its post-canonical texts and), there are several ‘methods’ of formal meditation, broadly (though not rigidly) centred on developing the thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening (*bodhi-pakkhiyā dhammas*)¹⁷ in different but complementary ways, as outlined in: the

¹⁷ The four presencings of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), the four right endeavours (*samma-ppadhāna*), the four bases of success/power (*iddhi-pāda*), the five spiritual faculties (*indriya*), the five powers/strength (*bala*), the seven factors for awakening (*bojjhaṅga*), the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭaṅgika magga*), see Gethin, 2001: 266.

step-by-step discourse (*anupubbi-kathā*)¹⁸ and the fruits of renunciation (*sāmañña-phala*)¹⁹ in the *Suttas*, as well as in similar instructions in later meditation ‘manuals such as the *Visuddhimagga*, the *Abhidharmakośa*, Kamalaśīla’s *Bhāvanākrama* ... and also Chinese and later Tibetan works.’²⁰

In the Theravāda tradition, formal meditation practice (which is preceded by the development of moral virtue and some form of renunciation)²¹ requires two main aiding factors, which are considered the most powerful external and internal precursors of the seven factors of awakening²²: having admirable friends (*kalyāṇa-mittas*) and systematic attention (*yoniso manasikāra*)²³. Having lovely and good friends aligns with the importance that all Buddhist traditions attribute to having a reliable, trustworthy and experienced guide in one’s formal meditation practice (ranging from a good friend and mentor from a Theravāda perspective to a powerful and seemingly ‘deified’ *guru/lama* in Tibetan traditions, via the figure of *Dharma* teacher in most schools). Systematic attention is praised in the two main ‘systems’

¹⁸ ‘Then the Blessed One gave instruction step by step... namely talk on giving, talk on good conduct, and talk on heaven; he proclaimed the danger, elimination and impurity of sense desires, and the benefit of desirelessness. When the Blessed One knew that the mind [of the listener] was ready, open, without hindrances, inspired and confident, then he gave the instruction in Dharma that is special to buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, the path’, e.g. *Majjhima Nikāya*, I. 379-80, cited in Gethin, 1998: 83. Technically, the ‘step-by-step discourse’ does not refer to the *bodhi-pakkhiyā dhammas*, but it is seen as the ordinary path in preparation for the noble path.

¹⁹ See the *Sāmañña-phala Sutta: The Fruits of the Homeless Life*, in Walshe, 1995: 91-109.

²⁰ Gethin, 1998: 165.

²¹ A useful summary of the prerequisites to the practice of formal meditation (as outlined by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*) is found in Goleman, 1977: 1-10: the cultivation of moral virtue (*sīla*) in thought, speech and action (the Buddhist precepts); right livelihood; having a simple dwelling and few possessions; being in the company of admirable friends; abandoning worldly worries and preoccupations.

²² ‘The awakening-factor of mindfulness (*sati-sambojjhaṅga*), the awakening-factor of discrimination of *dhamma* (*dhamma-vicaya-sambojjhaṅga*), the awakening-factor of strength (*virīya-sambojjhaṅga*), the awakening-factor of joy (*pīti-sambojjhaṅga*), the awakening-factor of tranquillity (*passaddhi-sambojjhaṅga*), the awakening-factor of concentration (*samādhi-sambojjhaṅga*), the awakening-factor of equipoise (*upekkhā-sambojjhaṅga*)’, in Gethin, 2001: 146.

²³ S.V.78-9, as cited in Harvey, 2008b: section 3.

of meditation training (*samatha* and *vipassanā*) as ‘wise and careful attention to those things which are conducive to calm and insight’²⁴, possibly the most important internal factor²⁵ for *citta-bhāvanā*.

Formal meditation is practised mainly in the sitting posture, ‘though all of the four postures (*iriyāpatha*) of walking, sitting, lying down and standing, are used on occasion and are mentioned in the texts.’²⁶ Different Buddhist traditions assign more or less importance to the type of posture and discuss it in varying length and detail, from Buddhaghosa’s succinct advice ‘that posture is suitable in which his unconcentrated mind becomes concentrated or his concentrated mind becomes more so’²⁷, to the meticulous attention to the correct posture in Zen²⁸, via the highly detailed analysis of the subtle anatomy and physiology in Tibetan Tantric Buddhism with its intricate descriptions of *cakras*, *nāḍīs*, *prāṇa* and *bindu*²⁹.

The classic Buddhist ‘methods’ of formal meditation could be summarised by the combined effort to develop *samādhi* and *paññā* via the practice of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, so as to abandon *rāga* (attachment) and *avijjā* (spiritual ignorance), cultivating deep calm (the counteractive of attachment), wisdom and spiritual knowledge (*ñāna*). The *samatha* practice

²⁴ Harvey, 2008b: section 4.

²⁵ It.9 (I.16): ‘With regards to internal factors, I don’t envision any other single factor like appropriate attention as doing so much for a monk in training, who has not attained the heart’s goal but remains intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. A monk who attends appropriately abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful’, cited in Harvey, 2008b: section 4.

²⁶ Sarah Shaw, cited in Harvey, 2008b: section 5.

²⁷ Ñāṇamoli (IV 43), 1991: 127.

²⁸ See for instance Sekida, 1985: 38-46.

²⁹ As described In Mullin, 1996: 58-9 and Harvey, 2008k: section 1.

(with which the classic *Suttas*³⁰ description of the path starts) is based on the development of increasingly deeper states of calm by focusing on a simple object³¹, thus accessing subtle concentration states (*samādhi*) and even lucid trance (*jhāna*). *Samatha* involves the development of positive states as well as the weakening and temporary suspension of the hindrances, leading to meditative calming, in which the radiant purity of mind can shine forth more freely. *Samatha* can be seen as the practice of tuning the mind by clarifying it, an ideal basis for the cultivation of *vipassanā*, the practice of developing insight into the three seals - *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, ‘leading to non-attachment and [complete] liberation’³². The classic *Sutta* illustration of *vipassanā* practice is contained in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (M.I.55-63) and in the *Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (D.II.290-315), where the aim is to cultivate mindfulness of the arising and ceasing of phenomena in relation to body, feelings, mental states and *dharmas*, noticing their impermanent nature, their leading to *dukkha*, their nature of not-Self, piercing through the reality of the Four Noble Truths and realizing *Nirvāṇa*.

These two practices are seen as complementary on the Buddhist path, albeit with a different emphasis: *samatha* is focused on weakening craving and attachment, on letting go of the driven-ness of the mind (which is always grasping for ‘food’), on ‘re-conditioning the way the mind/heart works. It seeks to gather in energies, and integrate wholesome mental factors so as to grow a strong, kindly centre of calm and awareness’³³: centering and expanding one’s

³⁰ See the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, the second *Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.

³¹ ‘In the Pali Canon, a great range of meditation topics are referred to. A.I. 38-42 lists...’ Harvey, 2008c: introduction. See also Buddhaghosa’s paradigmatic list of forty meditation subjects in the *Visuddhimagga* (though some of these pertain to *vipassanā*, too).

³² Harvey, 2008e: Introduction.

³³ Harvey, 2008d: section 1.

citta (thus, quintessentially, *citta-bhāvanā* training). *Vipassanā* practice accentuates the moment-by-moment process of observing the arising and passing away of phenomena, thus ‘understanding oneself as simply a conditioned stream of mental and physical processes, the five *khandas*³⁴, going beyond the illusory idea of a permanent Self, directly seeing with wisdom that all phenomena are conditioned, evanescent, unreliable processes, ‘perhaps catching a glimpse of that which is beyond change, limitation and suffering: *Nirvāṇa*, the unconditioned, deathless, unborn, beyond all thought of “I”³⁵.

Although there has been much debate³⁶ on the compatibility between *samatha* and *vipassanā*, I would agree with Gethin³⁷, Cousins³⁸, Harvey³⁹, Anālayo⁴⁰ and Thanissaro Bhikkhu⁴¹ (amongst others) that ‘calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) are at their best when developed in skilful cooperation’⁴², and that it is necessary to integrate them as aspects of a single, unified practice, both qualities of mind to be jointly developed, rather than contradictory, conflicting or even mutually exclusive *yānas* (vehicles) from which to choose. This perspective also aligns with the understanding of meditative development in Northern Buddhism⁴³, where ‘calm

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See for instance, Griffiths, 1981 and King, 1992.

³⁷ Gethin, 1998: 199-201.

³⁸ Cousins, 1984: 59-60.

³⁹ Harvey, 2008d: section 9.

⁴⁰ Anālayo, 2003: 88-91.

⁴¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997 and 1998.

⁴² Anālayo, 2003: 88.

⁴³ See Lodro, 1998: 159-165.

abiding' (*śamatha*) and 'special insight' (*vipaśyanā*) are seen as specific mental states which are both necessary on the path to liberation, not as different methods of meditation.

To sum up, I would consider formal meditation as an indispensable practice to move towards the Buddhist goal of *Nirvāṇa*, both as a means of *citta-bhāvanā* and *paññā-bhāvanā*: letting go of attachment and aversion, uprooting ignorance and realising direct spiritual knowledge through wisdom and insight.

Chanting

Recitation and chanting are intimately linked to the practice of formal meditation on the Buddhist path to Awakening as they can be regarded as a form of devotional meditation, 'perhaps the most widespread Buddhist practice in East Asia.'⁴⁴ Buddhist chanting is steeped in the ancient practice of recollection of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*, Skt. *Buddhānusr̥ti*), which is – in turn- 'one of a series of recollections (*anussati/anusr̥tis*): of the qualities of the Buddha, *Dharma*, *Saṅgha*, generosity, moral virtue, and the *devas*'⁴⁵. The famous commentator Buddhaghosa sees these as forms of mindfulness⁴⁶, hence as (formal) meditation, as they entail the remembering and bearing in mind of special qualities associated with the recollected objects. From a technical point of view, Buddhaghosa sees the various *anussatis* as able to take the mind to the state of access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), thus clearly considering them powerful meditative tools (albeit not able to take the meditator to full *jhāna* - *appanā*

⁴⁴ Harvey, 2008i: introduction.

⁴⁵ Harvey, 2008i: section 1.

⁴⁶ Ñāṇamoli, 1991: VII.1, p. 191.

samādhī)⁴⁷. Recollections are therefore seen as a form of *samatha* practice, as they lead to the temporary suspension of the hindrances, the arising of *jhāna* factors, though ‘not beyond access concentration, due to the deep or diffuse nature of the object.’⁴⁸

The Pure Land devotional worship and meditation practice of *nien-fo* (Chinese) or *nembutsu* (Japanese) is arguably the epitome of single-minded, concentrated and meditative mind/heart chanting and recitation training to develop positive mind qualities (faith, mindfulness, concentration, tranquillity, joy, energy, resolve) and undermine negative ones (torpor, agitation, mind scattering, doubt, worry), hence aiding the process of *citta-bhāvanā* towards loftier states of mind. While Pure Land recitation of the Buddha’s name can be regarded as mostly a form of *śamatha* practice, ‘its deeper phases bring in *vipaśyanā* elements,’⁴⁹ thus yoking together the two main meditation paths described in the previous section and representing ‘useful skilful means for spiritual development’⁵⁰, in alignment with our thesis of the interlinked nature of meditation and chanting on the Buddhist path.

Chanting can also be regarded as a form of *citta-bhāvanā* inasmuch as ‘it contributes to the systematic nurturing and growing of good qualities’⁵¹, especially the *jhāna* factors⁵², the five

⁴⁷ ‘But owing to the profundity of the Enlightened One’s special qualities, or else owing to his being occupied in recollecting special qualities of many sorts, the *jhāna* is only access and does not reach absorption’, *ibid.*, VII, 66, p. 209.

⁴⁸ Harvey, 2008c: section 2.

⁴⁹ Harvey, 2008i: section 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Harvey, 2008j: introduction.

⁵² The five *jhāna* factors (*jhānaṅgas*) are: *vitakka* (applied thought), *vicāra* (sustained thought or examination), *pīti* (joy), *sukha* (happiness) and *citta-ekaggatā* (one-pointedness of mind).

spiritual faculties⁵³ and the seven factors of awakening. With regards to the *jhāna* factors, chanting can be seen as developing:

- *vitakka* and *vicāra*, because it is necessary to apply and sustain one's mental application and examination whilst examining the words, pronunciation and sound of the chant;
- *pīti* and *sukha*, which can arise from a serene and flowing chant;
- *citta-ekaggatā*, as chanting requires and promotes single-minded concentration on it.

With regards to the five faculties, chanting can be seen as cultivating:

- *saddhā*, as it inspires heartfelt trust and faith in the Lord Buddha and his *Dharma*;
- *virīya*, as it calls for sustained energetic effort to vocalise the chant;
- *sati*, as it requires and strengthen mindfulness of words, rhythm, meaning as well as heedful attention to remain in harmony with other chanters;
- *samādhi*, promoting calm focus on the chant;
- *paññā*, reflecting on the meaning of the chant and allowing oneself to 'drop away' and being 'chanted by the chant'.

Finally, with regards to the seven factors of awakening, chanting develops:

⁵³ The five faculties (indriyas) are: *saddhā* (Pali, Skt. *śraddhā*): inspiring and serene heartfelt trust, *virīya* (Pali, Skt. *vīrya*): strength/vigour, *sati* (Pali, Skt. *smṛti*): mindfulness, *samādhi* (Pali and Skt.): unified concentration, *paññā* (Pali, Skt. *prajñā*): wisdom.

- *sati*, for the reasons illustrated above;
- *dhamma-vicaya*, with the attention on uttering all the syllables correctly;
- *viriya* and *pīti*, for the reasons illustrated above;
- *passaddhi*, *samādhi* and *upekkhā*, generating serene, calm and peaceful vibrations in the mind/heart of the chanter.

Study

The third element in our triad of complementary and mutually strengthening practices towards the Buddhist goal of liberation is study, which can be considered as integral part of the *citta-bhāvana* training.

In A.V.113-16, the Buddha speaks of “two series of conditions, in each of which one item acts as a “nutriment” to the next and, “when complete”, to “complete” the next”⁵⁴. One of these sequences starts with associating with genuine people, **hearing the true *Dhamma* [bold mine]** ...⁵⁵ until one is released by knowledge, thus attaining *Nirvāṇa*, the Buddhist goal *par excellence*. Mindfully listening to the *Dhamma* and diligently reflecting upon its profound meaning is highly recommended by the Buddha himself⁵⁶, thus regarded as a necessary preparation for

⁵⁴ Harvey, 2008b: section 4.

⁵⁵ The full sequence runs as follows (quoting from Harvey 2008b: section 4): 1. Associating with genuine people; 2. hearing the true *Dhamma*; 3. trustful confidence/faith; 4. systematic attention; 5. mindfulness and clear awareness; 6. guarding of the sense-faculties; 7. right conduct of body, speech and mind; 8. the four foundations of mindfulness (mindfulness of body, feelings, mind-states and *dhamma*-patterns; 9. the seven factors of awakening; 10. release by knowledge.

⁵⁶ See Anālayo, 2003: 114, note 96: ‘A III 87. The same description, however, comes up at A III 178 in a recommendation to reflect on the *Dhamma*, demonstrating that the Buddha did not categorically rejected such theoretically inquiry, but that his criticism was directed against neglect of the practice.’

and furthering of one's own understanding of the teachings, which can be seen as developing *sammā ditṭhi* (right view), the first path-factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Study can also be connected with the awakening-factor of *dhamma-vicaya* (discrimination of *dhammas*), which is in turn 'directly related to wisdom (*paññā*) in the Nikāyas,⁵⁷ hence corroborating the idea that mindful study is an essential element to cultivate the Buddhist threefold path (*sīla, samādhi and paññā*). Moreover, investigating the *Dhamma* is equivalent⁵⁸ to reflecting upon the Four Noble Truths, the quintessential succinct exposition of the Buddha's teaching.

In the Theravāda commentarial tradition, studying the *dhamma* is seen as fulfilling *dhamma* as *pariyatti*⁵⁹, again highlighting the importance of learning and understanding the teachings from an intellectual⁶⁰ perspective too. In both Theravāda and Northern tradition, the study of the *Abhidhamma/Abhidharma* is regarded 'as an auxiliary to meditation, providing the theoretical framework for practice... The *Abhidharma*, when viewed in the light of the Buddha's basic teachings, offers a psychology of enlightenment, a road map to the end of suffering'⁶¹, thus fulfilling the role of a crucial element on the Buddhist path towards *Nirvāṇa* (although intellectual analysis has to be done in a context of mindfulness and calm).

⁵⁷ Gethin, 2001: 147.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 151: 'A stock phrase describes the special *dhamma*-teaching of Buddhas (*buddhānaṃ sāmukkaṃsika dhamma-desanā*) as suffering (*dukkha*), arising (*samudaya*), cessation (*nirodha*), path (*magga*). This is, of course, a shorthand for the four noble truths. So *dhamma* is the four noble truths.'

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 152: 'Thus *dhamma* is understood as *pariyatti* or *āgama*, that is to say, *dhamma* as manifested in the teaching of the Buddha and recorded in the canonical literature which is to be learnt and mastered.'

⁶⁰ See the importance of the *Abhidhamma* and its commentaries in the Buddhist tradition of meditation.

⁶¹ Chapple, 1996: 90-1.

In Northern Buddhism, doctrines are even listed as meditation objects to develop *śamatha*⁶² (whilst in Theravāda they only pertain to *vipassanā* practice). Study of doctrinal points is emphasised especially in the Tibetan dGelugs school, both to develop *śamatha* and to further insight by ‘analytic meditations’⁶³.

Finally, I believe that even the practice of Tantric visualizations of the *yidam* (chosen deity) within the sacred precinct of a *maṇḍala* could be included in the category of meditative study, as it requires a superbly complex recollection of minute visual details which must be patiently analysed and then ritually evoked⁶⁴.

Conclusion: are any of these dispensable with?

In this essay, I have attempted to illustrate how formal meditation, chanting and study are harmoniously and interdependently connected on the Buddhist path to Awakening, each one informing and supporting the other in a sophisticated and recursively virtuous spiral of deepening understanding, and of realization of direct spiritual knowledge. These three elements create an amplifying interference⁶⁵ pattern that accelerates the journey from the

⁶² See Kamalaśīla’s *Bhāvanākrama*, in Beyer, 1974: 106.

⁶³ See Harvey, 2008h: section 3: ‘In Northern Buddhism, *vipaśyanā* is used as a term for high levels of insight developed by “analytic meditations”. It is developed especially in the “Path of Preparation”, which prepares the meditator for a direct seeing of reality. While direct knowledge of emptiness is not yet attained, the meditator practices with the firm intellectual conviction of emptiness of all.’

⁶⁴ ‘The process of tantric visualization can be strikingly dynamic. Visual elements transform into one another, or are transformed out of mantras, also visualised. Light rays emanate from and return into deities, acting for the benefit of and transforming the world. The central figure or figures generally dominate a tantric visualization, and their appearance may be prescribed in minute detail’, Williams, 2000: 226.

⁶⁵ ‘One of the things that makes holography possible is a phenomenon known as interference. Interference is the crisscrossing pattern that occurs when two or more waves, such as waves of water, ripple through each other... The complex arrangement of crests and troughs that results from such collisions is known as an interference pattern’, in Talbot, 1991: 14.

conditioned world of *Samsāra* to the unconditioned bliss of *Nirvāṇa*. A paradigmatic example of their symphonic play together could be the experience of a Sōtō Zen *Sesshin: zazen shikantaza* (formal meditation practice), morning and evening services with the chanting of *dhāraṇīs*, listening to the Master's *teishos* (*Dharma* talks) and individual as well as collective study.

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