

The Paṭṭhāna (Conditional Relations) and Buddhist Meditation: Application of the Teachings in the Paṭṭhāna in Insight (Vipassanā) Meditation Practice

*Kyaw, Pyi. Phyo
SOAS, London*

This paper will explore relevance and roles of Abhidhamma, Theravāda philosophy, in meditation practices with reference to some modern Burmese meditation traditions. In particular, I shall focus on the highly mathematical Paṭṭhāna, Paṭṭan in Burmese, the seventh text of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, which deals with the functioning of causality and is regarded by Burmese as the most important of the Abhidhamma traditions. I shall explore how and to what extent the teachings in the Paṭṭhāna are applied in insight (vipassanā) meditation practices, assessing the roles of theoretical knowledge of ultimate realities (paramattha-dhammā)¹ in meditation. In so doing, I shall attempt to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical aspects of Buddhist meditation.

While scholars writing on Theravāda meditation - Cousins,² King³ and Griffiths⁴ for example - have focused on distinction between insight meditation (vipassanā) and calm meditation (samatha), this paper will be the first to classify approaches within vipassanā meditation. Vipassanā meditation practices in contemporary Myanmar can be classified into two broad categories, namely, the theoretical based practice and the non-theoretical based practice. Some Burmese meditation masters, Mohnyin Sayadaw Ven. U Sumana (1873-1964)⁵ and Saddhammaransī Sayadaw Ven. Ashin Kuṇḍalābhivaṃsa (1921-) and Pa-Auk Sayadaw Ven. Āciṇṇa (1934-) for example, teach meditators to have theoretical knowledge of ultimate realities. While these meditation masters emphasize theoretical knowledge of the ultimate realities, other meditation masters such as the Sunlun Sayadaw Ven. U Kavi (1878-1952) and the Theinngu Sayadaw Ven. U Okkatha (1912-1973) insist on actual meditation practice, i.e. meditation sittings, without any prior theoretical training.⁶ My investigation in the present paper will focus on the theoretical-based meditation practice.

In the eyes of Burmese Buddhists, the philosophical teachings in the Abhidhamma play a crucial role in meditation practices. Kornfield, writing on Buddhist meditation masters in Myanmar and Thailand, rightly observes that “there is probably more emphasis and made use of the Abhidhamma teachings in [Myanmar] than in any other Buddhist country”.⁷ Moreover, Braun, working on the Ledi Sayadaw’s⁸ biography and works in relation to the modern insight meditation movement, highlights that “Abhidhamma, in

¹ See below on detailed explanation of the ultimate realities.

² Cousins 1973: 115-131.

³ King 1980.

⁴ Griffiths 1981: 605-624.

⁵ Kornfield 1996: 193-206.

⁶ See Kyaw (forthcoming) on discussion with regards to how Sunlun Sayadaw and Theinngu Sayadaw transformed their lives through their meditation practice with no formal teaching on theoretical aspect before and during their practice.

⁷ Kornfield 1996: 193.

⁸ The Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) was an influential Burmese monk. He is well-known for his scholarly works and vipassanā meditation method. It is believed that the British authorities in Burma arranged through Rangoon University College, then under Calcutta University, to award D.Litt to Ledi Sayadaw in 1911, the same year he was conferred on the *aggamaha-pandita* title. Ledi Sayadaw was among the best known scholars of his generation; he wrote 105 books in total in both Burmese and Pāli. He wrote two works on the topic of Paṭṭhāna: *Paṭṭhānuddesa-dīpanī* in Pāli and the Burmese translation of *Paṭṭhānuddesa-dīpanī-nissaya*.

Ledi's view, is a vital part of the practice of meditation which is open to all and from which all, at least to some degree, can benefit".⁹ Thus, Ledi Sayadaw and other meditation masters in contemporary Myanmar advocate people to learn the Abhidhamma teachings - mainly through the Abhidhammatthasangaha, Thingyo in Burmese - to the best of their abilities. Based on my research into the living tradition of Abhidhamma in contemporary Myanmar, a majority of Burmese Buddhists, following advice from such meditation masters, places emphasis on the study of the Abhidhamma. Therefore, the study of the Abhidhamma is pervasive within the scholarly circle of both monastic and lay literati.

To accurately assess the ways in which the Abhidhamma study is helpful for meditation from anthropological perspective is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it challenges the argument proposed by some people that Buddhist philosophical teachings have no practical value. Kalupahana writing on the Buddhist causality and philosophy of relations (i.e. the Paṭṭhāna) in the 1960s argues that the Buddha and his immediate successors were not interested "in the way or manner in which things are related [as described in the Paṭṭhāna] but only in the things themselves which are so related [as given in dependent origination]".¹⁰ (See below for detail explanation of the Paṭṭhāna.) This is because, according to Kalupahana, "the Buddha must have thought of the futility of discoursing on the analysis of the various ways in which phenomena are related one another".¹¹ Hence, he sees Paṭṭhāna as arising from the development of scholasticism that was reacting against the Brahmanical schools after the final enlightenment of the Buddha. Although this view is a viable analysis from the historical and philosophical perspectives, it poses two implications for the traditional Theravāda Buddhists. First, it implies that the Abhidhamma-piṭaka and hence the Paṭṭhāna are not the words of the Buddha, i.e. not Buddha-vacana, which challenges the traditional view. Second, Kalupahana's view of Paṭṭhāna as a philosophy of relations with no practical and meditative values contrasts sharply with the living tradition of Paṭṭhāna in Burmese Buddhism, where Paṭṭhāna is applied in meditation practices as we will see below.

The Paṭṭhāna: the teaching of the anattavāda by highlighting how dhammas are interrelated through infinite permutations of conditional relations

Before I explore how the teachings in the Paṭṭhāna are applied in meditations, I shall briefly outline the place of the Abhidhamma texts in the Theravāda canon, the Tipiṭaka, and explain what the Paṭṭhāna section of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka teaches. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka is one of the three main divisions of the Tipiṭaka; the others being the Sutta Piṭaka, the Collection of Teachings, and the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Collection of Discipline. It contains what Gombrich calls "systematic philosophy."¹² That is, the systematization of the teachings that emerged from a refined analytical approach is one of the features of the Abhidhamma. Along with philosophical systems, "the writings [in Abhidhamma] include metaphysics, discussion of causality, psychology and cosmology".¹³ There are seven texts in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the Paṭṭhāna is the last of these. The Burmese Tipiṭaka edition of Paṭṭhāna consists of five volumes in total, while Siamese Tipiṭaka edition comprises six volumes.¹⁴ Exegeses of the Paṭṭhāna include the Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā and the Pañcappakaraṇa-mūlaṭṭhikā and

⁹ Braun 2008: 338.

¹⁰ Kalupahana 1961: 183.

¹¹ Ibid. 183.

¹² Gombrich 2006: 5.

¹³ Crosby 2005a: 47.

¹⁴ Nyanatiloka 1983: 114

Pañcappakaraṇa-anuṭṭikā.¹⁵ Three main sections of the Paṭṭhāna are the Paccayuddesa, the ‘Enumeration of the [24] Conditions’, the Paccayaniddesa, the ‘Analytical Exposition of the Conditions’, and the Paṭiniddesa (lit. trans. ‘coming back to a subject again’). The Paṭiniddesa makes up the rest of the Paṭṭhāna and explains the interrelations between phenomena in a great detail. The Paccayuddesa and Paccayaniddesa are well known amongst the lay people and ritualistically recited by most Burmese Buddhists, while the Paṭiniddesa is the focal of scholastic study in Paṭṭhāna studies.

Mula-pahtan Sayadaw Ven. U Nārada of Myanmar, an expert in the Paṭṭhāna, explains the teachings in the Paṭṭhāna as follows.

“In the methods of the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination, only the manifested causes and effects [i.e. phenomena such as avijjā, taṇhā etc.] are considered. But, in Paṭṭhāna, the forces [i.e. 24 conditions] that bring about the relations between the causes and effects are also taken into account and it is with these forces that this subject [i.e. Paṭṭhāna] is primarily concerned”.¹⁶

In order to understand Paṭṭhāna, it is crucial to see it through the lens of Abhidhamma themes. That is, in the Theravāda Abhidhamma, there are four ultimate realities (paramattha-dhammā): consciousness (citta), mental concomitants (cetasika), matter (rūpa) and nirvana (nibbāna).¹⁷ Although ‘paramattha-dhammā’ is translated as ‘ultimate realities’, it does not mean as a ‘reality’ in sense of having some kind of ontological status. It should be understood as a part of a process, which reflects the Theravadins’ view of dhamma as “less reified, more experiential kind”.¹⁸ Moreover, according to Karunadasa, the description of dhammas as paramattha is understood in terms of their objective existence (paramatthato vijjamānā).¹⁹ This refers to the fact that the mental and material dhammas represent the utmost limits to which the analysis of empirical existence can be stretched.

In the Paṭṭhāna, the final analysis of any relationships between the conditioning states (paccaya-dhammā)²⁰ and conditioned states (paccayupanna-dhammā) resorts to the four ultimate realities. Nibbāna in the Abhidhamma terms is expressed as ‘unconditioned element’ (asaṅkhatā-dhātu) - i.e. that which is not produced by any cause or condition.²¹ By definition, it cannot be a conditioned state. The other three ultimate realities – citta, cetasika and rūpa – can be both conditioning states and conditioned states. In other words, the Paṭṭhāna explains specific relations and correlations between the four ultimate realities by highlighting the conditioning forces involved in and acting on these relations.

The table below gives a simplified description of the basic elements of Paṭṭhāna.

¹⁵ von Hinuber 1996: 74-75.

¹⁶ Nārada 1969: xi.

¹⁷ The four ultimate realities are broad categories given in the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, (see Bodhi 2000: 25-27). The first three ultimate realities can be analyzed into a more refined dhammas. For example, there are 89 cittas, 52 cetasikas and 28 rūpas, and they can then be analyzed further.

¹⁸ Cousins 1983-84: 107.

¹⁹ See VsmT 227; Mvn 258; ItiA 142 cit. in Karunadasa 1996: 14.

²⁰ Although I have translated dhamma as ‘phenomenon’ in other sections, when explaining the concept of the Paṭṭhāna I shall translate it as ‘state’ because the word ‘state’, I think, is more in line with the concept of the momentariness - i.e. constantly arising and dissolution of cittas, cetasikas and rūpas. Moreover, Gethin suggests that dhammas as “the basic mental and physical ‘state’” (2004: 516), and that dhammas are “qualities that constitute experience or reality is to be related to the usage of dhamma at the end of a bahuvrīhi compound in the sense of a particular nature or quality possessed by something”. (2004: 533) In this context, where dhamma is used at the end of a bahuvrīhi compound, it is more appropriate to translate it as ‘state’. ‘Paccaya-dhammā’ is thus understood as ‘conditioning states’, highlighting ‘qualities’ or ‘functions’ possessed by the ultimate realities or dhammas.

²¹ See Cousins (1983-84: 95-109) on the interpretations of the concept of nibbāna in the Pāli Abhidhamma.

Conditioning states (paccaya-dhammā)	Conditioned states (paccayuppanna-dhammā)	Conditioning forces (satti)
X	Y	Z

- X refers to conditioning states, where X can be any of the four ultimate realities. A ‘conditioning state’ is a cause on which its effect is dependent.
- Y refers to conditioned states, where Y can be any of the three ultimate realities, except nibbāna. A ‘conditioned state’ is the effect that results from a cause.
- Z represents conditioning forces, where Z is any of the 24 conditions, e.g. root condition (hetu-paccaya), object condition (ārammaṇa-paccaya) etc., in the Paṭṭhāna. (See Table 1 for explanation of the 24 conditions.) In other words, the 24 conditions are conditioning forces (satti) that act on the conditioning states in order to cause conditioned states. A ‘conditioning force’ is something that has the power (Pāli: satti, Burmese: that-ti) to bring about or accomplish or cause the effect to arise. The distinct feature of the method of Paṭṭhāna is the 24 conditioning forces - i.e.: the functions of the 24 conditions. Through these 24 conditioning forces, the conditioning states give rise to conditioned states. However, the 24 conditioning forces are not separate entities from the conditioning states. “Just as the hotness of chilies is inherent in the chilies and cannot exist without them, so too the conditioning forces inherent in the conditioning states and cannot exist without them. All conditioning states have their particular force, and this force enables them to cause the arising of the conditioned states”.²²

Here, X and Y are related by Z. For example, considering the first condition of the 24 conditions, the root condition (hetu-paccaya), in the Paccayaniddeśa, it is stated that “The roots are related to the states which are associated with roots, and the matter produced thereby, by root condition”.²³ In this relation, the ‘roots’ - i.e. three wholesome dhammas (non-greed, alobha; non-hatred, adosa; non-delusion, amoha) and three unwholesome dhammas (greed, lobha; hatred, dosa; delusion, moha) - are the conditioning states, X. The ‘states which are associated with roots, and the matter produced thereby’ - namely, 71 rooted cittas,²⁴ 52 cetasikas, rooted mind-produced matter and rooted rebirth-kamma-produced matter²⁵ - are the conditioned states, Y. These causes (X) and effects (Y) are related singly by the root condition (Z).²⁶ Root condition is a condition where a conditioning state, lobha for example, functions like a root by imparting firmness and fixity to the conditioned states, e.g. cittas rooted in lobha, their associated cetasikas and matters. Here, lobha is both a conditioning state and a conditioning force, for a conditioning force is not a separate entity from the conditioning state, as shown above. In other words, lobha causes the arising of cittas rooted in lobha

²² Bodhi 2000: 294.

²³ Nārada 1969: 2.

²⁴ Out of 89 cittas, 71 of them are called rooted cittas because they have wholesome and unwholesome dhammas as their principle causes, or roots. See footnote 37 on unwholesome rooted cittas.

²⁵ Out of two types of mind-produced matter, namely, rooted mind-produced matter (sahetuka-cittajarūpa) and non-rooted mind-produced matter (ahetuka-cittajarūpa), only rooted mind-produced matter is applicable here. In terms of kamma-produced matter (kammajarūpa), i.e. current kamma-produced matter (pavatti-kammajarūpa) and rebirth kamma-produced matter (paṭisandhi-kammajarūpa), the conditioning states of 6 roots give rise to only the rebirth kamma-produced matter. Since there are two types of rebirth kamma-produced matter: rooted and non-rooted, rooted rebirth kamma-produced matter are caused by the 6 roots.

²⁶ In the Paṭiniddeśa, we find that the relationships between X and Y are determined by many different, and in some sense infinite, permutations of conditioning forces.

and their associated cetasikas and rūpas through its special force, namely, grasping and clinging. Therefore, a conditioning force is inherent characteristics of the dhammas.

According to Mula-paṭṭhan Sayadaw and Karunadasa, the Paṭṭhāna is the teaching of the doctrine of no-self, anattavāda. The Paṭṭhāna explicitly rejects the doctrine of ‘self’ (attavāda) at two levels. First, the Paṭṭhāna emphasizes multiplicity of interrelationships between conditioning states and conditioned states through 24 conditions. Thus, the arising of the conditioned states is “not at the will and mercy of any being [i.e. a creator or a ‘self’]”.²⁷ Second, the interrelatedness and interdependence of these dhammas are not explained on the basis of the dichotomy between conditioning states and conditioning forces. Such dichotomy “leaves the door open for the intrusion of the doctrine of a substantial self (attavāda)”.²⁸ Any given dhamma can be both a conditioned state and a conditioning force, as we have seen above. This non-duality between conditioning states and conditioning force accentuates that there is no independent creator or ‘self’ that may influence conditioning states to give rise to conditioned states. In other words, if conditioning states and conditioning forces are separate entities, then we could say that an independent entity, which might be attributed as a ‘self’, is acting on a relation between a conditioning state and a conditioned state. Thus, we can say that the Theravāda Abhidhamma, viz., the Paṭṭhāna leave no loophole for the attavāda to exist.

Table 1: Brief explanation of the 24 conditions in the Paṭṭhāna²⁹

Conditions, paccayas	Explanation
Root condition, hetu-paccaya	A condition that is the firm foundation of conditioned states, like a root.
Object condition, ārammaṇa-paccaya	A condition that is the prop or support of conditioned states.
Predominance condition, adhipati-paccaya	A condition that is the predominant factor for conditioned states to arise.
Proximity condition, anantara-paccaya	It is a condition for phenomena to arise again and again in succession without interval.
Contiguity condition, samanantara-paccaya	According to the Visuddhimagga (XVII, 74), anantara and samanantara are different in name, but the same in meaning.
Co-nascence condition, saha-jāta-paccaya	Saha-jāta means that which has arisen together. Thus, a conditioning state, on arising, causes the conditioned states to arise simultaneously with it.
Mutuality condition, aññamañña-paccaya	Just as three sticks of a tripod give each other consolidating support, some phenomena condition one another reciprocally.
Support condition, nissaya-paccaya	This condition refers to phenomena which are arising together with the phenomena they condition, and to phenomena which have arisen previously to the phenomena they condition by giving support.
Decisive support condition, upanissaya-paccaya	It refers to a phenomenon assists another phenomenon by being a powerful inducement or a decisive support.
Pre-nascence condition, purejāta-paccaya	It refers to a relation where something that has arisen earlier becomes a support to something else which arises later.

²⁷ Nārada 1996: xiii.

²⁸ Karunadasa 1996: 7.

²⁹ This brief description of the 24 conditions are based on the works by Nyanatiloka (1983), Karunadasa (2010) and Gorkom (2010).

Conditions, paccayas	Explanation
Post-nascence condition, pacchājāta-paccaya	It refers to a relation where something which having arisen later becomes a support to something else which has arisen earlier.
Repetition condition, āsevana-paccaya	It is where a phenomenon helps towards the competency and strength of the succeeding phenomena by way of repetition, just as all the preceding applications to study etc.
Kamma condition, kamma-paccaya	Kamma is volition, which is a mental concomitant that arises with each citta. Therefore, it refers to a relation where volition directs the associated dhammas to accomplish their functions.
Kammic-result condition, vipāka-paccaya	A condition that assists other associated karmic-resultant phenomena by its passive nature - i.e. not have other activity.
Nutriments condition, āhara-paccaya	It is when a conditioning state maintains and supports the growth and development of the conditioned states. Just like the physical nutriment sustains the physical body, the three mental nutriments, i.e. contact, volition and consciousness, sustain the mental activities.
Faculty condition, indriya-paccaya	The conditioning state has leadership, great control, over the conditioned states. Indriyas are leaders each in their own field.
Jhāna condition, jhāna-paccaya	A condition that can burn the hindrances away in the sense of the jhāna-factors which are developed in concentration meditation - i.e. absorption, jhāna.
Path condition, magga-paccaya	The Path condition is so called because it relates to the conditioned state by causing it to function as a means of reaching a particular destination.
Association condition, sampayutta-paccaya	This condition refers to all mental and only mental phenomena as they aid one another by their being inseparably associated.
Dissociation condition, vippayutta-paccaya	It refers to a relationship where mind and matter is not one of association.
Presence condition, atthi-paccaya	This condition refers to the presence of any phenomena aiding the rise of other phenomena.
Absence condition, natthi-paccaya	It refers to phenomena that have just passed, which through their absence are aiding the mental phenomena immediately following after them, by giving them an opportunity to arise.
Disappearance condition, vigata-paccaya	It is when the disappearance of a phenomenon is giving certain other phenomena an opportunity to arise.
Non-disappearance condition, avigata-paccaya	It means the non-disappearance of any phenomena supports the rise of other phenomena.

Theoretical based vipassanā meditation traditions in contemporary Myanmar:

We have seen above that Ledi Sayadaw stresses importance of having the knowledge of the ultimate realities for meditation. Along with Ledi Sayadaw, the Pa-Auk Sayadaw teaches the meditators to have the theoretical knowledge of the matter, mental concomitants and consciousness in order to be used in the meditation. To attain enlightenment, “we must comprehend the impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature of mentality-materiality and their causes. Without knowing mentality-materiality and their causes, how can we comprehend that they are impermanent, suffering, and non-self? How can we practice Vipassanā?”³⁰ Hence, according to the Pa-Auk tradition, one must first

³⁰ Ng, W. K. 2000: 72.

‘know’ the dhammas (through intellectual acquisition) and then ‘see’ the emptiness of the dhammas by the three contemplations as mentioned in Visuddhimagga.³¹ In addition to advocating the intellectual acquisition of the dhammas prior to meditation practice by these meditation masters, the Mogok vipassanā meditation tradition, founded by the first Mogok Sayadaw Ven. Vimala, teaches the law of dependent origination to practitioners in order to help them with their meditation practice. According to Mogok Sayadaw, one must listen to the dhamma talks given by meditation teachers, while one is reflecting on one’s own aggregates (khandhā). Therefore, these vipassanā meditation masters teach theoretical knowledge of the dhammas as a core foundation for the practice.

The Paṭṭhāna and Vipassanā: the works of the Mohnyin Sayadaw, the Saddhammaransī Sayadaw and the Bamaw Sayadaw

Turning to meditation teachers who combine the Paṭṭhāna and meditation, the Mohnyin Sayadaw is one such teacher. He is well-known not only for his scriptural learning but also for his meditation practice. Thus, he is known amongst the Burmese Buddhists as both gantha-dhura (vocation of books) and vipassanā-dhura (vocation of meditation). According to Mohnyin meditation method, the prior knowledge of the ultimate realities will help meditators to direct their attention to the true nature of all dhammas in a precise and clear way.³² This means that having proper attention (yonisomanasīkāra) with regard to the true nature of all dhammas - namely, the conditional relations between dhammas and the arising and dissolution of these dhammas - is important for vipassanā meditation. In starting vipassanā, the meditator must microscopically examine his modes of moving and changes of posture. The meditator must have proper attention with regard to changes in one’s body and sensation as ‘changing’, i.e. anicca. Thus, he can see the three characteristics - i.e. impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha) and non-self (anatta) - very clearly. The Mohnyin’s approach begins with the contemplation of body (kāyānupassanā), and progresses through to sensation (vedanānupassanā) and mind (cittānupassanā). The meditator should contemplate the experience of the dissolution of mental and physical phenomena contained in the body. Therefore, his approach gives emphasis on seeing all phenomena as anicca.

‘The Practice of Paṭṭhāna and Vipassanā’ is one of many works produced by Mohnyin Sayadaw. Moreover, the following stanza composed by him illustrates the vital role of the Paṭṭhāna in his teaching.

“By forming a proverb:
‘Literary Paṭṭhāna’, ‘Village Paṭṭhāna’ and ‘My Paṭṭhāna’;
Let’s turn the literary Paṭṭhāna in books into village Paṭṭhāna [through communal recitation].
But do not be contented with just the village Paṭṭhāna;
Strike to develop it into my Paṭṭhāna [through insight meditation]”.³³
(My translation)

Mohnyin Sayadaw encourages people to progress from learning the Paṭṭhāna as literary work to celebrating the communal recitation ceremonies of the Paṭṭhāna to seeing the interrelatedness of dhammas thus internalizing the Paṭṭhāna.

³¹ Kyaw 2011: 5.

³² Kornfield 1996: 194.

³³ Siri 2002: 1-2.

In his book on the Paṭṭhāna and vipassanā, Mohnyin Sayadaw explains the Paccayaniddesa section of the Paṭṭhāna in plain Burmese so that wider lay audience can understand the Paṭṭhāna. Moreover, he writes how a specific condition of the 24 conditions can be used when practicing vipassanā. Since he is an Ābhidhammika, learned in Abhidhamma, his writing on vipassanā in relation to the Paṭṭhāna is highly technical and detailed. Therefore, I shall cover an important concept in the Abhidhamma, namely, the cognitive process (cittavīthi), before turning to specific examples of how 24 conditions are related to vipassanā practice.

According to the Abhidhamma, a cognitive process that occurs through eye-door (cakkhudvāravīthi) for example consists of seventeen mind-moments (cittakkhaṇa) as outlined in the chart below.

1	Past life-continuum, atītabhavaṅga	kammically neutral: indeterminate, abyākata
2	Vibrational life-continuum, bhavaṅgalana	
3	Arrest life-continuum, bhavaṅgupaccheda	
4	Five-door adverting, pañcadvārāvajjana	
5	Eye-consciousness, cakkhuvīññāṇa	
6	Receiving consciousness, sampaticchana	
7	Investigating consciousness, santīraṇa	
8	Determining consciousness, votthapana	
9-15	7 Javana	kammically active or neutral: wholesome, kusala or unwholesome, akusala or indeterminate, abyākata
16	Registration, tadārammaṇa	kammically neutral: indeterminate, abyākata
17	Registration, tadārammaṇa	

Here, if a visible form as object, having passed one mind-moment (1), enters the avenue of the eye, the life-continuum³⁴ vibrates for two mind-moments and is arrested (2 and 3). Then, a five-door adverting consciousness arises and ceases adverting to that same visible form as object (4). Immediately after that, the following consciousnesses arise and cease: eye-consciousness³⁵ sees that visible form (5), receiving consciousness receives it (6), investigating consciousness investigates it (7) and determining consciousness determines it (8). Following this, javana, i.e. active phase of the cognitive process, occurs for seven mind-moments (9-15). After the javanas, two registration resultants arise accordingly (16-17). In the context of Abhidhamma, javana is a technical term used to refer to the active phase of the cognitive process, and it is often left untranslated. Javana literally means ‘running swiftly’. From the chart above, we can see that the seven javana mind-moments consist of a series of kusalacittas or akusalacittas or abyākatacittas. The rate of the occurrence of any of these cittas is very fast at that stage, and hence, it is called javana. Moreover, if the 9th mind-moment is kusala for example, the rest of the javana

³⁴ Bhavaṅga or life-continuum is the function of consciousness by which the continuity of the individual is preserved. Bhavaṅgacittas arise and pass away every moment during life when there is no active cognitive process taking place. Arising and perishing at every moment during this passive phase of consciousness, the bhavaṅga flows on like a stream, without remaining static for two consecutive moments. Thus, it is called ‘life-continuum’. (Bodhi 2000: 122-123)

³⁵ There are six types of consciousness, namely, eye-consciousness (cakkhuvīññāṇa), ear-consciousness (satavīññāṇa), nose-consciousness (ghānavīññāṇa), tongue-consciousness (jihvāvīññāṇa), body-consciousness (kāyavīññāṇa) and mind-consciousness (manovīññāṇa). Each of the consciousness has corresponding bases (vatthu) and objects (ārammaṇa). For example, for an eye-consciousness to arise visible form (rūpārammaṇa) must come in contact with eye-sensitivity (cakkhuppasāda). See Bodhi 2000: 150-152 on the six types of cognitive processes.

mind-moments will be kusala. This is because the 9th javana becomes decisive support for the 10th javana, and so on. Therefore, kusalacittas will occur repeatedly during the javana stage as it progresses toward the 15th javana mind-moments. In addition, apart from the seven javana mind-moments, the rest of the 10 mind-moments are kammically indeterminate, that is, consciousness which cannot be determined in terms of the dichotomy of wholesome and unwholesome. Therefore, “the javana stage is the most important from an ethical standpoint, for it is at this point that wholesome or unwholesome cittas originate”.³⁶ Thus, it can determine kammic quality of the cognitive process.

Bearing this in mind, we will see how Mohnyin Sayadaw relates the teachings in the Paṭṭhāna to vipassanā practice. For the root condition, there are three wholesome roots - alobha, adosa, and amoha - and three unwholesome roots - lobha, dosa, and moha, as shown above. Mohnyin Sayadaw relates these roots to everyday experiences as follows.

When one encounters pleasant things [e.g. sees pleasant sight], lobha and moha would arise given that one has improper attention (ayonisomanasīkāra).³⁷ Similarly, encountering unpleasant things would lead to arising of dosa and moha if there is ayonisomanasīkāra. Finally, when one experiences neutral things, moha would arise if there is ayonisomanasīkāra. Thus, unwholesome javana (akusala javana) [i.e. unwholesome kamma in the sense of intention] would occur in the relation to the cognitive process.³⁸

Therefore, if one has ayonisomanasīkāra when one encounters any kind of daily experiences, unwholesome javanas could arise. Thus, unwholesome roots will cause unwholesome consciousness, i.e. akusala-citta. In order to have wholesome consciousness, according to Mohnyin Sayadaw, one must have yonisomanasīkāra. Based on the writing of Mohnyin Sayadaw, it is not yet clear to me how one should develop yonisomanasīkāra. In this regard, the writing of Saddhammaransī Sayadaw on how the Paccayaniddeśa section of the Paṭṭhāna is applied in insight meditation practices may shed light on what it means to have yonisomanasīkāra. Saddhammaransī Sayadaw explains how to develop yonisomanasīkāra in relation to object condition (ārammaṇa-paccaya) as follows.

When we encounter pleasant objects (iṭṭhārammaṇa), we should see them as a result of our past good actions. ...Having done good actions in the past, we experience good things at present. In order to have better life and achieve nibbāna in the future, it is best to do good actions. This is how we have to develop yonisomanasīkāra.³⁹

³⁶ Bodhi 2000: 124.

³⁷ According to the Abhidhammatthasāṅgaha, those states of consciousness in which greed is the principal root are termed “cittas rooted in greed”, and there are 8 of them. Those states of consciousness in which hatred is the principal root are termed “cittas rooted in hatred”, of which two are enumerated. Those states of consciousness in which delusion is the principal root are termed “cittas rooted in delusion”, of which two are enumerated. In those cittas rooted in greed and in those rooted in hatred, delusion is also found as an underlying root. Therefore, greed or hatred is always accompanied by delusion. (Bodhi 2000: 33)

³⁸ Sumana 1982: 46-47.

³⁹ Kuṇḍalābhivamsa 2010: 186-187.

Here, yonisomanasikāra can be understood in terms of having a thorough attention or pondering in order to see the causes or nature certain experiences.⁴⁰

Both Mohnyin Sayadaw and Saddhammaransī Sayadaw teach the meditator to have yonisomanasikāra and develop vipassanā meditation. Based on the writing of Saddhammaransī Sayadaw, I shall highlight how to practice both yonisomanasikāra and vipassanā with regards to sensation (vedanānupassanā) in relation to co-nascence condition (sahajāta-paccaya). Sensation (vedanā) is one of the four mental aggregates, and others being perception (saññā), volitional formations (saṅkhāra) and consciousness (viññāna). These mental aggregates arise together and condition each other reciprocally, which is given in the Paccayaniddeśa as “cattāro khandhā arūpino aññamaññaṃ saḥajāta-paccayena paccayo”. For instance, if one feels unpleasant sensations such as intense pain during a meditation sitting, one may become frustrated by the pain. By mentally rejecting the pain, the degree of aversion increases, which in turns creates the perception of intensified pain. Here, painful sensation (vedanā) causes consciousness of such pain (viññāna), and by reacting to the pain (saṅkhāra) one perceives that the pain has increased (saññā). Although I have explained this process in sequential order, the arising of these aggregates occurs simultaneously. Moreover, we can see that, here, vedanā is conditioning state and the other mental aggregates are conditioned states. The conditioning state and conditioned states are related to each other through saḥajāta-paccaya. In this example, we can see that by rejecting the pain the meditator is developing ayonisomanasikāra.

Having yonisomanasikāra, on the other hand, when faced with such pain would involve acknowledging the pain, and patiently observing and investigating it. Thus, one would be able to willingly accept it. By embracing the pain, one could investigate it further so that an understanding that ‘pain’ or ‘suffering’ (dukkha) is an inherent part of life would arise. By having yonisomanasikāra, one would be able to see the truth of pain (dukkha-sacca), which is - according to Buddhist teaching - inherent in all experiences. In terms of vipassanā practice, Saddhammaransī Sayadaw explains that as one investigates the painful sensation in depth by directly looking at it, the degree of pain may increase to its climax. After that, the degree of pain will begin to diminish. By maintaining one’s mindfulness of the pain, one will see that the pain will move from one part of the body to another part of the body. Through nonjudgmental mindfulness and concentrated mind, one would be able to see the arising and dissolution of the painful experiences in different parts of the body as soon as one looks at the pain.⁴¹ According to Saddhammaransī Sayadaw, as the mind become more concentrated and mindful, one would be able to see changing nature of the pain in three-fold way. That is, one would see arising and dissolution of 1) the painful sensation itself, 2) the awareness of the pain, and 3) the mental notification of the pain as ‘pain’.⁴² It seems to me that such in-depth understanding of anicca is achieved through concentrated and meditative mind, rather than as a result to the knowledge of the teachings in the Paṭṭhāna.

Although Saddhammaransī Sayadaw shows how to develop vedanānupassanā step-by-step in his writing, he does not explicitly say how the development of insight relates to the study of the Paṭṭhāna. For him, the mere fact that the four mental aggregates are mentioned in the context of saḥajāta-paccaya implies that meditation on sensation and mind can be developed. Nonetheless, we can say with certainty that the Paṭṭhāna study

⁴⁰ Yoniso is ablative form of yoni, which is defined by Rhys Davids as ‘origin’, ‘place of birth’ and ‘nature’, and is given as “down to its origin or foundation - i.e. thoroughly, properly etc. Manasikāra is defined as attention or pondering (Rhys Davids 1921-5: 560; 521).

⁴¹ Kuṇḍalābhivamsa 2010: 238-239.

⁴² Ibid. 240.

helps meditators to develop an understanding of their own meditation practice in the context of the teachings in the Paṭṭhāna. For example, he explains predominance condition (adhipati-paccaya) in the context of one's meditation practice.

Having determination to practice vipassanā until enlightenment is attained has desire (chanda), as predominant factor. [With such determination, one enters a meditation center.] Once at the meditation center, one puts continuous effort to develop mindfulness and practice vipassanā meditation. This is vīriyādhipati, [i.e. effort as predominant factor.] When difficulties are encountered as one progresses along the path, one does not become discouraged and disheartened because a strong mind [to achieve the goal] becomes a predominant factor (cittādhipati). As one develops insight knowledge, wisdom becomes predominant factor, i.e. vimamsādhipati has been developed.⁴³

That is, there must be predominant factors - i.e. desire, effort, mind and wisdom - when one is practicing vipassana. As one's practice has become established, one will encounter various difficulties. These difficulties will be overcome by having predominant factors. Through the understanding of the place and importance of predominant factors, meditation practitioners will be able to analyse their own meditation practice. More importantly, they will be able to change their attitude by recognizing the predominant factors that they may lack or need while practicing meditation. Here, such understanding of the Paṭṭhāna terminology not only helps meditators in their meditation practice, but also assists them to analyse their own path.

The emphasis on the meditative aspects of the Paṭṭhāna is not only present in the literature, but also apparent in dhamma talks given by monks. In a series of dhamma talks given by the Bamaw Sayadaw Ven. U Kumārābhivamsa (1929-) on the Paccayaniddesa section of the Paṭṭhāna, he highlights four stages of progression along the Buddhist path. These stages are:

- 1) to listen to sermons and recitations of the Dhamma by others (sotenasunāti)
- 2) to recite the Dhamma by oneself (vacasāpaṭhitā)
- 3) to consider or reflect carefully about the Dhamma (manasānupekkhitā)
- 4) to contemplate three characteristics - i.e. contemplation of impermanence (aniccānupassanā), of suffering (dukkhānupassanā), of not-self (anattānupassanā) - [with reference to all dhammas].⁴⁴

He encourages people to progress along these stages of the path using the Paṭṭhāna as a meditative tool. We can see that this scheme of the path encompasses all three types of kamma - i.e. bodily action (kāyakamma), vocal action (vacīkamma) and mental action (manokamma), and assumes that the first two actions - listening to and reciting the Paṭṭhāna - are necessities in order to develop vipassanā meditation. Thus, the theoretical knowledge about the Paṭṭhāna is acquired through listening to and reciting the Paṭṭhāna. Here again, the third and fourth stages correspond to yonisomanasīkāra and vipassanā meditation practice respectively.

In sum, all three Paṭṭhāna teachers focus on the Paccayaniddesa section of the Paṭṭhāna in their works. These works - i.e. two books and dhamma talks - are targeted for wider audience of lay people. Therefore, these teachers mainly relate the teachings in the

⁴³ Kuṇḍalābhivamsa 2010: 115.

⁴⁴ Kumāra (Bamaw Sayadaw) 05 June 2009.

Paccayaniddeśa to vipassanā meditation practice. These teachings are used to encourage meditators to develop yonisomanasikāra and insight knowledge (vipassanā-ñāṇa). In doing so, the theoretical knowledge of the dhammas are used to develop an understanding of one's own meditation practice.

Dangers of theoretical based meditation practice

Although the theoretical knowledge of ultimate realities can be helpful in encouraging meditators to develop yonisomanasikāra and vipassanā-ñāṇa, such knowledge, according to Theinngu Sayadaw, may create hindrances along the path to liberation from suffering.⁴⁵ This is because one may mistake one's prior knowledge of the dhammas as one's direct experience. That is, one may perceive the knowledge of the dhammas acquired at the intellectual level as one's direct experience of the true nature of the dhammas.⁴⁶ In other words, during the meditation sitting, one may imagine that 'knowing' the dhammas intellectually as 'seeing' them experientially. Such imagination of the dhammas could lead to philosophizing phase - i.e. just thinking about the philosophical teachings - during meditation sittings. This philosophizing phase occurs when mindfulness is absent. Therefore, it is crucial to combine the contemplation of the dhammas - e.g. contemplating the interrelations of the dhammas as described in the Paṭṭhāna - with mindfulness. Thus, mindfulness must be present in order to prevent the 'philosophizing phase' from arising.

Conclusions

In the context of some Burmese meditation traditions, philosophical teachings have practical usages in relation to vipassanā meditation practices and daily life experiences. Such prior theoretical knowledge of the dhammas helps to develop an understanding of one's meditation practice in terms of the teachings in the Paṭṭhāna. Moreover, the philosophical teachings in the Abhidhamma are transmitted to wider lay audience through dhamma talks. The dhamma talks on the Paṭṭhāna not only teach the lay people about the interrelations of the ultimate realities, but also enhance devotion (saddhā) towards the Buddha. This is because the Paṭṭhāna is regarded as the embodiment of the Buddha's omniscience, the Buddha-sabbaññuta-ñāṇa.

In addition to such roles, we have seen that these philosophical teachings are used in the practical aspects of meditation. Prior knowledge of the dhammas helps to develop yonisomanasikāra during meditation sittings and daily life. Combined yonisomanasikāra with non-judgmental mindfulness of the mental and physical phenomena, transformation of one's knowledge of the dhammas into a direct experience of them occurs. That is, one has transformed from 'knowing' the dhammas into 'seeing' them through the theoretical based meditation practice. Therefore, the theoretical knowledge of the dhammas is instrumental in meditation practice, thus of importance for achieving the liberation from suffering.

⁴⁵ This is based on a series of dhamma talks given by Theinngu Sayadaw in 1965.

⁴⁶ My thanks to Kate Crosby for informing me that Ven. Veera of Wat Rajasiddharam in Bangkok, who teaches the boran kammattana method of 18-19th century Sangharaja Suk Khai Thuen, regards study, and especially a prior understanding of the Pali terms, problematic because it leads one to project experience. (Personal communication on 03 Oct 2011)

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