



Eight Liberations - *Aṭṭha Vimokkhā*

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1. Introduction

We often find in the Pāḷicanon a compilation of eight attainments that the Buddha recommends his disciples to practice. They are called liberations (*vimokkhā*) because at the time of practice of these liberations, the mind is free from mental defilements. They can lead to ultimate liberation. They include as the eighth liberation the supreme attainment that we find in the Pāḷicanon.

It should be noted, however, that all eight liberations, when practiced in direct succession, can only be attained by a non-returner or an arahat, for the eighth liberation is attainable only by these groups of persons.¹ With an arahat, no more mental defilements can occur in the stream of consciousness. With the Arahāt path, all spiritual defilements have been cut off. In the non-returner, craving for sense objects and aversion with the accompanying mental factors such as envy, avarice and regret can no longer occur, but conceit, restlessness, craving for fine-material existence or non-material existence can still occur. Thus, for the non-returner it is a temporary liberation from all spiritual defilements. Thus, these eight liberations provide the ideal basis for the non-returner to achieve the ultimate goal of arahatship.

However, they also provide a way to walk all four paths. When combined with *vipassanā* and as a *samatha* foundation, they can lead to the goal, which is the eighth liberation. One must practice them again and again, which means practicing all eight *samatha* attainments and then with the factors involved in them, practicing *vipassanā*. In this way, one can slowly or quickly, depending on one's personal abilities, attain the supreme goal of arahatship. The eight *samatha* attainments included in the liberations provide a good base for deep purification and calming of the mind, and thus for temporary liberation from mental defilements. In this way, one creates a good foundation for insight and can reach the final liberation described in the eighth liberation. Calming the mind and being free from mental defilements are a prerequisite for *vipassanā* meditation.

In the suttā, we do not find detailed explanations of the practice of these eight exercises. In the commentary on the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, the first Abhidhamma book of the Pāḷicanon, and in the Paṭisambhidāmagga² we find explanations of the practice of each liberation.

Basically, however, it is helpful for all practitioners to practice the first seven of the eight liberations, since they always liberate from mental defilements during the time of practice and thus provide a good base for attaining path consciousness, the stages of awakening.

In AN 8.92 The series text of the knowledge of pleasure (*rāga*) - Rāgapeyyālaṃ states in the context:

"Bhikkhus, for direct knowledge of lust, eight things are to be developed. What eight?"

Then the eight liberations, as listed in chapter 2, are described.

In the following suttā, which have no name, the eight liberations are then mentioned as means for the following:

"Bhikkhus, for full understanding of lust . . . for the utter destruction. . . for the abandoning. . . for the destruction. . . for the vanishing . . . for the fading away . . . for the cessation. . . for the giving up . . . for the relinquishment of lust . . . these eight things are to be developed."

" 'Bhikkhus, for direct knowledge: for full understanding . . . for the utter destruction . . . for the abandoning . . . for the destruction . . . for the vanishing . . . for the fading away . . . for the cessation . . . for the giving up . . . for the relinquishment of hatred . . . of delusion . . . of anger . . . of hostility . . . of denigration . . . of insolence . . . of envy . . . of miserliness . . . of deceitfulness . . . of craftiness . . . of obstinacy . . . of vehemence . . . of conceit . . . of arrogance . . . of intoxication . . . of heedlessness . . . these eight things are to be developed.'

This is what the Blessed One said.. Elated, those bhikkhus delighted in the Blessed One's statement."

1 See Christina Garbe: The Cessation of Perception and Feeling, www.cetovimutti-theravada.org

2 Paṭisambhidāmagga, 12. Buch des Khuddaka Nikāya

2. Text of the Eight Liberations in the Pāḷicanon

"*Aṭṭhime, bhikkhave, vimokkhā. Katame aṭṭha?*

"There are eight liberations. What eight?

1. *Rūpī rūpāni passati. Ayaṃ paṭhamo vimokkho.*

One possessing form sees forms. This is the first liberation.

2. *Ajjhattaṃ arūpasaññī, bahiddhā rūpāni passati. Ayaṃ dutiyo vimokkho.*

One not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally. This is the second liberation.

3. *Subhanteva adhimutto hoti. Ayaṃ tatiyo vimokkho.*

Being inclined to the beautiful. This is the third liberation.

4. *Sabbaso rūpasaññānaṃ samatikkamā paṭighasaññānaṃ atthaṅgamā nānattasaññānaṃ amanasikārā 'ananto ākāso'ti ākāsaññācāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati. Ayaṃ catuttho vimokkho.*

After completely overcoming the perception of matter (*rūpa-saññā*), the disappearance of the perception of impingement [of sense objects on sense bases] (*paṭigha-saññā*), the non-observance of the perception of diversity (*nānatta-saññā*), by realizing 'space is infinite', one attains the base of the infinity of space and dwells in it. This is the fourth liberation.

5. *Sabbaso ākāsaññācāyatanaṃ samatikkamma 'anantaṃ viññāṇa'nti viññāṇaññācāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati. Ayaṃ pañcama vimokkho.*

After completely overcoming the base of infinity of space by realizing 'consciousness is infinite,' one attains the base of infinity of consciousness and dwells in it. This is the fifth liberation.

6. *Sabbaso viññāṇaññācāyatanaṃ samatikkamma 'natthi kiñcī'ti ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati. Ayaṃ chaṭṭho vimokkho.*

After completely overcoming the realm of infinity of consciousness by realizing 'There is nothing,' one attains the base of nothingness and dwells in it. This is the sixth liberation.

7. *Sabbaso ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ samatikkamma nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati. Ayaṃ sattamo vimokkho.*

After completely overcoming the base of nothingness, one attains the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and dwells in it. This is the seventh liberation.

8. *Sabbaso nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ samatikkamma saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ upasampajja viharati. Ayaṃ aṭṭhamo vimokkho.*

Having completely overcome the base of neither-perception-nor-not-perception, one attains the cessation of perception and feeling and dwells therein. This is the eighth liberation.

Ime kho, bhikkhave, aṭṭha vimokkhā'ti.

These are eight liberations, bhikkhus." AN 8.66

3. Practice

One can practice the eight liberations in different ways. In the *suttā*, there are no precise instructions on how to practice them. We only find the above text.

According to the *suttā*, the eight liberations are also not identical with the four fine-material *jhānā* and the four non-material bases. The four fine-material *jhānā* are not directly mentioned as such, but one can only deduce the necessity of their attainment from the enumeration of the four non-material bases, because in order to practice them, the attainment of the four fine-material *jhānā* is necessary. In the first three liberations, the objects are described, but one does not know exactly which is now the object of observation. The *jhāna* factors that we find in the *suttā* in the standard description of the *jhānā* are not mentioned here.

Since the objects of the first three liberations are not clearly mentioned, there are various ways to practice them. Several possibilities are presented below.

a. Practice according to *Paṭisambhidāmagga*

In the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the twelfth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, in the chapter *Vimokkhakathā* the eight liberations are described as follows:

(1) What is the liberation: 'Having matter, one sees matter'?

Someone here contemplates the black (*nīla*) sign (*nimitta*) internally within himself, he attains the perception of black. He picks up this sign well, he reflects it thoroughly, persistently he establishes it. Having picked up this sign well, having reflected it thoroughly, having established it persistently, he concentrates the consciousness externally in the black sign and attains the perception of black.

He picks up this sign well, he reflects it thoroughly, he establishes it persistently.

Having picked up this sign well, having reflected it thoroughly, having established it persistently, he repeats it, develops it, and practices it frequently.

It is as follows for him: Internally, externally, and in both ways it is matter. He perceives matter.

Someone here contemplates the yellow (*pīṭa*) sign (*nimitta*) internally within himself, ...

... the red sign ...

Someone here contemplates the white sign (*nimitta*) internally within himself, ...

Thus it is the liberation: 'having matter, one sees matter'.

(2) What is the liberation: 'Not perceiving matter internally, seeing matter externally'?

Here, someone does not internally contemplate the black sign (*nimitta*) within himself, does not attain the perception of black; externally, he concentrates the consciousness in the black sign and attains the perception of black.

He picks up this sign well, he reflects it thoroughly, he establishes it persistently.

Having picked up this sign well, having reflected it thoroughly, having established it persistently, he repeats it, develops it, and practices it frequently.

It is as follows for him: Internally there is no matter, externally it is this matter. He perceives matter.

Someone does not observe here internally within himself the yellow sign (*nimitta*), ...

... the red sign ...

Someone here does not internally contemplate within himself the white sign (*nimitta*), ...

So it is the liberation: 'Internally not perceiving matter, externally seeing matter'.

(3) What is the liberation: 'One is inclined only to the beautiful'?

Here a bhikkhu dwells pervading one quarter with a mind accompanied by loving-kindness (*mettā*); likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, also above, below, in all directions and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind accompanied by loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will. Because of the development of loving-kindness, beings are not repulsive.

... With a mind accompanied by compassion ... Due to the development of compassion, beings are not repulsive.

... With a mind accompanied by sympathetic joy ... Due to the development of sympathetic joy, beings are not repulsive.

... By pervading one quarter with a mind accompanied by equanimity ... Due to the development of equanimity, beings are not repulsive.

Such is the liberation: 'One is inclined only to the beautiful'.

(4.) - (8.) The fourth to eighth liberation are described in the same way as in AN 8.66, which were already quoted in chapter 2.

According to this description of the **first liberation**, it is *kasīṇa* meditation with the four colours

- black,
- yellow,
- red and
- white.

These colours are picked up from inner body parts of one's own body.

For this good concentration is already necessary, because both the body parts and their colour must be seen with mind consciousness, i.e. not with eye consciousness.

This picking up of an inner object is well possible from concentration of the fourth *jhāna* after emerging from it.

The fourth *jhāna* can be practiced with mindfulness of in-breath and out-breath. The *jhāna* has to be well established in the stream of consciousness. This means one must be able to dwell in it frequently and for long periods of time, at least two hours.

The state of mind after the correct practice of the real fourth *jhāna* with fine-material consciousness is completely different from the ordinary thinking mind or also from the mind that is intellectually engaged in dhamma.

However, there are also people who can see the body parts or at least some of them with not so well established concentration. The skeleton with its white colour can often be seen clearly by meditators if they wish, even if they have not reached the fourth *jhāna*.

In order to see a corresponding body part with mind consciousness, one must direct the mind to the corresponding area of the body immediately after emerging from the fourth *jhāna*. The corresponding body part then appears clearly in the mind.

Usually the bones are most easily perceived by most meditators. Therefore, it is useful to start with them.

One can pick up the white colour very well by looking at the back of the head inwardly.

Then, in the next step, one drops the perception of the form of the body part and concentrates the mind only on the colour.

The colour then spreads without having a form or one has to spread the colour intentionally so that a *kasīṇa* appears.

For the yellow colour, the urine in the bladder is well suited.

For the red colour, the blood is well suited.

For the black colour, the pupil is well suited or, if the hair colour is appropriate, the hair. Also the hair colour has to be perceived with closed eyes by mind consciousness and not by eye consciousness.

One should then develop the four fine-material *jhāna* with all four colours.

If one has not yet developed *kaṣiṇa* meditation with all four *jhāna*, it is advisable to begin with the white *kaṣiṇa*, as it is the easiest for most people to develop. Then one can follow the sequence of colours as we find them in the *suttā*.

It is not explicitly stated in the *sutta* text that the four fine-material *jhāna* are to be attained, but they are necessary for the attainment of the fourth liberation.

The **second liberation** is practiced accordingly in the same way. Here one takes the colours externally, that is, from the body parts of another person. If one has been successful with the first liberation and has developed the four *jhānā* with the four colours, one is also able to pick up the colours from the body parts of another being.

For the **third liberation**, the four *Brahmavihārā*:

- loving kindness (*mettā*)
- compassion (*karuṇā*)
- sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and
- equanimity (*upekkhā*)

are to be practiced as *jhāna*. With *mettā*, *karuṇā*, and *muditā*, one can attain from the first to the third *jhāna*; with *upekkhā*, one can attain only the fourth *jhāna*.

To practice the **fourth liberation** as the base of infinite space, one first practices one of the *kaṣiṇa* objects up to the fourth *jhāna*, emerges from it, and reflects on the disadvantages of matter:

It is only because of the possession of a body that disputes, quarrels, wars, fights, violence with arms, abuses, etc. arise. In the immaterial realms of existence such behavior does not exist.

The body is prone to many kinds of diseases, acute and chronic suffering, diseases of the sense organs, such as eyes, ears, sometimes associated with loss of the corresponding sense faculty. People can become blind or deaf due to disease, which is a severe limitation of the ability to live. People can become paralyzed by disease and accidents. People can get serious fatal diseases such as cancer or AIDS.

Some people have pain every day for a long time. Accidents can cause amputation of limbs. Thus, there are countless ways in which the body can become the cause of severe suffering.

But even if the body is healthy from a medical point of view, it carries many causes of discomfort. Eating, changing position, urge to move, washing and other cleaning are actions we take, due to discomfort.

It is the same with inanimate matter, it too is subject to decay, destruction, wear and tear, inoperability. One has to invest a lot of energy to obtain it and keep it in order.

After this reflection, one decides to evolve beyond materiality and attain the infinite space.

One then enters the fourth *jhāna* of a *kaṣiṇa* object again for a short time and reflects on the disadvantages after emerging:

- It is close to the third *jhāna*, which has happy feeling as a restless factor.
- It is gross in nature because it is based on a material object, compared to the more subtle first non-material base.
- The base of infinite space is more peaceful.

One again enters the fourth *jhāna*, expands it over the entire universe, and then begins to overcome matter by paying attention only to space. This takes place more or less quickly. If one has already practiced the base of infinite space in previous lives, matter disappears very quickly with the desire of infinite, empty space. If this is not so, one must systematically, with the desire to attain infinite space, overcome the matter of the *kaṣiṇa* object. When one has a firm desire to practice the base of infinite space, the *kaṣiṇa*-object breaks down by itself. One must then concentrate on the space thus created, the hole in the image. To do this, one should no longer take matter as an object, no longer pay attention to it, but only pay attention to space as an object. Either the *kaṣiṇa* disappears altogether and one can look at the unlimited space in this way or one first perceives limited space through a hole in the *kaṣiṇa*. One has to look with the mind through a hole in the *kaṣiṇa* in this case. If one observes only space through the hole, the perception of space spreads out more and more. Thus, the unlimited empty space will soon appear at the mind's eye. It is not that one makes the *kaṣiṇa* matter go away, but it disappears by itself through the strong concentration on the opposite and by not paying attention to it anymore. These considerations do not take place in the fourth absorption, but with sense sphere consciousness. Once the space has developed at the mind's eye, the mind soon enters absorption with it during its concentrated contemplation, and one has attained the base of infinite space.

With the expression infinite space it is meant that there is no beginning or end point of the space. Space is considered to be the space remaining after the removal of *kaṣiṇa*, which is not limited. It is that which arises when all matter has been removed. Only this space and the observing consciousness remain.

If one wishes to develop the **fifth liberation** as the base of infinite consciousness, one must contemplate the disadvantages of the base of infinite space after having practiced it as follows:

- This state of attainment is close to the fourth finematerial absorption.
- The base of infinite space is not as peaceful as the base of infinite consciousness.

Having thus overcome the wish for it and considered the base of infinite consciousness as peaceful, one pays no more attention to the base of infinite space, but directs the attention only to the consciousness which pervades this space. This consciousness is the object of the base of infinite consciousness.

It can be observed at the heart base, where it arises and recognizes the infinite space. Now one no longer directs the consciousness to the space, but to the consciousness, which had the space as object. This object of consciousness, which is also consciousness and had infinite space as its object, is very subtle. One has to pay complete attention to it and look at the object with strong mindfulness. Then the mind, trained by the previous attainments, enters absorption with this subtle object. This consciousness is infinite because it has pervaded the infinite space.,

If one wants to develop the **sixth liberation** as the base of nothingness, one has to consider the disadvantages of the base of infinite consciousness as follows:

- This state of attainment of the base of infinite consciousness is close to the base of infinite space, which is grosser.
- It is not as peaceful as the base of nothingness.

When, through these contemplations, one no longer has a desire for the base of infinite consciousness, because one wants to achieve a more peaceful base, one directs one's attention to the base of nothingness. This consists in the no longer arising of anything. One observes for getting this attainment at the heart base. One takes up this base by taking as object the moment when a moment of consciousness that had the base of infinite consciousness as its object has passed away and no new moment of consciousness has yet arisen. In order to take up this object, one has to recognize this moment with great concentration and attentiveness. One now focuses attention only on this absence of a consciousness, without taking any other object. The consciousness previously taken as an object is simply no longer considered and paid attention to. So the base of nothingness has as object the absence of the consciousness which had infinite

space as object and which was itself the object of the base of infinite consciousness.

The base of nothingness is a base that is empty of any object other than nothingness itself. It is not the decay of the previously considered consciousness, but the complete absence. One focuses with full attention on this new object and the mind will soon enter absorption with this nothingness. This base can only be attained through the practice of the previous *jhānā* and bases, because the consciousness has become so subtle by progressing through the fine-material absorptions and non-material bases that it no longer wishes to take any object at all. It also requires a certain process of insight to attain this subtle state of mind. The ability to dwell in nothingness has been attained through practice of the other *jhānā* and non-material bases. With sense sphere consciousness only, which continuously jumps from one object to another and also craves for it, such a sublime state is not imaginable. The mind does not pay attention to other objects and is not busy with anything else, thus the absorption into nothingness, which is the object of consciousness, arises. This is conceptual nothingness.

If one wishes to attain the **seventh liberation** as the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one has to consider the disadvantages of the base of nothingness. This base

- is close to the base of infinite consciousness.

- The base of nothingness is not as peaceful as the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

- Perception is associated with many sufferings, but peaceful and sublime is the base of neither-perception-nor-not-perception.

Thus, when one realizes the benefits of a higher state and overcomes the desire for the base of nothingness, one can practice the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. To attain this, one has to practice the base of nothingness and contemplate it as 'peaceful, peaceful'. When one contemplates like this with concentration, after more or less time the concentration will sink deeper and a more subtle object with a more subtle consciousness will appear.

The object at this stage is the consciousness that had the base of nothingness as its object. Here, one overcomes the base of nothingness by contemplation of a more peaceful state, thereby the mind falls into the new object with a very subtle consciousness and very subtle mental factors. There is still a trace of perception, but it is so subtle that one speaks of neither perception nor non-perception, likewise it is with feeling and all other mental factors. One can also no longer analyze the individual mental factors in a differentiated way after a longer stay and after emerging from this base. With the other immaterial bases it is possible to distinguish all mental factors. From the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception one can only observe consciousness and mental factors as one complex afterwards. But since all mental factors, including perception, are still present, one cannot speak of non-perception.

Since the mind is trained to take more and more subtle objects through the preceding absorptions and bases, there arises a consciousness that can recognize this very subtle state. With continued practice over several hours, this state of mind then, like all *jhānā*, increases in subtlety.

When perception is only very weak, any associative thinking, as a function of the mental factor perception, is very far away. But this does not mean that this state of mind is unclear or as if one is unconscious. Consciousness with its cognitive function is present. Mindfulness (*sati*) with its penetrating function and wisdom with its knowing function are also present. These parts of the mind are here very subtle, but also strongly purified and thus able of the most profound insights. Due to the weakness of the mental factor perception, proliferated thinking is strongly calmed down and direct seeing and understanding takes place on a very subtle level, without words, after emerging from this base.

For the **eighth liberation** as the cessation of perception and feeling, one must practice *vipassanā* with all previous attainments from the first *jhāna* to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, which means to regard all factors in body and mind, e.g., in the form of the five groups of existence (*khandha*) as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless. For more details on the cessation of perception and feeling, see Christina Garbe: The Cessation of Perception and feeling, www.cetovimutti-theravada.org, menu miscellaneous articles.

b. Practice according to Aṭṭhasālinī³

The first liberation is described here, just as in Paṭisambhidāmagga. It is also described here with the *kaṣiṇa* meditation. The colours are picked up by one's own body parts.

It is recommended here,

to pick up the black colour from the hair, the pupil or the bile,

the yellow colour from the skin, fat or the yellow spot of the eye,

the red colour from the flesh, blood, the tongue, the palms of the hands and soles of the feet or the red in the eyes,

the white colour from the bones, teeth, nails or the white of the eyes.

From the word rūpī - one who has matter, one can conclude here that these are the fine-material *jhānā*.

The second liberation is described accordingly: One picks up the colours for *kaṣiṇa* meditation from the body parts of another person.

The third liberation is described here in a different way than in the Paṭisambhidāmagga. Here, for the third liberation, it is recommended to pick up the colour for *kaṣiṇa* meditation from a beautiful colour. The method using the *Brahmavihārā* is explicitly rejected here.

The fourth to eighth liberations are practiced as described in Paṭisambhidāmagga.

c. Other Ways of Practice

Since the Suttā does not explicitly describe the practice of the liberations or whether one can practice all eight of them from the beginning or whether one has slow progress in them, one could also thoroughly practice the contemplation of the 32 body parts as impure (*asuci*) for the first liberation, as described in DN 22. This is in accordance with the sentence:

One possessing form sees forms. This is the first liberation. (*Rūpī rūpāni passati Ayam paṭhamo vimokkho.*)

The body parts can be well seen internally with mind consciousness after the concentration of the fourth *jhāna* with mindfulness of in- and outbreath.

If one practices according to DN 22 and begins with mindfulness on the in- and outbreath described in the first chapter of this suttā, and combines this with the exposition of right concentration as a factor of the noble eightfold path in the last chapter of the suttā, one should attain up to the fourth *jhāna* with the object of mindfulness on the in- and outbreath. This is how the Buddha taught mindfulness (*sati*).

By observing the 32 parts of the body as impure, one can only attain the first *jhāna*.

When one can see the body parts well with mind consciousness, one can practice first the contemplation of the body part.

Then one can pick up the colour from the corresponding body part and so then proceed with *kaṣiṇa* meditation and develop four *jhānā*. Thus, one would have developed in this way the first liberation.

One can develop the second liberation in the same way, namely with the 32 body parts of another being. This is also how it is instructed in DN 22, namely to practice internally and externally.

Through this exercise of observing the 32 parts of the body as impure (*asuci*) internally and externally, attachment to matter can well be overcome. This attachment is not overcome by aversion, because aversion cannot occur in the first *jhāna*. The first *jhāna* is a gratifying experience, which is associated with joy. The obstacles, which include aversion, are suppressed as long as the mind dwells in the *jhāna*.

³ Aṭṭhasālinī is the commentary of the first Abhidhamma book of the Tipiṭaka, Dhammasaṅgaṇī. See: The Expositor, translated by U Maung Tin, London 1920, p. 255 ff

In this way, one can slowly go through the liberations step by step. Then, if one still practices *vipassanā* after each *jhāna* with the contemplation of the 32 parts of the body and the four *jhānā* of *kaṣiṇa* meditation, unwholesome states of mind are suppressed by insight and thus liberation occurs temporarily.

At any point in this practice, path consciousness may occur, whereby, from path to path, mental defilements can be finally overcome.

With this approach, the third liberation is very suitable to be practiced with the *Brahmavihārā* up to *jhāna*. It further reduces emotional entanglements with other beings, whether clinging or rejecting, and the mind becomes temporarily free.

Also with each *Brahmavihāra-jhāna* one should practice *vipassanā*, whereby the aspect of liberation is strengthened not only by *samatha*, but additionally by *vipassanā*, which means seeing all factors involved as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless. The *Brahmavihārā* should be practiced with one's own person, the other person, and with all beings.

This is a very beautiful practice to consciously solve difficulties, which are always kammically conditioned, with other beings for oneself well and to free oneself from kammical entanglements. For the Arahāt, mental defilements no longer occur, but difficulties with other beings, as we can also see well in the example of the Buddha, who also had to experience slander, contempt, attempts to kill him, devaluation, etc., can still occur.

It can happen at all stages of this thorough practice of temporary liberation that path consciousness is achieved as final liberation from mental defilements.

Thus, the first seven *vimokkhā* are also a preparation for the eighth liberation. This can only be attained by non-returners and arahats, and only through seclusion and a very well-cleared, silent state of mind.

The fourth through seventh liberations have been clearly described in the *suttā* and should be practiced as described in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* description.

Regarding the combination of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, one can first practice all *samatha* attainments and then start again from the first liberation and practice *vipassanā* with all factors involved in body and mind after each *jhāna*.

Or one practices in pairs (*yuganaddha*) from the beginning, that is, directly after each *samatha* attainment *vipassanā*.

In this way, one has created the prerequisites for being able to walk all four paths and to be able to practice the eighth liberation, the cessation of perception and feeling, as a crowning achievement.

When one thus practices *samatha* and *vipassanā* as *vimokkhā*, one does not lose the focus of the goal of final liberation from all mental defilements, thereby a powerful support for the practice is produced.

4. Supportive and Obstructive Behaviour for the Attainment of the Liberations

In AN 5. 149 and 150 we find a good compilation of supportive and obstructive behaviour for the attainment of the liberations.

AN 5.149 Temporarily Liberated I - Paṭhamasamayavimuttasuttaṃ.

"Bhikkhus, these five things lead to the decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu. What five?

Delight in work,

delight in talk,

delight in sleep,

delight in company;

and he does not review the extent to which the mind is liberated.

These five things lead to the decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu."

"Bhikkhus, these five things lead to the non-decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu. What five?

There is no delight in work,

no delight in talk,,

no delight in sleep,

no delight in company;

and he reviews the extent to which the mind is liberated.

These five things lead to the non-decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu."

AN 5.150 Temporarily Liberated II – Dutiyasamayavimuttasuttaṃ

"Bhikkhus, these five things lead to the decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu. What five?

Delight in work,

delight in talk,

delight in sleep,

not guarding the doors of the sense faculties,

and lack of moderation in eating.

These five things lead to the decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu."

"Bhikkhus, these five things lead to the non-decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu. What five?

There is no delight in work,

no delight in talk,

no delight in sleep,

guarding the doors of the sense faculties,

and moderation in eating.

These five things lead to the non-decline of a temporarily liberated bhikkhu."

5. Meaning of the Word *vimokkha*

Both the Pāḷi word *vimokkhā* and the word *vimutti* are nouns with the same origin. The prefix *vi* in the Pāḷi language means, diverse, special, or also profound.

Mutti and *mokkha* both come from the verb *muñcati*, which is *muccati* in the passive form. It means to liberate, to release, to detach, to let go, or to be liberated, to be detached. The word *mokkhā* is also used for attaining arahatship.

We find in the Pāḷiliterature the two terms *vimokkhā* and *vimutti* for liberation. Liberation always refers to overcoming all mental defilements. The meaning of both words is the same. The word *vimokkhā* is used specifically for the eight liberations described in this article. It is also used for three liberations through *vipassanā* meditation, emptiness liberation, desireless liberation, and signless liberation.

Both words are used for temporary liberation as well as for final liberation through attaining arahatship, which means overcoming all mental defilements.

According to MN 43, the fourth fine-material *jhāna*, the base of nothingness and the *Brahmavihārā-jhānā* are mentioned as temporary liberations. These are temporary liberations through *samatha*.

There is also temporary liberation through *vipassanā*. This would be the emptiness liberation of the mind (*suññata cetovimutti*) in the relative sense. By this is meant the liberation of the mind conditioned by contemplation of emptiness of a personality in *vipassanā* meditation. This can only be seen in a long lasting state of *vipassanā-samādhi*. Only ultimate realities are perceived then and through this the view of *anatta*, emptiness of a person, emptiness of an ego, can be realized. One can speak of liberation of mind here only when unwholesome states of mind, rooted in craving, aversion, and delusion, do not arise for a long time. As long as the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teachings, final awakening, arahatship, has not been achieved, this state is also temporary. When the conditions for it cease, the liberation of mind also ceases.

The temporary liberations are reversible, the successive liberations from mental defilements through the four paths are not reversible.

In MN 25.9, the Buddha describes how one can lose this temporary liberation of the mind:

"Having lost their strength and energy, they lost their liberation of the mind. Having lost their liberation of the mind, they returned to that bait that Māra had laid out, to those material things of the world."

In a state of deep mental tranquility (*samādhi*), the mind is free from all defilements. This, however, is not the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teaching. Ultimate liberation can only be achieved by developing wisdom (*paññā*) in *vipassanā* meditation. However, the temporary liberation of mind through deep tranquility and concentration (*samādhi*) is a prerequisite for developing liberating wisdom. In a state of deep mental tranquility, the mind is completely one-pointed (*ekaggatā*). Based on this state of mind, profound understanding can arise and thereby defilements can be cut off forever. Only a mind temporarily free of mental defilements such as craving, aversion, and delusion can see things as they really are. If the mind is not freed from these unwholesome states, perception is influenced by them, and clear understanding and liberating wisdom cannot be developed.

6. Liberation, in what Sense Liberation?

In the Patisambhidamagga, a distinction is made between liberation as emergence internally and liberation as emergence externally.

What is liberation as emergence internally?

The four mental absorptions (*jhānā*). This is liberation as emergence internally.

What is liberation as emergence externally?

The four immaterial attainments. This is liberation as emergence externally.

What are the four liberations as emergence internally?

The first *jhāna* emerges from the hindrances,
the second *jhāna* emerges from initial and sustained application,
the third *jhāna* emerges from joy,
the fourth *jhāna* emerges from happiness and sorrow.
These are the four liberations as emergence internally.

What are the four liberations as emergence externally?

The attainment of the base of infinite space emerges from the perception of materiality, from the perception of impingement [of sense objects on sense bases], from the perception of diversity.
The attainment of the base of infinite consciousness emerges from the perception of infinite space,
the attainment of the base of nothingness emerges from the perception of infinite consciousness,
the attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception emerges from the perception of the base of nothingness.
These are the four liberations as emergence externally.

There is also a distinction between liberation for a definite time and liberation for an indefinite time, between shakable liberation and unshakable liberation, between worldly liberation and supramundane liberation, between liberation with influxes and liberation without influxes, between material, non-material liberation and liberation more immaterial as non-material liberation, liberation with desire and desireless liberation, liberation associated with fetters and liberation without fetters.

What is liberation for a definite time?

The four *jhānā* and the four immaterial attainments.
This is liberation for a definite time.

What is liberation for an indefinite time?

The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetics, and *Nibbāna*.
This is liberation for an indefinite time.

What is shakable liberation?

The four *jhānā* and the four immaterial attainments.
This is shakable liberation.

What is unshakable liberation?

The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetics, and *Nibbāna*.
This is unshakable liberation.

What is worldly liberation?

The four *jhānā* and the four immaterial attainments.
This is worldly liberation.

What is supramundane liberation?

The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetics, and *Nibbāna*.

This is supramundane liberation.

What is liberation with influxes?

The four *jhānā* and the four immaterial attainments.

This is liberation with influxes.

What is liberation without influxes?

The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetics, and *Nibbāna*.

This is liberation without influxes.

What is material (literally fleshly) liberation?

Liberation associated with materiality.

This is material liberation.

What is immaterial (literally, non-flesh) liberation?

Liberation connected with immaterial.

This is immaterial liberation.

What is liberation more immaterial than immaterial?

The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetics, and *Nibbāna*.

This is liberation more immaterial than immaterial.

What is liberation associated with desire?

The four *jhānā* and the four immaterial attainments.

This is liberation connected with desire.

What is liberation without desire?

The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetics, and *Nibbāna*.

This is desireless liberation.

What is liberation associated with fetters?

The four *jhānā* and the four immaterial attainments.

This is fettered liberation.

What is liberation not associated with fetters?

The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetics, and *Nibbāna*.

This is liberation not associated with fetters.

Through *vipassanā* meditation perception changes. The false or distorted perception is replaced by a perception of things as they really are. This is called liberation of perception. The following liberations result when one correctly practices *vipassanā* with the factors of *samatha* meditation of the eight *vimokkhā*.

What is liberation of perception?

Knowledge (*ñāṇa*) while contemplating impermanence is liberated from the perception of permanence. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in contemplating unsatisfactoriness is liberated from the perception of happiness. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in the contemplation of selflessness is liberated from the perception of a self. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in the contemplation of disenchantment is liberated from the perception of pleasure. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in the contemplation of dispassion is liberated from the perception of lust. This is perceptual liberation.

Knowledge in contemplating cessation is liberated from the perception of arising. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in the contemplation of letting go is liberated from the perception of grasping. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in the contemplation of signlessness is liberated from the perception of a sign. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in the contemplation of desirelessness is liberated from the perception of desire. This is liberation of perception.

Knowledge in the contemplation of emptiness is liberated from the perception of inclination. This is liberation of perception.

The same can be applied to liberation from not knowing through knowledge and liberation from desire and fear through unsurpassable knowledge.

Liberation in this sense, then, does not refer to ultimate liberation from all mental defilements, as occurs through the attainment of arahatship, but to temporary liberation from certain mental defilements, from unskillful, unwholesome things.

7. Relevance of the Eight Liberations

In MN 137 The Exposition of the Sixfold Base - *Saḷāyatanavibhaṅgasuttaṃ* where the Buddha talks to the bhikkhus about the six internal and external sense bases and their impermanence, as well as the need for renunciation, at the end of the sutta he represents himself to be the leader. He compares himself as a leader to an elephant tamer, to a horse tamer, to an ox tamer. These animal tamers send the corresponding tameable animal in one direction, namely east, west, north or south. He, on the other hand, sends his tamable disciples in eight directions as the eight liberations (*vimokkhā*). At the end it is said: *"So it happened in dependence on this that it was said: 'Among the teachers of training it is he that is called the incomparable leader of persons to be tamed.'"* This comparison shows the relevance of these eight liberations and also the prerequisite. The prerequisite is that the student should be tameable.

Also in MN 77, the eight liberations are mentioned by the Buddha. There the Buddha talks about the qualities of virtue by which he is honored, respected, appreciated and revered by his disciples, and of virtue by which his disciples live in dependence on him while honoring and respecting him. The qualities also include the eight liberations. After enumerating these, the Buddha says that while dwelling in these eight liberations, his disciples attain the culmination and perfection of direct knowledge (*abhiññā*).

In DN 15 The Great Discourse on Origination - *Mahānidānasuttaṃ*, where the Buddha explains to Venerable Ānanda the profundity of dependant origination, the Buddha also enumerates the eight liberations at the end. It is stated there:

"When a bhikkhu, Ānanda, attains these eight liberations in forward order, attains them in backward order, attains them in forward and backward order, wherever he desires, however he desires, for however long he desires, attains them and emerges from them, and when the influxes have dissipated, he realizes influx-free liberation of mind and wisdom liberation, thus seeing things, with his own direct knowledge, and dwells in them. This one is called, Ānanda, liberated from both sides. And there is, Ānanda, among the liberations from both sides, no other liberation from both sides that is higher and more sublime."

Here it is clear that the eight liberations include *vipassanā*, for otherwise wisdom liberation would not be possible. Liberation from both sides includes liberation through *samatha* and through *vipassanā*. Overcoming the influxes means attaining arahatship. Thus, this can be achieved with continuous practice, forward, backward, at all times and in all places by the eight liberations.