

3. SAMATHA MEDITATION

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Namotassa bhagavato arahato sammā sam buddhassa

Wishing no return to rebirth, with my two palms flush on my forehead,
I bow to the Lord, the true Sammā sam Buddha, the Teacher unto Himself,
The Discoverer and the Great Propagator of the Dhamma.

Samādhi

As noted earlier, samādhi is concentration achieved by a method of samatha meditation, in which attention is focused on a single object for some length of time, repeated many times over, and over. The mind is like a young bull. A wild bull without tether will play around at will. Similarly the mind is free and moves at will; it moves incredibly fast. Thoughts move. Sensations move. Cravings move. Bouts of anger move. It is in a good mood now, but all of a sudden it gets wild and sour, releasing verbal and physical actions, equally moody and wild. If the bull is tied with a rope to an anchor in the ground, it will try wildly to break away. By thrashing it with a cane, it works itself up, going round the anchor, shortening the leash in the process, and finally getting exhausted, settles down on its belly and lies still. Similarly, the untrained mind tries to break away from focusing attention on a single object, perhaps without being able to achieve a focused attention for some time. (The mind is the bull; the attention, the rope; and the object, the anchor; the cane, the effort). Repeated attempts may fail some times. But it is not impossible. It calms down eventually to a standstill and stays fixed on the object. That is the concentration, samādhi, we are working for, with un-scattered attention and alertness, ready to be launched into the realms of either jhāna or vipassanā bhāvanā.

Put in another way, samādhi is a gathering in unity, as against scattering, of the mind and its associates, culminating in another mind-associate called *ekaggatā*, a state of the unified mind. It can be classed in different ways depending on properties and levels of jhāna in samatha bhāvanā. Take, for instance, focusing attention on a twelve-inch circle of earth about a yard away from the observer.

One, man or lady, may sit cross-legged or in any easy posture that can be maintained still for some length of time, and with the body upright, look fixedly at the circle with open eyes, saying in mind, 'Earth, earth, .., ..'. This practice of focusing attention on the real object is called *parikamma bhāvanā*, and the circle of real earth *parikamma nimitta*. The focused state of the mind on the *parikamma nimitta* is *parikamma samādhi*. Having achieved this samādhi, the eyes may be closed for some time and see if the circle remains in the mind's vision. Doing so on again, and off again, the 'vision' will stay with the observer's eyes closed. Seeing the object with eyes closed is called *uggaha nimitta*, the second vision sign. The sign is only a matter of cognitive signature, not real. The posture may be changed facing away, or shifting, or standing, but the sign will remain in the mind, primarily due to the power of samādhi. Once this *uggaha nimitta* is with the yogi, the yogi may change postures and continue meditation without looking at the earth circle again.

As meditation continues, and as the mind gets calmer and clearer, the samādhi ascends. Appearance of the sign changes, this time very clear, like looking into the plane of a clean mirror. The colors shine without a flaw, much more stable and still. This is called ‘*patibhāga nimitta*’. (This sign is still a product of the cognitive property of the mind-associate, termed *saññata*, with the support of the uggaha samādhi. It is not real.) The bhavanā level ascends higher to *Upacāra bhāvanā*. The concentration level now is known as *upacāra samādhi*, close to the first *rupāvacara jhāna*.

This samādhi is a useful tool for two purposes. One: the yogi can continue to work to achieve a higher samādhi, to step into further stages of samatha bhāvanā. Two: the yogi can switch to the practice of vipassanā bhāvanā to tread the Noble Eight-fold Path in search of the Four Noble Truths.

Upon continuation of samatha bhāvanā, the yogi’s samādhi ascends to *appanā samādhi* whereby the absorption is far more deeply etched out in yogi’s mind than that in the upacāya samādhi. And the five initial parts of jhāna levels appear distinctly, signifying the arrival at the first jhāna. The yogi may go on beyond this level and attain one or all levels of jhāna, classed as *rupāvacara jhāna*. The yogi may switch to vipassanā bhāvanā at any point of this journey in jhāna, if the yogi wishes. But, most commonly, the yogis at this stage of mental absorption are so full of joy and happy with their own jhāna experience that they don’t normally go for the Eight-fold Path. They may think they have arrived at Nibbāna. Or, they may opt for other higher jhānas to allow them entry into heavenly homes of the brahmas. Or else, they may just hope for meeting up with the next Buddha. This is a belief in ‘self’, the soul at the center of creation, the ‘indestructible’ *atta* for eternity, as distinct from non-self, *anatta*, which signifies that there is only the power of kamma that goes round samsarā.

Jhāna

Jhāna is one of the five kinds of Sammā Ditthi or the Right View, in Buddhism. Its practice and fruition had existed long before the advent of Buddhism, as evidenced by the two hermits, Kala Devila and Udaka from whom the Bodhisatta, Prince Siddattha took his instructions. He mastered all there was to learn about jhāna in a short period of time. He knew it was not the kind of Wisdom he was seeking. The contemplative prince was twenty-nine then. With the support and companionship of five other ascetics, the *pañcawaggi*, he tried all sorts of available methods, mainly in the way of self-mortification, which included stopping intake of food and breathing. It took him six years of seemingly insurmountable hardships, referred to as the *dukkaracariyā*, to decide finally that it was no way. There was no one to teach him. So, he took the Middle Way between the two extremes of indulgence in good things of life (he was a prince in Kapilavatthu) on one hand, and self-torture on the other. The Supreme Wisdom came to him as he sat meditating, relaxed but determined, under that banyan tree, as mentioned earlier.

‘Focused attention, kept at close quarters, is jhāna,’ Mahāsi Sayadaw had once explained of the definition of jhāna. Jhāna has five parts, analogous to the parts of a body. In samatha meditation, the first jhāna has all the five parts, namely:

- (1) *vitakka*, the effort that places the mind and its associates onto the plane of bhavana, time and again (this removes thinamiddha nivarana) - the repeated effort of putting the mind on parikamma nimitta;

- (2) *vicāra*, contemplation of the bhāvana, over and over (removes vicikicchā) -
the keeping of parikamma nimitta on the aruna;
- (3) *pīti*, taking delight in the bhāvana (removes vyāpāda) –
the feeling of unmatched joy;
- (4) *sukha*, feeling happy and content at the bhāvana (removes uddhacca
kukkucca)
- the feeling of completeness in satisfaction and happiness
- (5) *Ekaggatā*, unified state of all mind and mind associates (removes
kammacchanda nivarana) – the feeling of quietness, calmness, and
peace, only possible with the support of upekkha cetasika.

Once the first jhāna is attained, samādhi is so firm and strong that the yogi can maintain a stable concentration of the mind for long hours without a hitch. The yogi sees and assesses the five parts of jhāna, leaving not a single doubt. Being free from all five hindrances (nivaranas) the yogi can enter and stay in this jhāna over and over, say, for an hour, two hours, one day, two days, up to seven days. This state of the mind is filled with *rupāvacarajhāna kusala*¹, its kammic power is much stronger and nobler than *kāma kusala*, which is indulgence-oriented meritorious acts, such as wishful giving (*dāna*), and moral restraints (*silā*).

From the first jhāna, the yogi can rise into higher levels by conscious, but natural ejection of the first four jhāna parts one after another, the last part to stay in this jhāna being ekaggata with *upekkhā*². All rupāvacara jhānas require keeping the patibhāga nimitta in mental focus. The highest level is the fourth, but sometimes referred to as the fifth, depending on how the ejected parts are grouped as the jhāna level ascends. But they are of the same status. Take the fifth Jhāna, for reference. The yogi in this jhāna is not only free of the nivaranas, but has also discarded the four lower jhānas, so that he is completely free from all anxiety and his mind, extremely pure and peaceful. The yogi seems to have no breath in or out. This jhāna enhances entry into vipassanā with ease.

The different levels of jhāna, depending on parts-contents can be ‘classified’ as follows:

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| (1) The first jhāna has all 5 parts: | vitakka, vicāra, pīti, sukha, ekaggata |
| (2) The second jhāna has 4 parts | vicāra, pīti, sukha, ekaggata |
| (3) The third jhāna has 3 parts | pīti, sukha, ekaggata |
| (4) The fourth jhāna has 2 parts | sukha, ekaggata |
| (5) The fifth jhāna has 1 part + upekkhā | (upekkhā), ekaggatā |

The fifth jhāna, (or the fourth of the second grouping) has only one of the five jhāna-parts, the ekaggatā, the mind by itself being stationary at one point, which can only be maintained in conjunction with the support of upekkhā cetasika. It is to be noticed that only an ascetic can sustain these higher jhānas; householders, without a doubt, cannot achieve such a state of the mind for obvious reasons. What householders can achieve is upacāra samādhi. The mind at upacara samādhi (near the first jhāna) is found to be practically free of the five nivāraṇa elements, and pure enough to proceed into vipassanā bhāvanā. So, when we talk about meditation, we mean to take to the two methods (i.e.

¹ Noble merits of the mind compatible with the living mode of the brahmas (having bodily forms)

² A neutral state of the mind, with no likes or dislikes, no love or hate; equanimity.

samatha and vipassana) in conjunction, not in separation. We must remember that upacāra samādhi is the lowest essential absorption we need to start vipassanā meditation.

In appreciation of a unique manner of lavish devotion (*saddhā*) to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sanghā, together with the most incredible power of jhāna, the story of King Pokkusati of Tekkasilā (in Pakistan today) is often told:

He was a friend of Bimbisāra, king of Rājagaha. Rājagaha is an ancient kingdom now in the state of Bihar, India. Bimbisāra was a devout Buddhist. Once, Pokkusāti sent to Bimbisāra, via hand-delivery of some merchants, a gift of eight pieces of velvet material of the finest, most priceless quality. As a return gift of matching kindness and yet of unmatched value, Bimbisāra, being thoughtful of Tekkasilā as a country Buddhism had not reached, sent to Pokkusāti a gold plaque. On the plaque were inscribed the Properties of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and the method of in- and out-breath (mindfulness) method of meditation. He also invited the royal friend to come and join the Order of Sangha, to learn the Dhamma that would lead one onto the path to the end of the samsarā of birth, age, pains and rebirth, to break the turning of the wheel of suffering.

Pokkusāti took it to heart. It was delightful news to him. He went up to the top level floor of his palace, put on the robes of a hermit, lived alone, kept Sabbath and meditated, entering into in/out breath method of meditation. He soon became adept, and won the fourth level of rūpāvacara jhāna. He then had the eight pieces of *parikkharā*¹ bought, put the new robes on, came down the palace and went out of town, alone without letting any body know. When the palace came to know, they followed and entreated with him. Pokkusāti used his royal command by drawing a line and ordered them not to come past it.

He headed for Srāvattī where he would find the Buddha at His *vihāra* (monastery). He went on foot. As a matter of respect and devotion, he wore no footwear, and brought no umbrella. His feet soon became sore and swollen. When he met some ox-cart caravan of merchants, he would not take a ride, not to let his respect for the Buddha lax. He would not eat after noon. He would not lie down or sleep. He would sit under a shady tree, meditating, when caravan men rested, ate and slept. By virtue of the power of the fourth jhāna, he did not tire for want of sleep, and could ignore the heat and cold of the day and night. He was fresh and strong, starting out the following morning, walking at the rear of the caravan.

He saw and paid homage to the Buddha at Srāvattī. He heard the Lord give a discourse, and understood the dhamma with ease, being assisted by his jhāna. After the discourse, he gained anāgāmi magga, the third of the four-stage magga-phala.

A second kind of jhāna is *arūpāvacara jhāna*², which is of the same jhāna level as the former kind, but takes different *ārūna*³, the mental objects of attention. For instance, after attaining the rūpāvacara jhāna, concentrate on the body and think it is all filth and rot causing the feeling of aversion and repugnance. Think over and over how the body causes hunger, pain, heat and cold, sickness, insect bites, violent quarrels using weapons, and so on, till you come to a decision that it would be best for you to discard the body.

¹ Basic paraphernalia include the alms bowl, the robes and undergarments, a water filter etc.

² non-matter type of jhāna, the kind of jhāna *arūpa brahmas* assume – they have consciousness only, no form.

³ Mental objects, thoughts of things near and far. Objects that attract and meet with the eye, ear, nasal sensor, tongue, body and mind.

Contemplating thus repeatedly, and over and over, you want to part with the patibhāga nimitta and so leave rūpāvacara jhāna. And then you take the sky arūna, saying in mind ‘sky, sky ...’ over and over. That is the way to get into non-matter jhāna. The yogi who is in routine grip with this type of meditation will go to the heavenly homes of brahmas who have no bodily matter but the mind, consciousness or ‘spirit’ in the next life.

This covers, in brief, the subject of jhāna for the purpose of this booklet. The yogi, having the purpose of insight meditation in mind, would do well to understand that the brahmaic gati, the way to heavenly homes of brahmas, is not what he is after – brahmas may live in jhana apparently ‘for ever’, but they are still subject to the Law of Kamma, and when the limit of their jhāna-assisted life ends, they are bound to come down to earth or anywhere else as a result of their other kammic acts committed in some other past lives. This fact was evident in the case of the encounter of the Buddha with a Brahma, Baka by name. He had been thinking that he was the first, original being in the universe, that he created the worlds within it, animate as well as inanimate, and that he lived to eternity. The Buddha persuaded him to look back at his life and see if he could see any break or breaks in it, suggesting his rūpāvacara jhāna was so powerful as to have made him forget the breaks and think what he was thinking. Then, the brahma reflected and saw the breaks in the cycles of appearing, disappearing and reappearing of his being. The breaks were so short as to be imperceptible, making him think of continuity, the illusion of eternity. It ‘soon’ will end. Baka was fortunate to have met a Buddha. But what if he didn’t? Or, for that matter, what if other brahmas and intelligent beings do not? This is the primary reason why a proper retreat with proper coaching is absolutely necessary for the ordinary lay yogi in his meditation training, that is to say, not to be led astray and stay in the delightful experience of a jhāna in pursuing samatha meditation.

The Forty Methods

Buddha has indicated forty methods of samatha meditation, most of which, if not all, is useful in pursuit of the highest level of concentration, possibly leading to the highest Jhana. The methods can be grouped into several categories each as:

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| (a) <i>Brahma Cariya</i> , habits of the brahmas | four elements; |
| (b) <i>Kasina</i> , attention on neutral objects, | ten methods; |
| (c) <i>Asūba</i> , attention on obtrusive, repulsive objects, | ten methods; |
| (d) <i>Anussati</i> , attention on mindfulness, | ten methods; |
| (e) <i>Āruppa</i> , attention on arupavacarajhāna, | four methods; |
| (f) <i>Āhāra patikula saññā</i> , attention on food as repulsive,
offensive, rotten | one method; |
| (g) <i>Catūdātūva vatthāna</i> , attention on the four elements,
the fundamental elements of earth, fire, water and air | one method. |

These various *kamatthāna* methods are effective, provided selection is made to suit particular temperaments of the individuals. That was one reason why the Buddha had indicated them all. A second reason is for the practitioner to know the different, special benefits of the various methods.

3.1 *Brahma Cariya* (Noble Way of Life of Brahmas)

These are the four noble habits of the *brahmas*, beings of the twenty different levels of heavenly homes. So, they are often referred to as *brahma vihāra* (brahmaic way of life) and *brahmacora dhamma* (law of the brahmas). Noble humans, with purity of the mind such as attained in other samatha methods, are said to live in these habits as well. The foursome elements themselves are classed as samatha bhāvanā, and can raise a practicing yogi to the highest jhāna. A yogi in *metta jhāna* can enter into vipassanā bhāvanā with ease. *Mettā* is all-inclusive. Where *mettā* is, *karunā* and *muditā* are there. When *metta* has done its course, *upekkhā* takes over. *Upekkha* sees things as they are, and leaves things be, without invoking any *dosa*, the dissatisfaction or anger. *Dosa* is anti-*mettā*, the evil reaction itself regardless of justification.

The elements of brahma cariya are:

Mettā, universal goodwill or love applicable equally to all living beings;

Karuna, compassion and kindness to the less fortunate;

Muditā, sympathetic joy to see the more fortunate;

Upekkha, neutral state of mind, non-reactionary mind, equanimity

Details of the four elements follow.

(1) *Mettā*, often variously translated as love, loving kindness, good will, and benevolence, is the kind of good will that extends to all beings, no matter what, without an expectation of any kind in return. Love between parents and their children, between brothers and sisters, between man and woman, is love of a sort, which certainly would have good will, kindness and benevolence, natural, spontaneous and passionate. But it is not exactly the *brahmacora metta*, which is acquired with a constant practice of *mettā kammattāna*. It is the purest of all loves, possible only with the accompaniment of equanimity or *upekkhā*. It is the exact antithesis of *dosa* (anger, fear, jealousy, etc.). Some may say or do things in anger, fear or out of jealousy, justifying to themselves that they do these out of love. But these passions can be classed as *dosa*, the evil itself. *Dosa* can do anything, including the most terrible things in the world. And yet, it will justify itself!

Mettā is a noble affair of the mind that is collected and accumulated in the heart. It produces two results: one, the wish for general well being of all living beings; two, the ability to carry out the aims of that wish to materialize. Considering the possibility that all beings have once or more than once been blood-related to one another in the infinitely long untold past of the continuum of *samsarā* in one way or another, it should not be too difficult to think of all as one great family of beings, now related or unrelated, familiar or unfamiliar, large or small, long or short, fat or thin, near or far, all circulating in the thirty one planes of existence, throughout all the infinitely numerous universes. A lady across the street or somewhere one had met once might have been one's mother or sister. So is a gentleman, your brother, uncle, father, or son. The idea can be extended to all other people, as well as the entire living world. So it should not be too hard to pray or wish all beings to be in good health, happiness and freedom from all miseries and harms. Living

in this mode from moment to moment in one's day-to-day life is, in fact, living in mettā vihara. Carrying out one's daily chores in this spirit is the proof of what one has in one's heart.

There is the **Mettā Sutta** in the Pali language for the purpose of **mettā bhāvanā**. In Myanmar, many people learn and recite the Sutta in its original language. Most of us get into bhāvanā for a brief period of recitation in the vernacular.

A prerequisite of the bhāvanā is for the yogi to keep the five or eight moral precepts, The precepts precipitate in the yogi the virtues of moral righteousness not only in freedom from physical and verbal misconducts, but also in honesty, uprightness, and genuinely affable manners.

One may wish and extend mettā in one's own language, according to Mettā Sutta as follows (some make it in a hymn or in verse, sung in a slow, sonorous tone):

- # To all and sundry beings - *I wish you all the health and happiness, and freedom from all the harms and miseries;*
- # To all those with fear or no fear, *(ditto);*
- # To all those seen or unseen, *(ditto);*
- # To all those visible or not visible *(ditto)*
- # To all those near or far, *(ditto);*
- # To all those bound to be reborn or not to be reborn *(ditto);*
- # To all those big, small or middling *(ditto);*
- # To all those long, short or middling *(ditto);*
- # To all those fat, thin or middling *(ditto);*
- Let there be no belittling, no bullying, no oppression;
- Let there be no deceit,
- Let there be no wickedness;
- Let there be no ill will.

In addition, one may also wish and extend one's mettā in ten cardinal directions:

- To all those countless number of beings, *mankind, gods and all others* living to the **East**, *I wish you to be free of all harms, to be in good health and happiness, and enjoy the fruit of your blameless labor;*
- To all those countless number of beings, *mankind, gods and all others* living to the **West**, *I wish you to be free of all harms, to be in good health and happiness, and enjoy the fruit of your blameless labor;*
- To all those countless number of beings *(ditto)* living to the **North** *(ditto)*;
- To all those countless number of beings *(ditto)* living to the **South** *(ditto)*;
- To those countless number of beings *(ditto)* living to the **South-west** *(ditto)*;
- To those countless number of beings *(ditto)* living to the **North-east** *(ditto)*;
- To those countless number of beings *(ditto)* living to the **South-east** *(ditto)*;
- To those countless number of beings *(ditto)* living to the **North-west** *(ditto)*;
- To those countless number of beings living **above us and** thereabout *(ditto)*;
- To those countless number of beings living **below us and** thereabout *(ditto)*.

One may wish mettā to oneself, one's own family, relatives, friends, mentors and neighbors, whomever one feels good towards and wishes to express gratitude to. One may keep oneself in metta meditation any time of the day, anywhere, at home or whilst

traveling. Metta is often likened to money in the bank: you can give money out only if you have it there. So it is a matter of accumulation in the heart, like money in the bank.

A particular question may be asked as to whether the mettā radiation really reaches and benefits the object ‘person’ as the wisher has intended. Since upekkhā is there, the wisher is happy if he finds his wishes come true. But if not, his upekkhā dictates that it is nothing to be emotional about and he would do what he can to help the recipient of his mettā. What his mettā does not fail to do is that it dwells in his heart, accumulates and grows making his mettā even more radiant. This can be evident from his character. With mettā jhāna, he can enter into vipassanā with ease.

The mettā bhāvanā together with upekkhā would bring about the fourth rupāvacara jhāna. Immediate benefits of mettā bhāvanā can be listed as:

A. Personal benefits of mettā meditation:

- Sleeping well;
- Waking up and rising well;
- No bad dreams in sleep;
- Loved by humankind;
- Loved and assisted by gods;
- No danger from fire;
- No danger from poisons;
- No harm from weapons;
- Easy samādhi;
- Clear and radiant looks;
- Untroubled, peaceful death.

B. General benefits of mettā meditation:

- Mettā is an all-powerful tool in making the world a good place to live in;
- Mettā can calm down angry men, and make peace among enemies;
- There is nothing that mettā with forbearance cannot win over;
- Mettā triumphs over the enemies within and without¹;
- With mettā, there is no insoluble problem whatsoever.

(2) **Karunā** is compassion extended to a being in misery or poverty, wishing to raise the situation out of status quo. It can be extended to one and all, whoever is in a pitiable state. Wishing and saying so, and giving a helping hand as opportunity permits, over and over is *karunā bhāvanā*.

(3) **Muditā** is a gladness extended to a being in good health and prosperity, at any rate better than the one wishing the other, to go on being in good health, wealth and happiness, and never be the less. It can be extended to one and all. Wishing and saying so over and over is *muditā bhāvanā*.

(4) **Upekkhā** is a state of the mind that considers that every being is subject to his or her own kamma; there is nothing that anybody can do about it, but only kamma is

¹ Enemies within are greed, anger and ignorance; external enemies are slander, violent physical attacks, etc.

one's own property in such a way as 'one reaps what one sows.' It is a neutral state of the mind, equanimity itself. It can be extended to one and all. Viewing everything in such a neutral state of mind is *upekkhā bhāvanā*. (It is not passive, but proactive with other methods of meditation.)

The first three elements are interdependent, that is, meditation on one element is automatically in keeping with the other two. One *bhāvanā* can give rise to the first, second and third *rupāvacara jhāna*. After the third *jhāna*, with the assistance of *upekkhā bhāvanā*, one can rise to the fourth *rupāvacara jhāna*, or the fifth as the case may be. Physical, verbal and mental actions in conformity with all these four elements of brahma vihāra are the noblest of all actions that the monks and lay people alike can practice in their daily lives.

Mettā Kammatthana and kappa

It is in the scriptures that *kappa*¹ after *kappa* had appeared and disappeared in countless number of times in the immeasurably long untold past. Disappearances were the work of nature when mankind and earth-bound gods were so morally corrupt, hated one another so much and made brutal wars all over the earth's surface. World-destroying fires came and went. So also world-destroying floods came and went.

It is also mentioned in the scriptures that when the bad men were at war, the good people gathered, and at the fore-warning of good-natured gods, entered into *mettā bhavanā* and more, to attain *abhiññā*² that raised them high enough to be free of the fires or the floodwaters until such time as the earth was habitable again. Then, intelligent life forms such as that we know today began again.

Gotama Buddha, had said there were a great many Buddhas in those other *kappas* (they were humans and taught the same dhamma as He did), and three others in this present *kappa* before Him. They all taught men and gods *mettā*. *Mettā* is after all the only savior of mankind and the living world from bad moral conducts and from eventual 'extinction'. Extinction will never be, though, because the law of *kamma* is there. The law of duality, such as goodness and badness, is there. Just as there are evil lots, there are *kalyāna puthujjana*, the good worldly people. There are *ariyas*, the noble and holy ones. There come Buddhas occasionally, who teach *metta*, and how to gain freedom from suffering and moral wrongs, and finally (for many) to achieve *vimutti rasa*³ in the 'realm' of *Nibbāna*.

¹ Earth, the earthy world (which could be anywhere in the infinite number of *cakkāvala* or 'universes').

² Abilities to perform miracles, the unbelievable, products of mental states other than *jhāna*.

³ Emancipation, freedom from the cycle of birth, aging, suffering, death, and rebirth.