JOHANNES BRONKHORST

SELF AND MEDITATION IN INDIAN BUDDHISM[1]

(published in: *International Conference on Korean Son Buddhism, Kobulch'ongnim Paekyang-sa Buddhist Monastery, 19-22.8.2542 (= 1998).* Kobulch'ongnim Much'asonhoi Organizing Committee, Seoul, Korea, 1998. Pp. 141-159)

In order to understand the ideas on the self and on meditation in early Buddhism and in some other contemporary Indian religions, one has to take into consideration the doctrine of karma as it existed at that time. This doctrine is older than Buddhism, and constitutes the background for other religious movements of ancient India besides Buddhism. There are few records describing the doctrine of karma in its earliest form, but the evidence we have supports the following presentation.

Deeds constitute the decisive factor that cause rebirth to take place and that determine what the new life will be like: good deeds lead to a good rebirth, bad deeds to a bad one. The religious movements of ancient India that accepted this fundamental belief shared in common that their highest aspiration was not to obtain a good rebirth, but to avoid any rebirth whatsoever. How could this aspiration be realised? Moral behaviour would obviously not be of any help, given that good deeds were thought to lead to rebirth, even a good one. What, if not deeds of some kind, could prevent rebirth from taking place?

---

1 This article draws heavily on my earlier publications, esp. *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India* (2nd edition, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1993); *The Two Sources of Indian Asceticism* (Peter Lang, Bern, 1993; 2nd edition, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1998); "The Buddha and the Jainas reconsidered" (AS 49(2), 1995, 333-350); "Dharma and Abhidharma" (BSOAS 48 (1985), pp. 305-320); "Remarks on the history of Jaina meditation" (*Jain Studies in Honour of Jozef Deleu*, ed. Rudy Smet and Kenji Watanabe, Tokyo: Hon-no-Tomosha, 1993, pp. 151-162); "Die Buddhistische Lehre" (*Der indische Buddhismus und seine Verzweigungen, Die Religionen der Menschheit*, vol. 24,1, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 2000); "Did the Buddha believe in karma and rebirth?" (JIABS 21(1), 1998); "Zur Genese des Buddhismus in seinem geschichtlichen Kontext. Proprium — Abgrenzung gegenüber hinduistischen Traditionen und Jinismus" (*Der Buddhismus als Anfrage an christliche Theologie und Philosophie*, ed. Andreas Bsteh, Mödling: St. Gabriel, 2000). These publications contain full references to the original texts.

Two solutions presented themselves. The first one is as simple as it is straightforward. If deeds bring about rebirth, one will have to abstain from all activities whatsoever if one wants to prevent rebirth from taking place. This solution requires people aspiring for liberation to engage in ascetic practices in which motionlessness of body and mind plays a central role. Indeed, perfect liberation will be obtained by the ascetic who manages to immobilise his body and mind completely right until death. Death will be hastened by the fact that the ascetic abstains from eating and, during the last minutes of his life, from breathing. There is certainly the added complication that deeds carried out before the ascetic enters his immobile life-style will still carry fruit. These deeds, however, were believed to reach fruition in the painful experiences which the ascetic evokes by his difficult life-style. The store of earlier deeds having been exhausted, the ascetic can concentrate on his death, which he invites through fasting and the interruption of breathing, as I said above. The moment of death is, for the successful ascetic, also his moment of liberation.

A different solution was accepted by others. If the deeds of persons bring about their rebirth, it becomes important to know which deeds really belong to a person and which don't. This entails the question: what exactly is the person? A number of thinkers answered that the real self of a person is different from all that acts. The real self is different from the body to begin with, but also different from the mind, and from whatever else that acts for that matter. The self is by its very nature immobile, motionless and actionless. Once one realises this, one distantiates oneself automatically from all parts of the personality that act, and therefore from one's deeds. More precisely, one realises that no deeds whatsoever belong to the person, i.e., to oneself. Those who have this insight know that in reality they never act, and that they cannot therefore be reborn as a result of their deeds. The knowledge that they — in deepest reality — never act, and that there are therefore no deeds that belong to them that could bring about a new birth, liberates those who

have this knowledge once and for all. The nature of this solution, unlike the first one, is such that liberation can be reached before death. Insight is obtained while alive, so people who have definitely reached it will be alive for at least some time after the event.

The first of the two solutions which I have presented finds its clearest and least watered down expression in the texts of early Jainism. These texts celebrate the motionless ascetic and the conscious choice of death through starvation. They describe the ever increasing control of body and mind, until nothing moves any longer in the ascetic, neither in his body nor in his mind. These same texts also point out how the culmination of this life-style, i.e. voluntary death through starvation, is accompanied by the suppression of breathing. But the Jaina texts are not the only ones that glorify the immobilisation of body and mind. Early Hindu texts, such as certain Vedic Sūtras and portions of the Mahābhārata, present a very similar picture, although it is usually less detailed.

The idea of an inactive self, knowledge of which is a precondition for liberation, is an almost omnipresent theme of classical Hinduism. It makes its appearance in the early Upaniṣads (which may have borrowed it from others). It is a recurring theme in the Mahābhārata, and it is the very basis of many subsequent developments of Hinduism, including in particular all the Brahmanical schools of philosophy.

The doctrine of karma as I have described it existed already at the time of the Buddha, as did the two solutions which I have mentioned. It seems certain that the Buddha did not accept the doctrine in this form. For him it is not deeds, i.e. physical and mental movements, which determine one's fate, but what is behind deeds. The early Buddhist texts speak again and again of thirst or desire (*tṛṣṇā*) as the root problem, rather than mere deeds. On some rare occasions they identify deeds with intention (*cetanā*).[2] A deed that was not carried out in spite of strong

[2] AN III.415.

desire would nevertheless leave its karmic traces, and a deed that was carried out without intention — perhaps by mistake — would not. In other words, the doctrine of karma accepted by the Buddha was in one fundamental respect quite different from that accepted by other religious movements of his time.[3] This had an unmistakable consequence. The two solutions current among the other movements could not possibly be acceptable to the Buddha. Immobilisation of the body would have no effect as long as desire had not yet been removed. Much the same could be said about insight into the true nature of an inactive self. Deeds were for the Buddha less important than the psychological states that might, or might not, bring them about. The challenge faced by the Buddha was not, therefore, to stop deeds, but to deal with the psychology of the person concerned.

It follows from what precedes that the solution offered by the Buddha had to be different from the two described earlier. His solution had to be different, and it had to be psychological. Indeed, unlike the other religious movements of his day, the Buddha taught a form of meditation with the aim of bringing about a radical change in the psychological makeup of its practitioners. This radical change could be brought about during the life-time of the person concerned, so it was believed, and the Buddha himself presented himself as someone in whom it had taken place.[4]

I have so far used the words self and meditation a few times. The self — and more in particular the conviction that the self, by its very nature, does not act — played an essential role in one solution to the problem resulting from the conviction

---

[3] Richard Gombrich ("The Buddhist attitude to thaumaturgy," *Bauddhavidyāsudhākaraḥ: Studies in Honour of Heinz Bechert on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Jens-Uwe Hartmann, Swisttal-Odendorf 1997 (IndTib 30), pp. 165-184) is right in emphasising the revolutionary nature of the Buddha's theory of karma, but no doubt wrong in suggesting that before his time primarily ritual acts were believed to be responsible for continual rebirth (p. 171). See also the chapter "*Kamma* as a reaction to Brahminism" in Gombrich's book *How Buddhism Began: The conditioned genesis of the early teachings* (London & Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Athlone, 1996 (Jordan Lectures 1994), pp. 27-64).

[4] Some scholars seem to have missed this point. Oskar v. Hinüber ("Old age and old monks in Pāli Buddhism," *Aging, Asian Concepts and Experiences, Past and Present*, ed. Susanne Formanek and Sepp Linhart, Wien: ÖAW, 1997 (SAWW 643), pp. 65-78), for example, writes (p. 67) that "the Buddha ... spent half a century striving for enlightenment and teaching before he finally entered *nirvāṇa* at the age of 80".

that physical and mental deeds are responsible for rebirth. Since the Buddha did not recognise the problem, he rejected the solution. Knowledge of the self plays no role on his path to liberation. Because the Buddha did not accept that deeds themselves are responsible for rebirth, his method was, and had to be, psychological. Part of his method was a certain kind of meditation which supposedly allowed its practitioner to bring about the requisite psychological changes. It will now be clear that the items that figure in the title of this lecture — self and meditation — have something to do with each other. The Buddha introduced a psychological method of which meditation was part, because he rejected knowledge of the self as a way toward liberation.

At this point I may have to clarify some points. To begin with, the early texts are not so clear as to whether the existence of a self is rejected or not by the Buddha. Much has been written about this issue, without a clear and unambiguous solution in sight so far. Most convincing is probably Claus Oetke[5] who, at the end of a long and painstaking enquiry, arrives at the conclusions that the early texts neither accept nor reject the self. Fortunately we do not have to take position in this debate. Whether or not the Buddha accepted the *existence* of a self, it is certain that he did not preach *knowledge* of the self as an essential element of the path to liberation. His path was different, and meditation had an important role to play in it.

A further point to be dealt with concerns meditation in early Jainism. I have argued that the path of early Jainism consisted in the immobilisation of body and mind. The early Jaina texts do sometimes use the term *dhyāna*, which is often translated ‘meditation’. A closer inspection reveals however that this term is used precisely for the mental immobilisation which is part of the total immobilisation of body and mind typical of Jainism and parallel movements. ‘Meditation’ may not be a very appropriate translation for *dhyāna* in this context, and the difference with the Buddhist use of the term is beyond doubt.

---

5 *"Ich" und das Ich. Analytische Untersuchungen zur buddhistisch-brahmanischen Ótmankontroverse*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1988 (ANISt 33), pp. 59-242.

It should be clear, then, that the attitude of the Buddha with regard to self and meditation had much to do with his understanding of the doctrine of karma. Yet there are indications that his psychological understanding of this doctrine caused confusion and misunderstanding among his followers. At least some of the early Buddhists, many of whom may have been recruited from surroundings where the other understanding of the doctrine of karma held sway, appear to have somehow missed this important feature of the Buddha's teaching. They held on to the view that deeds themselves (rather than the desires that inspire them) lead to rebirth, and consequently they felt attracted to the two solutions described above. Already the old Sūtras describe some practices and beliefs that fit the physical interpretation of the doctrine of karma much better than the psychological one. We find feats of immobilisation glorified, and mental exercises which appear to have had no other aim than to immobilise the mind. What is more, we find the view that insight into the true nature of the self leads to liberation reintroduced, but in a modified form. Let us consider this last point first.

As pointed out above, knowledge of the true nature of the self was believed (by certain non-Buddhists) to lead to liberation because it implied distantiation from all that is active in body and mind. Such a liberating knowledge, as we have seen, was not recognised by the Buddha. Now listen to the following passage from the second sermon attributed to the Buddha:[6]

> Then the Lord addressed the group of five monks, saying: "Matter (*rūpa*), monks, is not self. Now were this matter self, monks, this matter would not tend to sickness, and one might get the chance of saying in regard to matter, ‘Let matter become thus for me, let matter not become thus for me’. But inasmuch, monks, as matter is not self, therefore matter tends to sickness, and one does not get the chance of saying in regard to matter, ‘Let matter become thus for me, let matter not become thus for

6 Vin I.13 f.; tr. BD 4 p. 20 f., modified.

> me'." The same words are then repeated with regard to the remaining four constituents of the person (*skandha*), viz. feeling (*vedanā*), ideation (*saṃjñā*), the habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*), consciousness (*vijñāna*). The Buddha then continues:
>
> "What do you think about this, monks? Is matter permanent or impermanent?"
>
> "Impermanent, Lord."
>
> "But is that which is impermanent suffering or bliss?"
>
> "Painful, Lord."
>
> "But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, painful, of a nature to change, as 'This is mine, this am I, this is my self'?"
>
> "It is not, Lord."

The same words are then repeated, this time in connection with the remaining four constituents (*skandha*) of the person.

In order to correctly appreciate this passage, recall that matter (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), ideation (*saṃjñā*), the habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*) are the five constituents (*skandha*) of a person. Together they constitute the person's body and mind. This passage points out that with regard to none of these one can say 'This is mine, this am I, this is my self'. Scholars have often wondered what this teaches us about the acceptance or otherwise of the self by the Buddha, but this question does not interest us at present. The passage primarily states that one is not identical with any of these constituents. This, in its turn, implies that one should not identify with one's body and mind. And this is precisely what knowledge of the true and inactive nature of the self was supposed to bring about among those who accepted that as a path to liberation.

This conclusion is confirmed by the sequel of the sermon, which reads:

> Seeing in this way, monks, the instructed disciple of the ariyans turns away from matter and he turns away from feeling and he turns away from ideation and he turns away from the habitual tendencies and he turns away from consciousness; turning away he is dispassionate; through dispassion he is freed; in the freed one the knowledge comes to be: 'I am freed', and he knows: Birth has been destroyed, the pure life has been lived, what was to be done has been done, so that there is no more return here.

It is easy to see that the liberating insight into the true nature of the self has here been replaced by another liberating insight, that of non-self. The monks who have heard this sermon and obtained this insight reach immediate liberation:

> Thus spoke the Lord; delighted, the group of five monks rejoiced in what the Lord had said. Moreover while this discourse was being uttered (*imasmiñ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ bhaññamāne*), the minds of the group of five monks were freed from the intoxicants without grasping. At that time there were six perfected ones (*arhat*) in the world.

The mere fact of hearing this wisdom proclaimed was apparently enough for the five monks to reach instant liberation.

I hope it becomes clear that, and why, the idea of knowledge of the true nature of the self as a precondition for liberation exerted an attraction already on the early Buddhists, among them the composer, or redactor, of this part of the Buddha's first sermon. However, at this early period knowledge of the self could not be accepted as liberating insight in Buddhism. We may assume that the rejection by the Buddha of this particular solution was still in the minds of his followers. As a result they introduced this solution through a backdoor: they

introduced knowledge of non-self rather than knowledge of self as liberating insight.

The idea of an inactive self continued to exert an attraction on the Buddhists. It finds expression in the so-called *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The similarity between the *tathāgatagarbha* of certain Buddhists and the self of certain non-Buddhists was so striking that one Buddhist text comments upon it. The following passage occurs in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. The Bodhisattva Mahāmati addresses the following question to the Buddha:[7]

> You describe the *tathāgatagarbha* as brilliant by nature and pure by its purity etc., possessing the thirty-two signs [of excellence], and present in the bodies of all beings; it is enveloped in a garment of *skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas*, like a gem of great value which is enveloped in a dirty garment; it is soiled with passion, hatred, confusion and false imagination, and described by the venerable one as eternal, stable, auspicious and without change. Why is this doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* not identical with the doctrine of the *ātman* of the non-Buddhists? Also the non-Buddhists preach a doctrine of the *ātman* which is eternal, non-active, without attributes, omnipresent and imperishable.

The Buddha's answer does not interest us at present. An attempt is made to show that there is, after all, a difference between the *tathāgatagarbha* of the Buddhists and the *ātman* of the non-Buddhists. The main point is that the two were so close that even Buddhists started wondering what the difference was. Clearly, the idea of an inactive self had maintained its attraction for the Buddhists of this later period.

---

[7] Laṅkāv(V) 2.137, p. 33 l. 10 ff. The word *kartā* at the end of Mahāmati's question has been corrected into *akartā* 'non-active'; only this reading makes sense; it is moreover confirmed by the Tibetan translation (Taipei edition vol. 10, folio 86a), as I have been informed by T. Tillemans.

At this point something has to be said about the *pudgala*, the notion of the person or self that came to be accepted by the so-called Pudgalavādins. The *pudgala* is to be distinguished from the self I have talked about so far. The *pudgala* was not believed to be inactive; knowledge of the true nature of the *pudgala* could not therefore guarantee or be a precondition for liberation. Quite on the contrary, the *pudgala* was thought of as neither identical with nor different from the *skandha*s, the constituents of the person. It appears to have been conceived of as the whole of those constituents. Many other Buddhists, especially those belonging to the Abhidharma schools, had such a concept of the person. They certainly rejected this concept, whereas the Pudgalavādins accepted it. It must however be recalled that what these Buddhists rejected, and what the Pudgalavādins accepted, was something quite different from the notion of an inactive self which we have been discussing so far. The Buddha had rejected knowledge of the inactive self as an essential step on the road to liberation, and later Buddhists reintroduced this notion, first through a back-door (as knowledge of the non-self), then in the form of the *tathāgatagarbha*. The notion of the *pudgala* was not yet important at the time of the Buddha, and may indeed not have evolved until much later, when Abhidharma systematically analysed the person and everything else there is. The rejection by these Buddhists of the *pudgala* should not therefore be confused with the rejection of the inactive self.

After these reflections about the self let us now turn to meditation. It has already been pointed out that in the way preached by the Buddha meditation played a central role. The most important part is constituted by the so-called Four Dhyānas, which follow a long series of preparatory exercises in which mindfulness

(*smṛti*) plays an important role. The Four Dhyānas are described as follows in the Mahāsaccaka Sūtra:[8]

> Then indeed, Aggivessana, having taken ample food, and having recovered strength, being separated from desires, separated from bad things, I reached the First Dhyāna, which is accompanied by thought and reflection, born from separation, and consists of joy and bliss, and resided [there]. ...
> As a result of appeasing thought and reflection I reached the Second Dhyāna, which is an inner tranquillisation, a unification of the mind, free from thought and reflection, consisting of joy and bliss that is born from concentration (*samādhija*), and resided [there]. ...
> As a result of detachment from joy, I remained indifferent, attentive and mindful. I experienced with my body the bliss which the noble ones describe [in these terms]: 'indifferent, with attentiveness, residing in bliss'; thus I reached the Third Dhyāna and resided [there]. ...
> As a result of abandoning bliss, and abandoning pain, as a result of the earlier disappearance of cheerfulness and dejection, I reached the Fourth Dhyāna, which is free from pain and bliss, the complete purity of equanimity and attentiveness, and resided [there]. ....

It is important to remember that these meditative states are not presented as aims in themselves. The aim, as always in the early Buddhist texts, is liberation; this in its turn is the result of a psychological transformation that can only take place in meditative trance, in the Fourth Dhyāna to be precise. This psychological transformation, which is the result of a liberating insight, is described as follows:[9]

---

8 MN I.247.
9 E.g. MN I.23

> Because he knows this and sees this, his mind is liberated from the taints (three kinds of taints are enumerated, which I leave out, JB). Once [his mind] is freed, the insight arises in him: "I am freed". "Rebirth is destroyed, the sacred life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, so that I will not return here." This is what he knows.

It will be clear that liberation here is not the result of meditation itself, but of a psychological transformation which the meditator brings about in this meditative state. This implies that this meditative state, and the Four Dhyānas in general, are not totally devoid of mental activity. This is exactly what we would expect, for immobilisation of the mind was no aim of the Buddha. His answer to rebirth as a result of action was not inaction, but psychological transformation. This psychological transformation takes place as the result of an important insight. Regarding the nature of this insight the text offer many different answers. There is indeed reason to believe that the earliest tradition had no precise information as to its content. This, in its turn, is not very surprising if we take into account that this insight was obtained and brought about its effect, liberation, in a state which nowadays would be called an "altered state of consciousness".

However, many contemporaries of the Buddha did not agree with the idea of psychological transformation as precondition for liberation, as we have seen. Nor did some of his early followers. They were tempted by that other understanding of the doctrine of karma in which karma is activity, and liberation from its effects takes place as a result of inaction. Practices relating to that other understanding of the doctrine of karma were therefore introduced into Buddhism, and among these there are meditational practices of a different kind.

Let us first consider some physical practices. Non-Buddhist ascetics cultivated total control of the senses, so much so that their functioning could be completely suppressed. No such suppression was advocated by the Buddha, and

indeed, at least one Buddhist Sūtra (the Indriyabhāvanā Sutta of the Pāli canon and its parallel in Chinese translation) ridicules the kind of so-called 'cultivation of the senses' which leads to their non-functioning; the Buddha is here reported to say that if this is cultivation of the senses, the blind and deaf would be cultivators of the senses. And yet, in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, in its various recensions, where a discussion with someone called Putkasa (in Sanskrit) or Pukkusa (in Pāli) is recorded, the Buddha is presented as boasting that once, in a violent thunderstorm when lightning killed two farmers and four oxen nearby him, he did not notice it. We must assume that this apocryphal story reflects the admiration that, in spite of the Buddha, certain Buddhists felt for these kinds of abilities.

Clearer, and even more surprising, is the fact that sometimes the Buddha himself is credited with practices which we can recognise as being typical of early Jainism, and which certain Buddhist text indeed ascribe to Jainas and criticise as such. For example, a Sūtra of the Majjhima Nikāya (the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta) and its parallels in Chinese translation describe and criticise the Jainas as practising 'annihilation of former actions by asceticism' and 'non-performing of new actions'. This is an accurate description of the practices of the Jainas. But several other Sūtras of the Buddhist canon put almost the same words in the mouth of the Buddha, who here *approves* of these practices. We conclude from this contradiction that non-Buddhist practices — this time it clearly concerns Jaina practices — had come to be accepted by at least some Buddhists, and ascribed to the Buddha himself.

The appeal of these practices remained strong, even centuries later. As late a text as the third Bhāvanākrama of Kamalaśīla (8th century C.E.) criticises the following opinion:[10]

---

[10] MBT III, pp. 13-14; tr. David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the transmission and reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet,* London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1989 (Jordan Lectures 1987), p. 93.

> A certain [teacher] has the following opinion: "It is because of the force of good and bad deeds (*śubhāśubhakarman*), produced through mental construction (*cittavikalpa*), that sentient beings (*sattva*) revolve in the round of existences (*saṃsāra*), experiencing the fruits of deeds (*karmaphala*) such as heaven (*svargādi*). Those who on the contrary neither think on anything (*na kiṃcic cintayanti*) nor perform any deed whatever are completely freed (*parimuc-*) from the round of existences. Therefore nothing is to be thought on (*na kiṃcic cintayitavyam*), nor is salutary conduct (*kuśalacaryā*) consisting in generosity and the like (*dānādi*) to be practised. It is only in respect to foolish people (*mūrkhajana*) that salutary conduct consisting in generosity and the like has been indicated (*nirdiṣṭā*)."

The same opinion is further characterised in these words: "No deed whatever, salutary or otherwise, is to be performed" (*na kiṃcit kuśalādikarma kartavyam*).

We have seen that non-Buddhists practised asceticism in order to evoke painful experiences which were taken to be the fruition of earlier deeds. The Buddha had rejected this notion as well as the need for painful asceticism. However, the traditional biography of the Buddha before his enlightenment, i.e., when he was still Bodhisattva, includes a long period of severe asceticism. It has been pointed out, most recently by Minoru Hara,[11] that a number of accounts of the life of the Buddha depict his pre-enlightenment asceticism as a way to deliver him from defilement incurred in an earlier existence.

The practices which were introduced, or attempted to be introduced, into Buddhism did not only concern suppression of bodily action and of the senses. Suppression of mental activity, too, is prominent. Consider first the following.

---

[11] Minoru Hara, "A note on the Buddha's asceticism: The Liu du ji jing (Six Pāramitā-sūtra) 53," *Bauddhavidyāsudhākaraḥ: Studies in Honour of Heinz Bechert on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Jens-Uwe Hartmann, Swisttal-Odendorf 1997 (IndTib 30), pp. 249-260.

The Vitakkasanthāna Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya and its parallels in Chinese translation *recommend* the practising monk to ‘restrain his thought with his mind, to coerce and torment it’. Exactly the same words are used elsewhere in the Pāli canon (in the Mahāsaccaka Sutta, Bodhirājakumāra Sutta and Saṅgārava Sutta) in order to describe the *futile* attempts of the Buddha before his enlightenment to reach liberation after the manner of the Jainas. The passage from the third Bhāvanākrama just cited states, similarly, that "nothing is to be thought on" (*na kiṃcic cintayitavyam*). Other indications show that suppression of mental activity, though rejected by the Buddha, came to characterise much that became known as Buddhist meditation.

Let us first look at the so-called eight Liberations (*vimokṣa / vimokkha*). They are the following:

1) Having visible shape, one sees visible shapes
2) Having no ideation of visible shape in oneself, one sees visible shapes outside [oneself]
3) One becomes intent on what is beautiful
4) By completely going beyond ideations of visible shape and the coming to an end of ideations of aversion, by not fixing one’s mind on different ideations, [thinking] ‘space is infinite’, he reaches the Stage of Infinity of Space (*ākāśānantyāyatana / ākāsānañcāyatana*) and remains there
5) Having completely gone beyond the Stage of Infinity of Space, [thinking] ‘knowledge is infinite’, one reaches the Stage of Infinity of Perception (*vijñānānantyāyatana / viññāṇañcāyatana*) and remains there
6) Having completely gone beyond the Stage of Infinity of Perception [thinking] ‘there is nothing’ one reaches the Stage of Nothingness (*ākiñcanyāyatana / ākiñcaññāyatana*) and remains there

7) Having completely gone beyond the Stage of Nothingness, one reaches the Stage of Neither Ideation nor Non-Ideation (*naivasaṃ-jñānāsaṃjñāyatana / nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*) and remains there
8) Having completely gone beyond the Stage of Neither Ideation nor Non-Ideation, one reaches the Cessation of Ideations and Feelings (*saṃjñāvedayitanirodha / saññāvedayitanirodha*) and remains there.

It is difficult to understand fully what exactly is meant by this series of stages, but there can be no doubt that it is a list of graded exercises by which the practitioner gradually puts an end to all ideations. In the Stage of Nothingness the most ethereal of ideations alone remain, described as “there is nothing”. In the following two states even this ideation disappears. Mental activity is in this way completely suppressed.

The Stage of Infinity of Space (*ākāśānantyāyatana / ākāsānañcāyatana*), the Stage of Infinity of Perception (*vijñānānantyāyatana / viññāṇañcāyatana*), the Stage of Nothingness (*ākiñcanyāyatana / ākiñcaññāyatana*) and the Stage of Neither Ideation nor Non-Ideation (*naivasaṃjñānāsaṃjñāyatana / nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*) often occur together in the Buddhist Sūtras, also in other contexts. They are known by the name *ārūpya* "Formless States". Independent evidence, from early Abhidharma this time, confirms that neither these Formless States nor the Cessation of Ideations and Feelings (*saṃ-jñāvedayitanirodha / saññāvedayitanirodha*) were part of the Buddha's original teaching.[12] And yet they came to be looked upon as central to Buddhist meditation.

What can we conclude from the above observations? It is clear that the development of Buddhism, already in India and already in the early centuries following the death of its founder, cannot be looked upon as the simple preservation of the teachings of the historical Buddha. Elements that had not been

[12] See my article "Dharma and Abhidharma" mentioned in note 1, above.

taught by him and even some that had been explicitly rejected by him found their way into the practices and theoretical positions of Buddhism. Other important developments, such as Abhidharma and perhaps also certain philosophical developments associated with Mahāyāna, came about as a result of attempts to order and systematise the Buddhist teachings. These and other factors have to be taken into account if one wishes to understand Buddhism in its historical development.

Similar reflection can be made when it comes to self and meditation in Buddhism. It seems certain that the Buddha never preached knowledge of the self as essential for reaching liberation. Yet his followers introduced this notion, first in a roundabout way, later directly in such forms as the *tathāgatagarbha*. With regard to meditation we can be sure that the Buddha taught some kind of meditation — the four Dhyānas to be precise — as preliminary stages to the psychological transformation that constituted the aim of his teachings. His followers, once again, introduced other forms of meditation which had little to do with this psychological transformation, and much more with the originally non-Buddhist aim of immobilising the mind.

Abbreviations:[13]

AN	Aṅguttara-Nikāya, ed. R. Morris, E. Hardy, 5 vols., London 1885-1900 (PTS); vol. 6 (Indexes, by M. Hunt and C. A. F. Rhys Davids), London 1910 (PTS)
ANISt	Alt- und Neuindische Studien, Hamburg
AS	Asiatische Studien, Études Asiatiques, Bern
BD	I. B. Horner (transl.), The Book of the Discipline, Vinaya Piṭaka, vols. 1-6, London 1938-1966 (SBB)
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London
BST	Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, Darbhanga
IndTib	Indica et Tibetica
JIABS	Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Madison

[13] Where possible I follow the *Abkürzungsverzeichnis zur buddhistischen Literatur in Indien und Südostasien insbesondere zu den Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für buddhistische Studien der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, ed. Heinz Bechert, Vorabdruck, Göttingen 1988.

Laṅkāv(V)	(Saddharma)laṅkāvatārasūtra, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Darbhanga 1963 (BST 3)
MBT	Giuseppe Tucci, Minor Buddhist Texts, pt. I, Roma 1956 (SOR IX); pt. II, Roma 1958 (SOR IX,2); pt. III, Roma 1971 (SOR XLIII)
MN	Majjhima-Nikāya, ed. V. Trenckner, R. Chalmers, 3 vols., London 1888-1899 (PTS)
ÖAW	Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien
PTS	Pali Text Society, London
SAWW	Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Phil.-hist. Kl., Wien
SBB	Sacred Books of the Buddhists Series, London
SOR	Serie Orientale Roma, Roma
Vin	Vinayapiṭaka, ed. H. Oldenberg, 5 vols., London 1879-1883 (PTS)