Early Buddhist Practice of Meditation

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Abstract

The practice of meditation is an essential part of the Buddhist path leading to emancipation. This brief essay outlines the fundamentals of meditation, as understood by the Theravada tradition, in its two aspects: samatha (calming) and vipassanā (insight). The discussion is based exclusively on Pāli texts with little input from the author himself.

The Purpose and Function of Meditation

The Buddha realized that human existence, from birth to death, is suffering and unsatisfactory. In early Vedic teachings we find that the seers were looking for a lasting solution to the problem of death. They thought of a state of immortality (āmatā) or deathlessness, but missed the point that death was the inevitable outcome of birth. It was indeed the Buddha’s insight that we die because we are born! He understood that if we could only stop birth (jāti), death would also be stopped. While the Buddha’s focus is on the cause (birth = jāti), as opposed to the effect (death = maraṇa), his vision included both ends of the spectrum—“birthlessness” (ajātam) as well as deathlessness (āmatāṃ). He clearly saw the causal link, namely that deathlessness is achieved only through birthlessness.

In Brāhmaṇic thought, immortality or deathlessness is achieved through union with the Brahman, the creator God who is identified as the cosmic principle (jagad ātman). The end of sorrow is considered to be this unification of the individual soul with that of the cosmic. The Buddha, however, maintains that the gods, including Brahma, the Creator,
are subject to impermanence, and that, consequently, union is not the solution, as we are born again and again, bound by the fetters of \textit{saṃsāra}.

Meditation is the technique by which one works him or herself out of this cycle of birth and death (\textit{saṃsāra}). Referring to practices purporting to lead to deathlessness, the Buddha says that they are a kind of external treatment. In the \textit{Brāhmaṇa Vagga} of the \textit{Dhammapada}, we find that some ascetics and brāhmaṇas treat the cause externally as opposed to internally.\textsuperscript{2} The Buddha sees that the external treatment of an internal problem is not the solution. Internally we are not sound (\textit{abbhantaram te gahanam}, Dhp. 394). The Buddha thus devised a scheme of introspection by which one may look into and investigate one’s own mind, which leads to liberation. This investigation involves understanding the real nature of phenomena.

\textbf{The Centrality of Meditation in the Buddhist Path}

The practice of meditation as a means of mental purification was not unknown in India during the time of the Buddha. It was emphasized by most recluses as well as Brahmins. It was considered to be an essential part of Indian religions. The term \textit{yoga}—literally translated as “yoking” or joining, and generally associated with the union of the mind to divinity or supreme reality—was one of the popular terms for meditation. It does not, however, occur in Buddhist texts in the sense of \textit{meditation}. Instead, the Buddha uses the term \textit{bhāvanā}, in the sense of mental development.\textsuperscript{3}

According to early Buddhist scriptures, there were ascetics and brahmins (\textit{saṃnābrāhmāṇa}) who practiced meditation during the time of the Buddha. In the Ariyapariyesana Sutta\textsuperscript{4} the Buddha relates how, prior to his Enlightenment, he sought out two teachers who claimed to practice the highest form of meditation. Āḷāra Kāḷāma taught the third stage of “non-form meditation” (\textit{arūpa jhāna}), namely, “the state of emptiness” (\textit{ākincaññāyatana}). Uddaka Rāmaputta taught the fourth stage, namely, “the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (\textit{nevasaṅñā-nāsaṅñāyatana}). The Buddha, of course, saw both of them as falling short of the liberation he sought.

In the course of a dialogue with the Jain Saccaka, the Buddha discusses a method of physical and mental training (\textit{kāyabhāvanā} and \textit{cittabhāvanā}) practiced by earlier teachers.\textsuperscript{5} The Brahmajala Sutta in the Digha Nikaya refers to a \textit{cetosamādhī} “mental concentration,” a form of meditation practiced by some ascetics and brahmins for the development of concentration of mind that, through exertion and application of effort
and right attention, produces supernatural results, such as the capacity for recollection of past existences (pubbenivāśanussati).\(^6\)

It is clear from this short survey that during the sixth century BCE, the practice of meditation was well established and highly recognized by Indian religious teachers. The Buddha had a good background with which to formulate an extremely advanced type of meditation that can be distinguished from the practices of other teachers, incorporating aspects such as samatha bhāvanā (tranquility or calming meditation).\(^7\)

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya provides a lucid explanation of the application of vipassanā or insight meditation, especially the practice of ānāpāṇa sati, establishing mindfulness of breathing in and out. This Sutta also teaches one how to develop insight into one’s own body (kāya) in order to overcome the wrong view of the body and one’s attachment to it.

The Buddhist path of purification is generally called a “gradual practice” (anupubba sikkhā), “gradual doing” (anupubba kiriyā), and “gradual path” (anupubba paṭipadā).\(^8\)

It is clear that the Buddha holds that one cannot attain wisdom at the very beginning of the practice. Meditation, therefore, needs to be seen as a necessary component of the Buddhist gradual path.

**Samatha and Vipassanā: Two Types**

The Buddha practiced two methods of meditation: samatha (calming) and vipassanā (insight). The former was already in practice, as shown by the two teachers he had sought out. It is, however, in the conviction that the defilements cannot be totally removed by following the samatha practice that he left them. By this practice of calmness of mind, the practitioner is only able to suppress defilements, but is not able to eliminate them.

The second insight (vipassanā) method, which is the Buddha’s own innovation, is intended to remove all of the defilements, leaving no residue. Through insight (vipassanā) practice, the meditator realizes the truth of phenomena as really they are. This is the only way to realize nibbāna.

The tranquility meditation (samatha) is capable of achieving only the jhānic level of experiences. The residue of the unwholesome is not completely destroyed, but remains in a latent state. This means that they can arise again if the meditator is heedless. It is only by combining samatha with vipassanā that one successfully attains to Arahanthood, thus acquiring knowledge and wisdom. These Arahants are called paradhammakusala, or ubhatobhāgavimutta, “emancipated through
mind and wisdom” (cetovimutta and paññāvimutta) in the sense that they are, like the Buddha, capable of giving instructions to others. This category of Arahants is also called païsambhidãpatta, depicting those who have attained the mastership in analysis. Additionally, there are those who become Arahants solely through the practice of insight, without the tranquility method. Such individuals are called sadhannamakusala, or paññãvimutta translated as “emancipated through wisdom.” They are also called sukkavipassaka, or “one who has exhausted defilements through insight.”

**Morality (sîla) and the Practice of Meditation**

Sîla (“morality or virtue”) plays an important role in the practice of meditation. The Buddha’s way of teaching was very systematic. He adopted a step-by-step method (ãnupubbãkathã). When addressing the average person, for example, he usually began by explaining the advantages of dãna (“giving or liberality”) as a way of overcoming attachments, i.e., the desire for clinging to or grasping our possessions, a very strong human impulse that hinders spiritual progress. Next, he spoke about morality (sîla kathã), the foundation for the spiritual practice. This moral foundation helps to overcome the psychological problems one encounters, such as sensual desire (kæmacchanda), ill-will (vyãpãda), sloth and torpor (thînamîdha), restlessness and agitation (uddhacca kukkucca), and skeptical doubt (vîcîkechã). Morality, therefore, comes to be called, in Buddhist texts, the foundation of concentration.10 Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (“The Path of Purification”), the classical exposition of the Buddhist practice leading to emancipation in *Theravada* Buddhism, emphasizes that “the wise man, having well established in the morality while developing the mind and wisdom, …disentangles this entanglement” (sîle patiãhãya naro sapaãhno, citãm pañãhãca bhãvayãm…so imãm vijaûye jaããm,11 namely, the Såmsãric existence.

In the first thirteen Suttas of the Dîgha Nikãya (as above), sîla is divided into three grades (1) “small virtue” (cîla sîla), (2) “middle virtue” (majjhima sîla) and (3) “great virtue” (mahã sîla).12 Additionally, the practice of sîla has three aspects: (1) refraining (2) forsaking, and (3) developing.13 The first refers to refraining from vices such as those listed under the Five Precepts— killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxicants. To forsake is to get rid of whatever weapons used for killing beings in violation of the precepts. The developing aspect is spreading loving kindness and compassion towards humans, animals, property, and the environment.
We find a new way of explaining sīla in the *Visuddhimagga* (above), elucidated in a twofold way: (1) refraining or abstaining from harmful actions (vārita sīla), and (2) practicing or doing good things (cārita sīla). The first relates to refraining from what is morally unskillful and harmful to individuals, including the doer and society as a whole. The second includes the practice of the brahmavihāra “noble abidings”—mettā (“loving kindness”), karuṇā (“compassion”), muditā (“sympathetic joy”) and uppekṣā (“equanimity”). For the ordained, mundane activities such as sweeping and cleaning of the monastery also fall into this category.

Elsewhere in the *Visuddhimagga*, now in relation to the ordained *saṅgha*, Buddhaghosa divides sīla into four Moral Disciplines: pātimokkha restraint (pātimokka saṅvāra sīla), sense restraint (indriya saṅvāra sīla), purity of livelihood (ājīva pārisuddhi sīla), and of use of requisites (paccaya sannissita sīla).

The “moral discipline of restraint according to the Pātimokkha” is the scrupulous observance of the 227 precepts (sikkhā) of the Pātimokkha, intended for the ordained *saṅgha* for their training and discipline. These rules can be regarded as the backbone of monastic discipline.

The “moral discipline of sense restraint” refers to the exercise of restraint over the sense faculties when contacting external and internal objects with the respective sense faculties, or the “doors” (dvāra) of sense faculties. Just as anyone can enter a house when the doors are open, any object can enter ones mind and contaminate it when the sense faculties are open. The Buddha advises his disciples not to apprehend signs or particulars on seeing a visible object with the eye. If the eye faculty was left unguarded, unprofitable states of covetousness and grief might invade. By guarding his or her sense doors, the meditator stops conceptualizing and pondering over the object; instead, he or she simply takes it in as a mere object. The same, of course, applies to other sense faculties, such as the auditory, the gustatory, etc.

The “moral discipline of purity of livelihood” is the avoidance of wrong means of living. The *saṅgha* (to whom the 227 precepts apply) are not to engage in such things as divination, astrology, the practice of medicine, political talk, and so forth. One is to be perpetually honest in every way regarding one’s living and practice.

The “moral discipline concerning the use of the requisites” (including food, robes, shelter and medicine) calls upon the *saṅgha* to reflect upon such requisites as being solely for sustenance, and not for worldly benefits. When eating food, one should thus reflect that this food is “not for sport, not for energy, not for an attractive body, nor for a better complexion.”
vibhūsanāya), but is only for survival and spiritual advancement. Likewise, the robes and clothes are not for the purpose of “beautifying the body, not for attraction,” but only for “guarding the body from flies, mosquitoes, cold...” (yāvadeva sītassa paṭighātāya, unhassa paṭighātāya, daṃsakasavātātapsirinṣapasaṃphassānaṃ paṭighātāya, yāvadeva hiri kopīnaphicchādanatthāṇī...)\(^{17}\)

**Necessity of a Teacher or a Friend**

It is extremely important to have a teacher or friend\(^{18}\) as an instructor from whom one may obtain an appropriate object of meditation fitting the temperament of the meditator, receive instruction in the methods of developing it, and to guide one along the path. The practice of meditation leading to jhāna (“absorptions”) as well as vipassāna (“insight”) is an arduous course. Therefore, meticulous care has to be taken. Precise techniques and skillfulness are necessary to overcome the pitfalls one may face in the course of the practice. It is for this reason that an experienced teacher, instructor, or at least a friend, is needed to consult from time to time when the need arises, as well as to pass on his or her store of accumulated knowledge and experience.

**A Place for Meditation**

After receiving instruction from a teacher or friend and arriving at a suitable subject of meditation appropriate to one’s character (temperament), the selection of a suitable place for meditation has to be performed carefully as well. In early Buddhist texts we find references to secluded places like mountains, cemeteries, caves, forests, and under trees as appropriate for meditation. The Anguttara Nikāya lists the following five characteristics of such a place:

1. It should not be too far from or too near a village that can be relied on as an alms resort and should have a clear path.
2. It should be quiet and secluded and be free from inclemency of weather and from harmful insects and animals.
3. It should be close to an alms-resort (gocarāgama) to obtain the four requisites robes (cīvara), food (pindapāta), shelter (senāsana), and medicine (gilānapaccaya) while dwelling there.
4. It should have an easy and ready access to learned elders and spiritual friends who can consult when problems arise regarding meditation.
5. ?
Getting Rid of Impediments

The impediments (paññibodha) are a problem too for the practice of meditation. These are mainly related to the four requisites, namely robes, an alms bowl, dwelling place and medicine, though not exclusively so. The *Visuddhimagga* lists ten such impediments in the way of meditation:

1. Impediment of dwelling (āvāsa-paññibodha),
2. Impediment of family (kula-paññibodha),
3. Impediment of gain (lābha-paññibodha),
4. Impediment of community (gana-paññibodha),
5. Impediment of work (kamma-paññibodha),
6. Impediment of travel (addhāna-paññibodha),
7. Impediment of relatives (paññīti-paññibodha),
8. Impediment of sickness (ābādha-paññibodha),
9. Impediment of study (gantha-paññibodha) and
10. Impediments of supernormal powers (iddhi-paññibodha).

Getting rid of Hindrances

Hindrances are a serious impediment in meditation. In the Pāli Nikāya texts regarding the first *jhāna* there is a formula which says, “…secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states of mind, he enters and dwells in the first *jāhana*, which is accompanied by applied thought and sustained thought with rapture and happiness born of seclusion.” (*So vividce’va kāmehi vividca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajam pītisukham paṭhamajjhānāṃ upasampajja viharati.*) In this formula, the sensual pleasures and unwholesome states of mind refer to the hindrances (nīvaraṇa). There are, to repeat (see above), five hindrances (pañcānīvaraṇa): sensual desire (kāmacchanda), ill-will (vyāpāda), sloth and torpor (thīnamiddha), restlessness and worry (or worry and flurry) (uddhaccakukkucca), and doubt (vicikicchā). These five hindrances not only obstruct the *jāhānic* meditation, but also the whole process of emancipation. Referring to them, the Buddha says that these are obstructions, hindrances, corruptions of the mind, and weakeners of wisdom. Furthermore, these five hindrances are causes of blindness and loss of vision, unknowing and opposed to wisdom, aligned with vexation, and leading away from Nibbāna.

The first hindrance, sensual desire, is explained in terms of the five sensual pleasures: desire for agreeable forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tangibles. These are desirable, lovely, pleasing, sensuous and
stimulative of lust. The hindrance ill-will, or hatred, is the aversion directed towards disagreeable persons or things. Sloth and torpor is the dullness or the very laziness that obstructs the motivation for meditation. In the Dhammasangani, the first book of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, “sloth” is explained as dullness and mental inertia, and “torpor” as indolence. “Restlessness and worry” is explained as two states, even though they are taken together. Thus the “restlessness” (uddhacca) is the excitement, agitation and disquietude. Worry (kukkucca) is the sense of guilt aroused by moral transgressions. Doubt (vicikicchā) is the uncertainty regarding the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha and the training.

When these hindrances are eliminated, a sense of exultation arises in the mind of the meditator. With that exultation, joy is born. With this joy, the body becomes serene and calm, and it gives rise to happiness. With this background, the mind becomes well concentrated. This is the beginning of samādhi (concentration).

The Process

The function of meditation is salvific and its purpose, from a Buddhist point of view, is to bring an end to birth. To be destroyed in this process are the following ten fetters, literally “binding factors” (saṁyajana):

1. Wrong view of personality or soul (sakkāya diṭṭhi)
2. Baseless doubt (vicikicchā)
3. Clinging to rites and rituals (siḷabbata parāmāsa)
4. Sensual desire (kāmarāga)
5. Ill will or hatred (vyāpāda)
6. Lust for fine material existence (rūparāga)
7. Lust for immaterial existence (arūparāga)
8. Conceit (māna)
9. Restlessness (uddhacca)
10. Ignorance (avijjā)

Fetters are divided into two categories. The first five: wrong view, doubt, clinging to rites and rituals, sensual desire, and ill will, relate to the lower plane. The last five: lust for fine material existence, lust for immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness and ignorance, relate to the upper plane. By the practice of meditation the fetters are destroyed and the practitioner transcends, step by step; thus he comes to be freed from fetters.

There are four levels in removing the fetters. At the first level of realization, namely, “stream entran,” (sotāpanna), the first three fetters
are destroyed completely without residue. At the second level, “once-returner” (sakadāgāmī), fetters four and five are subdued to a greater degree, to be eliminated completely at the third level, or “non-returner” (anāgāmī). The last five fetters are completely destroyed only at the fourth level of realization (arahant).

The Subjects of Meditation

The systematized list of subjects of meditation is comprised of forty for samatha (calming) practice and three for vipassanā (insight) meditation. These are called kammaṭṭhāna, literally meaning “a place of work”—kamma “work” + ṭhāna “place.” The term ārammaṇa, “object of meditation,” is also found occurring in the Nikāya texts to convey the same meaning.

Kammaṭṭhānas:

The forty subjects of meditation prescribed for the samatha method are classified in the Visuddhimagga under the following seven categories:

1. Ten kasiṇas (devices): (1) earth, (2) water, (3) fire, (4) air, (5) blue, (6) yellow, (7) red, (8) white, (9) space and (10) consciousness. These are used as supports of concentration.
2. Ten foulnesses (asubha), all relating to a dead body: (1) swollen or bloated corpse (uddhumātaka), (2) livid or discolored corpse (vinīlaka), (3) festering corpse (vipubbaṅka), (4) fissured or cut up corpse (vicchedaka), (5) mangled or gnawed corpse (vikkhāyitaka), (6) scattered or dismembered corpse (vikkhītaka), (7) hacked and scattered corpse (hatavikkhītaka) (8) blood-stained corpse (lohitaka), (9) worm-infested corpse (pulavaka) and (10) a skeleton (atthika).
3. Ten recollections (anussati): (1) recollection of the Buddha, (2) recollection of the Dhamma, (3) recollection of the Saṅgha, (4) recollection of morality, (5) recollection of liberality, (6) recollection of gods (dēva), (7) mindfulness of the body, (8) mindfulness of breathing, (9) mindfulness of death and (10) mindfulness of tranquility.
4. Four divine abidings (brahma vihāra): (1) loving-kindness (mettā), (2) compassion (karuṇā), (3) sympathetic joy (muditā) and (4) equanimity (upekkhā). These are called the four “immeasurables” (appamaññā) because they should be
developed towards all sentient beings without qualification, and limitlessly.

5. Four immaterial states: (1) the base of boundless space, (2) the base of boundless consciousness, (3) the base of nothingness and (4) the base of neither perception nor non-perception. These correspond to the four immaterial jhānas called āruppa or arūpajjhāna (no-form absorptions).

6. The perception of repulsiveness of food (āhāre paṭikkūla saññā).

7. The four elements: earth, water, fire and air (catudhātu vavatthāna), being the analysis of the physical body into four great elements.

There are, however, at least four such lists in the Pāli Nikāya texts, commentaries and later works. As listed by Vajiranana in his Buddhist Meditation, they are: (1) the methods found in the Nikāyas, (2) the methods found in the Abhidhamma, (3) the methods found in the Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa, and (4) the methods found in the later works.24

The forty kammatthānas, or objects of meditation, have two functions according to commentarial interpretation. One is their ability to induce different levels of concentration, and the other their suitability for different temperaments.

One important factor regarding these meditational objects is that those recommended for insight practice are also found in the tranquility (samatha) method. This is most likely the result of combining the two methods into one single practice starting with samatha and culminating in vipassanā, leading to the realization of Nibbāna.

**Taking to meditation**

Once the prerequisites for meditation, namely eliminating the hindrances and other material problems that may inhibit the practice, exultation or joy (piti) arises. With the experience of this joy, the body becomes serene and calm (sukha). This is the foundation of happiness. With the feeling of happiness, the mind mounts to concentration. This is called the beginning of samādhi (concentration i.e. saṃ+ā+dhā = putting together, to concentrate). In its technical sense, it signifies both the state of mind and the method designed to induce that state. In the Majjhima Nikāya, samādhi is explained as a state of mind and a method of mental training.

Having selected an appropriate object fitting to one’s temperament with the help of the teacher or instructor, the meditator
goes to a secluded place and starts the practice. First he or she sits cross-legged, keeping the object of meditation, kasiṇa (above), up-front and meditates with a one-pointedness of mind (ekaggatā) on the object. In the process of the (meditation) practice, the first jhāna (absorption) is reached.

The First, jhāna is explained in the Suttas in the following manner:

Having become free from sense-desire (kāma) and unwholesome thoughts, he attains and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by reasoning (vitakka), investigation (vicāra), zest (piti), happiness (sukha) and one-pointedness (ekaggatā).

In this jhāna, for the first time, the meditator experiences joy and happiness and he suffuses, permeates, fills and pervades his body with the joy and happiness arising from it.

The First jhāna is reached along with the expulsion of five hindrances (above): “free from sense desire (kāma) and unwholesome thoughts (akusaladhammā).” With the joy and happiness of attaining the first jhāna, the meditator continues his practice with the determination of attaining the second jhāna, reaching it with the elimination of “reasoning” and “investigation” (vitakka, vicāra). By this second jhāna there remains only three factors: zest, happiness and one-pointedness. In the Nikāya texts, this second jhāna is generally characterized as being “born of samādhi (concentration) of the first jhāna.” Like in the first jhāna, the meditator suffuses, fills, permeates and pervades his body with zest and happiness. With continued Practice, and now with the cessation of zest, he remains in equanimity, mindful and self-possessed, experiencing bodily happiness. Thus he attains and abides in the third jhāna. There now remain only two factors: happiness and one-pointedness. He suffuses, fills, permeates and pervades his entire body with happiness.

Next, by eliminating the sense of happiness, the meditator attains to the Fourth jhāna, the last level of the Plane of Form (rūpāvacara), where there is neither happiness nor pain, but with the characteristic of equanimity and pureness of mindfulness.

In the Abhidhamma and commentarial traditions, a mention is made of a fifth jhāna25 that is not found in the early Nikāya teaching. This is no doubt a later development in the Theravada tradition. In the first jhāna we saw five jhānic factors: reasoning, investigation, zest, happiness and one-pointedness. When we reach the second, reasoning and investigation are eliminated, but in the third and fourth, only one
factor is eliminated at a time. The Ābhīdharmikas might have thought that this way of eliminating the jhānic factors is not compatible. Therefore, they may have created the fifth jhāna to make the process more balanced. For, according to this Abhidhamma explanation, at the first Jhānic level, only “reasoning” (vitakka) is eliminated.

Now the meditator, after attaining the first four jhāna, finds that they have their own limitations in that they are still of the material plane, and thus connected with gross matter and coarser than the next level of immaterial attainments (arūpajjhāna).

According to Nīkāya teaching, there are four formless or immaterial jhāna, resulting as they do by severing all contact with the objective world and developing the idea of emptiness (or nothingness—suññatā [Sanskrit: sūnyatā]) regarding the phenomenal world. With practice, the meditator attains to the Base of Boundless Space (akhānañcayatana). This has only the characteristic of one-pointedness common to all jhāna. According to Sutta teachings, when the meditator achieves this level, he removes the perception of matter (rūpasaññā), the perception of resistance (paṭighasaññā), the perception of variety (nānattasaññā) and develops the idea of infinite space.

The second immaterial absorption, The Base of Boundless Consciousness (vīññānañcayatana) is achieved by the meditator seeing the two defects of the Base of Boundless Space. It is still close to the fourth material absorption and is not as yet peaceful enough. The Pali Nīkāya phrase related to this jhāna is as follows: “By completely surmounting the base consisting of boundless space with the awareness of unbounded consciousness, he enters upon and dwells in the Base of Boundless Consciousness.” The object of this jhāna is consciousness.

The third formless jhāna is called the Base of Nothingness (ākīñcaññāyatana). In order to achieve this level, the meditator should see the two defects of the second immaterial jhāna: too close to the Base of Boundless Space, and gross compared to the Base of Nothingness. At this level of realization, he has the understanding of nothingness—everything is void.

The fourth level of formless absorption is characterized as Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception (nevasaññānāsaññāyatana). This is an extremely subtle level of realization compared to other levels, and is hence called the Peak of Perception (saññagga).

Along with the attainment of these jhāna, the meditator acquires fivefold special or super knowledges (pañca+abhiññā). These special knowledges are as follows:

1. Psychokinesis (iddhividha): the power or special ability to perform miraculous activities like walking on water without sinking,
traversing through the air, manifold manifestations of oneself, and
so forth.
2. Clairvoyance or divine eye (dibbacakkhu): the practitioner can see
things not only within the sphere of the normal eye faculty but
also things beyond the normal.
3. Clairaudience or divine ear (dibbasota): the meditator is able to
hear sounds and words far beyond the range of ordinary ear
faculty.
4. Telepathy or the ability to penetrate into the minds of others
(paracittavijāna): the ability to read other people’s minds.
5. Retrocognition (pubbenivāsānussati): the meditator can look into
his own past existences as well as that of others.

The method of meditation described thus far is of the samatha,
or tranquility type. The basic process, as well as the outcome, is one of
rendering the mind tranquil and calm. This method, however, is not
sufficient for achieving full emancipation, as the residues of
unwholesome cannot be removed completely by that practice. It is for
this reason that the Buddha developed the second method.
The objects of this latter method are Impermanence (anicca),
Suffering (dukkha) and No-Soul (anatta). When the meditator
completes this method, and realizes Nibbāna, he acquires the sixth
special knowledge called the Knowledge of the Extinction of Cankers
(āsvakkhayāna) in him.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, it can be said that meditation is an essential part of the
Buddhist practice leading towards Nibbānic realization. The Buddha
realized, in the process of his early practice of self-mortification, the
uselessness of external practices. Purificatory rituals are external and
cannot do anything regarding the removal of mental taints. Only the
practice of meditation, insight going beyond calming, can remove all
banes without residue and ensure Nibbāna.

1 Radhakrishnan, S., The Principal Upanishads, George Allen and Unwin,
2 “Kim te jñātihi dummedha kim te ajañjasātiyā abbhantaraṃ te gahanaṃ
bāhirāṃ parimajjasi.” Dhammapada, 394
3 It was the Sāṅkhya School of philosophy that developed the system of Yoga
practices (Vajiranana, Paravahera, Buddhist Meditation, Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia, 1975, p. 1).
4 Majjhima Nikāya, Vol. I. p. 163ff
"kiṃ te jaṭāhi dummedhā, kiṃ te ajinasātiyā abhantaraṃ te gahaṇaṃ bāhiraṃ parimajjasi." Dhammapada, 394

This practice may be similar to Yogic practice of meditation systematized by Patañjali.

"Idha bijkhave ekacco samanā vā brāhmaṇo vā ātappaṃ anvāya padhānaṃ anvāya anuyogam anvāya appamādāṃ anvāya sammā mansikāraṃ anvāya tathāīpaṃ cetosamādhiṃ phusati, yathā saṃāhite citte anekavihitāṃ pubbenivāsaṃ anussaratā." Digha Nikaya, Vol. I. p. 15

See the first thirteen discourses of the Digha Nikāya for a detailed description of the Buddhist practice of meditation.

See next for an elaboration of this and the next three.

The importance of a "good friend" (kalyāṇamitta) is emphasized by the Buddha in the practice of Noble Eightfold Path. Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. I. p.88

Digha Nikāya, Vol. I. p. 71

Digha Nikāya, Vol. I. p. 71

Anguttara Nikāya, Vol. I. p. 233

Visuddhimagga, ps. 170-310

Vajirananana, Paravahera, Buddhist Meditation, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1975, p. 66

Visuddhimagga, ps. 169-170 Buddhaghosa explains how to develop a Fifth Jhāna in his Visuddhimagga Dhammasangini, 160-175
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