

On Samadhi

By Bhante Anuttara

In this article, I would like to discuss Samadhi, the sixth of the seven Awakening Factors. Many of you have likely heard the term Samadhi before. In fact, Buddha himself frequently used this term, emphasizing its essential role in his teachings aimed at liberation from suffering.

Various translations and interpretations have been offered for the meaning of Samadhi. While the most common translation is "concentration," such a rendering has its limitations in fully conveying the true essence of Samadhi due to the typical nuances and implications associated with the word "concentration." The term Samadhi is derived from "Sam" + "adhi," with the original basic meaning of "Sam" being related to collectiveness, connectedness, and combination.

In this sense, I find "unification" to be a suitable translation for Samadhi. Sometimes, Zen masters depict a circle to symbolise the ultimate state they experience through deep meditation. I think this is a good symbol for the term Samadhi, because it shows a sense of unification and emptiness as accompanying characteristics.

According to Buddha, correct Samadhi progresses through four stages known as Jhana (deep meditative states). The first Jhana is relatively coarse due to its various elements, but it becomes simplified and refined until only one-pointedness remains in the fourth Jhana. It's important to understand "one-pointedness" correctly. The Pali word for it is "ekaggata," where "eka" means one and "agga" means the top or summit. Thus, "ekaggata" can be understood as the peak of the mountain. When you reach the fourth Jhana, you are at the summit, able to see all around without barriers. This summit view symbolises understanding and realisation of the truth.

The journey towards awakening or enlightenment is likened to climbing a high mountain. Before starting this journey, we were in the valley, dark and damp. Each cautious step on the track represents mindfulness (1), Examining the map and identifying milestones signifies the investigation of phenomena (2). Effort and energy

(3) are necessary, followed by joy (4) and tranquility (5). This process leads us to the peak, Samadhi (6). And at the summit, one experiences equanimity (7), which we'll discuss next time.

In any case, it's crucial to develop Samadhi, as repeatedly recommended by Buddha based on his own experience. There are many ways to practice Samadhi, with one common and reliable method called mindfulness of breathing. In his discourse on mindfulness of breathing (Anapanasati Sutta), Buddha guides us step by step to attain Samadhi and Insights by using the terms which we have already discussed above.

Are you ready to embark on this journey upwards?

With metta,
Bhante Anuttara