

9 Assessment of *Manomayakāya*, *Iddhividhā* and the other *Abhiññās* in the Buddhist Path of Liberation

Index 9.1 The *Manomayakāya*, *Iddhividhā* and Other *Abhiññās* in the Path. – 9.2 From What are the *Manomayakāya*, *Iddhividhā* and Other *Abhiññās* Developed? – 9.3 The Body in the Final Stages of the Path. – 9.4 Extraordinary Perception and Powers in the Light of the *Cittavīthi* Doctrine. – 9.5 Conclusion: Balancing the Data.

The Elder Phusamitta dwelling at Kurundaka said: “O friend, for sure the mind of the fourth *jhāna* which is the foundation of the higher knowledges is necessarily both malleable and fit for work”.

Kurundakanivāsi-Phusamittathero panāha: ekantaṃ mudu c’ eva kammaniyañ ca nāma abhiññāpādakacatutthajjhānaci ttam eva āvuso ti
(Mp I 59)

When the mind is endowed with these eight qualities in this way it becomes capable of being guided to directly experience by higher knowledges the things that should be directly experienced by higher knowledges

evaṃ aṭṭhangasamannāgataṃ cittaṃ abhinīhārakkhamaṃ hoti abhiññāsacchikaraṇiyānaṃ dhammānaṃ abhiññāsacchikiriyāya
(Vism 377)

9.1 The *Manomayakāya*, *Iddhividhā* and Other *Abhiññās* in the Path

The Buddhist path of liberation in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* gives the impression of being a paradigmatic account, which, however, does not provide clear instructions of how to perform what it prescribes. Concerning the meditation practice, Rupert Gethin writes that “if one set off into the forest with only a copy of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* as one’s guide, it is doubtful that one would make very much progress in one’s meditation



practice” (Gethin 2004, 202). This is also valid for what concerns the method to develop the *manomayakāya*, *idhividhā* and other *abhiññās*, given that a full range of instructions are only provided by later texts, not before the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* elaboration.¹ Furthermore, not only the method of developing, but also the significance of the *manomayakāya*, *idhividhā* and other *abhiññās* are absent in the account of the Buddhist path. The only *abhiññā* that has a clear Buddhist connotation is the last one, the *āsavakkhayañāṇa*, in which the insight into the four noble truths is achieved. This is, according to the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, the best among the fruits of the ascetic life, while it might seem to us, from a secular point of view, the least marvellous. However, we should not forget that the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* is presenting a path that is supposed to lead to liberation. This reminds us of the soteriological purpose of the account. Therefore, we may wonder if the *manomayakāya*, *idhividhā* and other *abhiññās* as well have a soteriological significance within the path. In this regard, it is worth considering the fact that not all of these elements are present in the various Buddhist accounts of the path of liberation.² On the one hand, it may be stated with Clough that “it must be pointed out that a thorough reading of the Pāli Nikāyas reveals that the *abhiññās* were not always deemed a necessary part of the path to *nibbana*” ([2010] 2011, 414).³ On the other hand, the last three *abhiññās*, generally called ‘three knowledges’ (*tisso vijjā*), are often part of the accounts that narrate the awakening of the Buddha himself.⁴ It is worth noting that the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*’s version is probably one among the most inclusive accounts, if not the most, concerning the Buddhist path of liberation. Other accounts, compared with the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*’s one, omit some stages and one of the most omitted is the creation of a *manomayakāya*.⁵ If stages can be omitted, this might indicate that they are not mandatory, but it would be better to understand them as ideal type stages. And by that, it means that the prescriptive account of the Buddhist path of liberation describes only an ideal path that could be in reality, and according to needs, quite flexible and adaptive. The adaptive characteristic of the path is not a mere hypothesis, but is evidence supported by the many accounts that would present a different list of stages. This fact would affect the view that would see the various stages of the path as necessary prerequisites. As previously highlighted (§ 7.3), the logic of this concatenation of prerequisites led scholars to maintain that the practice of the extraordinary capacities was due to the development of the *manomayakāya*. I have demonstrated that in the Vedic thought as well, the development of a mental embodiment can have the extraordinary capabilities as an outcome. However, I have

1 It would be fair to wonder whether some passages in the early canonical texts, and especially in the *Idhividhāsaṃyutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*, could represent a first elaboration of a method to develop these capabilities. E.g. “he unifies the body in the mind and the mind in the body” (*kāyaṃ pi citte samādahati cittaṃ pi kāye samādahati*; S V 284). A detailed analysis of this part of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* is required for the future, while for some remarks see De Notariis 2022b, 404-9.

2 See Gethin 2020, in which it is highlighted as the stages occur differently in the various accounts (see especially the tables in Gethin 2020, 18, 23, 32, 36, 37, 44, 47).

3 Supported also by Gómez ([2010] 2011, 515).

4 E.g. *Bhayabheravasutta* (M 4), *Mahāsaccakasutta* (M 36), *Verañjasutta* (A IV 172-9).

5 This can be inferred from the detailed account of the various versions of the path in the Nikāyas and Āgamas (Gethin 2020).

also highlighted that it should be stressed that this does not mean that the use of the body made of mind is mandatory to perform these extraordinary acts. It is attested, for instance in the *Samyuttanikāya*, that the Buddha was able to go to the Brahmā world (i.e. the last *iddhi*) with both the physical body (*cātumahābhūtikena kāyena*, lit. the body composed of the four great elements), and the body made of mind (*manomayena kāyena*).⁶

9.2 From What are the *Manomayakāya*, *Iddhividhā* and Other *Abhiññās* Developed?

According to the canonical accounts, at the base of the development of the *manomayakāya*, *iddhividhā* and other *abhiññās* there seems to be the development of the *jhānas*. All the stages that follow the development of the fourth *jhāna* in the Buddhist path of liberation (viz. from *ñāṇa-dassana* to *āsavakkhayañāṇa*) begin with the stock phrase:

When the mind is concentrated in this way, purified, cleaned, unblemished, deprived of impurities, malleable, fit for work, steadfast, having attained impassibility, he directs and turns the mind **[to develop a specific power]**.⁷

Therefore, it would seem that all the stages from the *ñāṇa-dassana* to *āsavakkhayañāṇa* have the same state of mind as the basis. This idea is not completely new, but seems to be sustained also by Rupert Gethin.⁸ Furthermore, it seems to also be the exegetical interpretation of the Theravādins to some extent. This is noticeable from the evidence provided by the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*. The commentary, at the end of the comment on the *āsavakkhayañāṇa*, lists ten knowledges (*dasañāṇa*) that are supposed to correspond to the stages from the *ñāṇa-dassana* to *āsavakkhayañāṇa*:

Ten knowledges are expressed so far: 1) *vipassanā-ñāṇa*; 2) *manomaya-ñāṇa*; 3) *iddhividha-ñāṇa*; 4) *dibbasota-ñāṇa*; 5) *cetopariya-ñāṇa*; 6) *pubbēnivāsa-ñāṇa*; 7) *dibbacakkhu-ñāṇa*, which has the double knowledge

⁶ *abhiñāṇāti nu kho bhante Bhagavā iddhiyā manomayena kāyena Brahmālokaṃ upasaṅkamitā [...] abhiñāṇāti kho pana bhante Bhagavā iminā cātumahābhūtikena kāyena iddhiyā Brahmālokaṃ upasaṅkamitā* (S V 282).

⁷ *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye ṭhite ānejjappatte [specific power inflected in dative/genitive] cittam abhininnāmeti.*

⁸ "In the account of the gradual path the state of mind reached by the practice of the fourth *jhāna* is one that is characterized as concentrated (*samāhita*) thoroughly purified (*pārisuddha*) and cleansed (*pariyodāta*), stainless (*anaṅgaṇa*), without defilements (*vigatūpakkilesa*), sensitive (*mudubhūta*), workable (*kammaniya*), steady (*ṭhita*), unshakable (*āneṅga-ppatta*). Such a state of mind can be applied to mastery of various meditational powers [i.e. *iddhis*] [...] it can be applied to developing various higher knowledges [i.e. *abhiññās*]" (Gethin 2019, 180; square brackets mine), and also "[i]t seems clear that in broad terms Buddhaghosa's conception of the development of insight reflects the canonical account of the gradual path where the state of mind developed in the fourth *jhāna* is then applied to the development of various knowledges, culminating in the liberating knowledge of the destruction of the defiling tendencies (*āsava*)" (Gethin 2019, 195). See also Gethin 1998, 185-6; 2011, 219-20.

of: 8) *yathākammūpaga* and 9) the knowledge of the future (*anāgata*) accomplished through the power of the divine eye; 10) *āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*.⁹

With the term *vipassanā-ñāṇa*, the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* clearly refers to the *ñāṇa-dassana*.¹⁰ The commentary, moreover, mentions two additional knowledges based on the stage of the *cutūpapātañāṇa* (which is called *dibbacakkhuñāṇa*): *yathākammūpagañāṇa* and *anāgatañāṇa*. These two further knowledges demonstrate that the exegesis recovered in the *Visuddhimagga* and in the **Vimuttimagga* (with some variations) is taken into account in this context as well. This account highlights that the stages after the fourth *jhāna* are possible outcomes of the application of a particular state of mind.¹¹ However, in another commentarial passage, it seems that these knowledges find support one upon the other. The passage is part of the commentary on the *Kūṭadantasutta* (D 5), wherein the Buddha explains to the brāhmaṇa Kūṭadanta more profitable sacrifices (*yañña*) than the bloody ones that Kūṭadanta wanted to perform. *Yañña*, indeed, corresponds to the Sanskrit *yajña*, the so-called ‘sacrifice’, which in Vedic culture often involved the use of violence. The story repeats the path of liberation found in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* in an abbreviated form and the commentary comments upon it as follows:

The *vipassanāñāṇa* too – because the one who practices it, having found support in the qualities which are the perfections of the fourth *jhāna*, is not in distress, then – involves little exertion (*appaṭṭha*) and injury (*appasamārambha*); but because of the [usual] absence of the happiness similar to the happiness derived from the *vipassanā*,¹² it is of great fruit; and because of the sacrifice (*pariccāga*) of the defilements which are enemies, it is a sacrifice (*yañña*). The *manomayiddhi* too – because the one who practices it, having found a support in the *vipassanāñāṇa*, is not in distress, – is without exertion and injury; because of its ability to create a physical form similar to one’s own, it is of great fruit; and because of the sacrifice of defilements which are one’s own enemies,¹³ it is the sacrifice. The knowledges beginning with *iddhividha* too – because one who practices them (viz. the *iddhis*), having found a support in the knowledges beginning with *manomaya*, is not in distress – are without exertion and injury; and because of the abandoning of the defilements which are each one’s enemies, they are a sacrifice. But among these, *iddhividha* should be understood as of great fruit, because of its ability to reveal the manifold appearances and transformations; *dibbasota* because of its ability to hear sounds of gods and humans; *cetopariyañāṇa*

9 *ettāvatā vipassanā-ñāṇaṃ manomaya-ñāṇaṃ iddhividha-ñāṇaṃ dibba-sota-ñāṇaṃ ceto-pariya-ñāṇaṃ pubbe-nivāsa-ñāṇaṃ dibba-cakkhu-vasena nipphannaṃ anāgataṃ yathākammūpaga-ñāṇa-dvayaṃ dibba-cakkhu-ñāṇaṃ āsava-kkhaya-ñāṇaṃ ti dasa-ñāṇāni niddiṭṭhā honti* (Sv I 227).

10 *idha pana ñāṇa-dassanāya cittaṃ ti idaṃ vipassanā-ñāṇaṃ ñāṇa-dassanaṃ ti vuttaṃ* (Sv I 220).

11 This seems to also be confirmed by Mp I 59 and Vism 377, which are the epigraphs of this chapter.

12 “The [commentary] says ‘*vipassanā* brings much joy and delight for the mind of the one gifted with *vipassanā*’ [referring to] ‘*vipassanā...pe...abhāvā*’” (*vipassanā vipassakassa anappakamā pītisomanassaṃ samāvahatī ti āha vipassanā...pe...abhāvā* ti; Sv-pt I 438).

13 Here, I followed the reading *attano paccanīka* in Be.

because of its ability to know the sixteen kinds of consciousness of others; *pubbenivāsānussatiñāṇa* because of its ability to recollect the states [of existence] as desired; *dibbacakkhu* because of its ability to see physical forms as desired; *āsavakkhayañāṇa* because of its ability to accomplish the happiness derived from the excellent and sublime path.¹⁴

Seemingly, in this passage the *vipassanāñāṇa* is based on the *jhāna*'s qualities (*catutthajjhāna-pariyosānesu guṇesu patitṭhāya*), the *manomayañāṇa* is based on the *vipassanāñāṇa* (*vipassanā-ñāṇe patitṭhāya*), and the *iddhividhañāṇa* and the following *ñāṇas*, respectively, are based on the *manomayañāṇa* and the following respective *ñāṇas* (*manomaya-ñāṇādisu patitṭhāya*). The text, however, does not specify if the preceding *ñāṇa* is an essential prerequisite or whether it may just bolster the development of the following one. The latter seems to be the right interpretation, given that many stages are often omitted in the accounts of the Buddhist path of liberation. However, despite the variance of the stages involved in the various Buddhist accounts of the path, we cannot ignore the existence in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*'s Buddhist path of liberation of a narrative climax focused on the body's improvement.¹⁵

9.3 The Body in the Final Stages of the Path

Ideas about extraordinary embodiment are not merely proposed, they are *celebrated*; they present not merely 'an' alternative, but much better alternative. [...] Such perfected bodies, then, are often at the very center of what a given tradition has to say about embodiment, particularly about its existential or salvific significance
(Radich 2016, 22)

In the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, the body seems, indeed, the main character of the story and also the connecting element of many stages. Starting from the attainment of the *jhānas*, an increasingly refined joy permeates the body. This physicality of contentment starts from the first *jhāna*:

He (the monk) drenches, completely fills, permeates, saturates this very body with joy and happiness born of seclusion, there is not any [single

¹⁴ *vipassanā-ñāṇam pi, yasmā catutthajjhāna-pariyosānesu guṇesu patitṭhāya nibbattento na kilamati tasmā appaṭṭhaṃ appa-samārambhaṃ, vipassanā-sukha-sadisassa pana sukhassa abhāvā mahapphalaṃ, paccanīka-kilesa-pariccāgato yañño. manomayiddhi pi, yasmā vipassanā-ñāṇe patitṭhāya nibbattento na kilamati tasmā sū appaṭṭhā appa-samārambhā, attano sadisa-rūpaṃ nimmāna-samatthatāya mahapphalā, nappaccanīka-kilesapariccāgato [Be attano paccanīka] yañño. iddhi-vidhañāṇādisu pi, yasmā manomaya-ñāṇādisu patitṭhāya nibbattento na kilamati tasmā appaṭṭhāni appa-samārambhāni, attano attano paccanīka-kilesa-ppahānato yañño. iddhi-vidhaṃ pan' ettha nānāvidha-vikubbana-dassana-samatthatāya, dibba-sotaṃ deva-manussānaṃ sadda-savana-samatthatāya, cetopariyañāṇaṃ pasesaṃ soḷasavidha-cittajānana-samatthatāya, pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇaṃ icchit-icchita-ṭṭhāna-samanussaraṇa-samatthatāya, dibba-cakkhu icchit-icchita-rūpa-dassana-samatthatāya, āsava-kkhaya-ñāṇaṃ atipaṇīta-lokuttara-maggasukha-nippādāna-samatthatāya mahapphalaṃ ti veditabbaṃ (Sv I 307).*

¹⁵ A similar attempt to analyse the connections among the final stages of the path is provided by Radich (2007, 255-66). I have found very intriguing his hypothesis that would see the *manomayakāya*, *iddhividhā*, and the other *abhiññās* as necessary for liberation in terms of means of knowledge, to touch with the body (*kāyena phusitvā*) the spiritual truths. I think that what follows is somewhat in line with Radich's theory.

point] of the whole body which is not suffused by the joy and happiness born of seclusion.¹⁶

The accounts of other *jhānas* follow the same structure, changing some details. The second *jhāna* has joy and happiness born of concentration (*samādhija*),¹⁷ the third *jhāna* has only happiness without joy (*nippītika*),¹⁸ and in the fourth *jhāna* the monk suffuses the body with the purified mind, which is cleansed.¹⁹ Here, it is worth referring to the passage in the *Iddhipādasamyutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya* in which body and mind are put together (e.g. *kāyaṃ pi citte samādahati cittam pi kāye samādahati*; S V 283), and perceptions of pleasure and lightness in the physical body are reached (e.g. *sukhasaññaṃ ca lahusaññaṃ ca kāye okkamitvā*; S V 283). Turning back to the Buddhist path of the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, we may note that after the achievement of the fourth *jhāna*, the stage of the *nāṇa-dassana* (= *vipassanāñāṇa* in the commentary) occurs. During this stage, a sort of gnosis arises; the monk reaches awareness of the relationship between mind and body. He discovers that the body is impermanent and that the consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is attached to it. Then, there seems an actual enhancement of the body that is followed by the manifestation of some marvellous bodily capabilities. The next stage, indeed, concerns the creation of the body made of mind (*manomayakāya*), a kind of body that is also owned by some gods in some realms.²⁰ Thereafter, the monk is able to perform many psychophysical powers (*iddhividhā*) and even to get in touch with deities, since he is able to go as far as the Brahmā world. According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the monk in the Brahmā world even enters in conversation with the god Brahmā (Paṭis II 209-10). It might be argued that a real divinisation of the body occurs, the monk reaches a kind of divine condition, and is equated with the gods themselves. Therefore, the monk develops the divine ear (*dibbasota*), which is also, according to the *Visuddhimagga*, the kind of ear that is owned by the deities (Vism 407). Here, I would like to put forward a hypothesis that might seem, at first, a little bold, but which actually is quite reasonable. What I want to argue is that, at least during the stage in which the divine ear is developed, the divinisation of all the physical senses occurs.

9.3.1 Divinisation of the Physical Senses: *Dibbasotadhātu* and *Dibbacakkhu*

The only senses that, according to the texts, are divinised are the ear (*sota*) and the eye (*cakkhu*). These two senses are, not by chance, the most occurring sense faculties in the Upaniṣads. That is, whilst in the Upaniṣads there are lists of faculties in which physical senses occur, mostly only the ear/hearing

16 *so imam eva kāyaṃ vivekajena pīti-sukhena abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti parippharati, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa vivekajena pīti-sukhena apphuṭaṃ hoti* (D I 73).

17 *so imam eva kāyaṃ samādhijena pīti-sukhena abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti parippharati, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa samādhijena pīti-sukhena apphuṭaṃ hoti* (D I 74).

18 *so imam eva kāyaṃ nippītikena sukhena abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti parippharati, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa nippītikena sukhena apphuṭaṃ hoti* (D I 75).

19 *so imam eva kāyaṃ parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena pharitvā nisinno hoti, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena apphuṭaṃ hoti* (D I 75-6).

20 E.g. D I 17; D III 84-5; see Radich 2007, 240-2.

(*śrotra*) and the eye/sight (*caḥṣus*) are listed.²¹ In the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*'s Buddhist path of liberation, after the stage in which the monk develops many psychophysical powers (*iddhividhā*), only the development of the divine ear is listed. The *dibbacakkhu* occurs in the account of the *cutūpapātañāṇa* and later texts (*Paṭisambhidāmagga*, **Vimuttimagma*, *Visuddhimagma*, and often commentaries) mostly refer to this stage using the *dibbacakkhu* in a metonymic way. However, the *dibbacakkhu* is used in the canonical account as a mere instrument to achieve this kind of knowledge. It has not been reported anywhere that the *dibbacakkhu* is created during the stage of the *cutūpapātañāṇa*. Then, when is the *dibbacakkhu* developed? A way to answer to this question involves looking at the evidence that would attest the use of the *dibbacakkhu*. A suggestive account is reported in the *Visuddhimagma*'s exposition of the *cetopariyañāṇa*. The text clearly states: "how should this knowledge (i.e. *cetopariyañāṇa*) be produced? This is indeed accomplished through the power of the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*)".²² Relying on this exegetical account, we should assume that the *dibbacakkhu* had already been developed before the *cetopariyañāṇa*. Otherwise, it could hardly be used as a tool to obtain this higher knowledge. Still relying on the exegetical sources, we may note that the description of the *dibbacakkhu* is quite similar to the one that concerns the *dibbasotadhātu*.²³ This means that, in principle, the *dibbasota* and the *dibbacakkhu* are not different, but are only the divine version of the ear and the eye. From a soteriological point of view, however, the *dibbacakkhu* brings forth a kind of knowledge which is more pregnant with soteriological relevance (viz. the *cutūpapātañāṇa*). In the Buddhist path of liberation there seems to be a kind of escalation of soteriological significance, culminating in the achievement of liberation. However, before being able to get this kind of knowledge, the practitioner should boost his own physical means of knowledge, the senses. He had already enhanced his mind, which is the easiest thing to change. As the Buddha is reported to have said: "O monks, I do not see any other thing that once has been cultivated frequently becomes malleable (*mudu*) and workable (*kammañña*) as the mind (*citta*)".²⁴ Thereafter, the practitioner uses his own mind to achieve a new kind of gnosis about himself, the very nature of the body, and the relationship between his body and mind (*ñāṇa-dassana*); he can create a new mental body (*manomayakāya*); he becomes able to perform marvellous actions (*iddhividhā*); he becomes able to know what normally is precluded (*abhiññā*). The first step towards this knowledge is the divinisation of the sensory way of knowing. A knowledge that is, at least partly, based on the sense functions is also the *cetopariyañāṇa*. The way in which the *dibbacakkhu* is involved in this *abhiññā* has been already

21 Concerning the translation of *śrotra* and *caḥṣus*, see Killingley 2006: 80. Some examples of Vedic texts in which lists of faculties include only the sensory functions of hearing and sight are: RV 10.90.13-14; ŚB 9.2.2.5; ŚB 10.1.3.4; ŚB 10.5.2.20; BU 1.3.2-7; BU 1.4.17; BU 3.2.13; BU 6.1.7-14; CU 3.18.2; CU 4.3.3; TU 1.7.6 (+ *tvac* 'touching'); AU 1.1.4; KauU 2.3 (Killingley 2006, 105 n. 35 reports that there is the variant reading *ghrāna* 'smell' in place of *prāna*, which is, incidentally, the one adopted by Olivelle 1998); KauU 2.14; KeU 1.1; KeU 1.2; KeU 1.3; KeU 1.5-9. This list is not comprehensive; it only aims to highlight as the occurrence of solely hearing and sight is a recurring pattern.

22 *kathaṃ paṇ' etaṃ nāṇaṃ uppādetabban ti? etaṃ hi dibbacakkhuvasena ijhāti* (Vism 409).

23 Cf. Vism 407 with Vism 423 and Vism 408 with Vism 429, see also above in § 8.4.3.

24 *ahaṃ bhikkhave na aññaṃ ekadhammā pi samanupassāmi yaṃ evaṃ bhāvitaṃ bahulikataṃ mudu ca hoti kammaññaṃ ca yathayidaṃ cittaṃ* (A 1 9).

highlighted. However, it may sound a bit striking that also the function of hearing could be involved. To be more precise, there is evidence that not only the normal function of hearing is involved, but also an extraordinary one; just like not only a divine eye can be involved, but also a normal one. The miracle of telepathy known as *ādesanāpāṭihāriya* at A I 170-1 (cf. D III 104) is performed in four ways: 1) by observing some signs, thanks to body language signals (i.e. through the normal observation, the physical eye should be involved); 2) by hearing from other humans, non-humans (i.e. spirits), deities (the physical or a supernormal ear should be involved); 3) by hearing the sub-vocal sound produced by the diffusion of thought (a supernormal kind of hearing should be involved); and 4) knowing with the mind, encompassing the mind of one who has reached the concentration (*samādhi*) that is *avitakka* (without applied thought) and *avicāra* (without sustained thought) (if we assume that this stage is the equivalent of the one reported in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*'s, this is the one that involves the *dibbacakkhu*). Therefore, we may say that at the basis of the telepathy or mind-reading there is a refined use of the sense faculties, although this *abhiññā* does not seem to have a soteriological function. At this point of the path, it seems that the practitioner, through the enhancement of the body, is able to move in the physical world at will through the power of the *iddhividhā*, his senses are divine and so able to perceive everything, even the other thoughts (N.B. according to Indian thought, the mind is the sixth sense). Thereafter, through the *pubbenivāsānussatiñña*, he can use his *sati*²⁵ to move in the past space-time continuum.²⁶ The phraseology of this *abhiññā* makes clear that this knowledge concerns the understanding of *saṃsāra*. The canonical account emphasises the sequentiality of rebirths, when one dies in one place will be reborn in another one: *tato cuto amutra upapādiṃ [...] so tato cuto idhūpapanno* (D I 81). This is precisely the definition of *saṃsāra* provided by the *Milindapañha*:

The king said: “Venerable Nāgasena, what you call ‘*saṃsāra*’, what is it?”. “What is born here, great king, dies truly here; what died here somewhere else arises; what is born there, dies truly there; what died there somewhere else arises. In this way, great king, the *saṃsāra* is”.²⁷

25 “‘**Recollection of former existences (*pubbe nivāsānussati*)**’ is the memory (*sati*) through which he remembers (*anussarati*) the former (*pubbe*) existence (*nivāsa*)” (***pubbe nivāsānussati ti yāya satiyā pubbe nivāsaṃ anussarati***; Vism 410). According to the *Milindapañha*, *sati* arises in sixteen ways (*soḷasahi ākārehi mahārāja sati uppajjati*; Mil 78) (according to Horner 1969, 108 n. 1, seventeen ways are given). The first of these ways is called *abhijāna* ‘knowing by experience’, and the *Milindapañha* explains it as follows: “When, great king, both the venerable Ānanda and the lay follower Khujjuttarā, or some others who have remembrance of [former] (re-)births, remember the [former] (re-)birth, thus *sati* arises from knowing by experience (*abhijāna*)” (*yathā mahārāja āyasmā ca Ānando Khujjuttarā ca upāsikā ye vā pan’ aññe pi keci jātissarā jātiṃ saranti, evaṃ abhijānato sati uppajjati*; Mil 78-9).

26 In the *Milindapañha* (82), the remembrance of some business undertaken in the past in another city is compared with a monk who possesses psychic powers (*iddhimant*) and thus can go as far as the Brahmā world very quickly. In the account, when the king remembers something he has done in the city of Alasanda, which is a distant two hundred *yojanas* from the place where the dialogue took place, the monk Nāgasena congratulates him as if he had had actually travelled that distance. See *kiva dūro mahārāja ito Alasando hoti ti. dumattāni bhante yojanasatānīti. – abhijānāsi nu tvaṃ mahārāja tattha kiñcid-eva karaṇiyam karitvā saritvā ti. – āma bhante, sarāmi ti. – lahuṃ kho tvaṃ mahārāja gato si dumattāni yojanasatāni ti* (Mil 82).

27 *rājā āha: Bhante Nāgasena, yaṃ pan’ etaṃ brūsi: saṃsāro ti, katamo so saṃsāro ti. – idha mahārāja jāto idh’ eva marati, idha mato aññatra uppajjati, taṃ jāto taṃ yeva marati, taṃ*

This fact is also confirmed by the exegetical explanation provided by the **Vimuttimagga*, in which it is reported that during the implementation of this *abhiññā*, the practitioner “contemplates the stream of consciousness (識流轉; *viññāṇasota*): the two [births] are linked and uninterrupted, the birth in this world, the birth in that world”.²⁸ During the *pubbenivāsānussatiñāṇa*, the working of *saṃsāra* is observed with regard to the personal experience. In the next *abhiññā*, the *cutūpapātañāṇa*, the working of *saṃsāra* is observed with regard to the other beings. The future condition of existence is observed according to the *kamma* (*yathākammūpaga*). This *abhiññā* as well is achieved through an enhanced sensory faculty, namely the *dibbacakkhu*. It might seem *prima facie* that the only *abhiññā* that does not make use of an enhanced sensory faculty is the *pubbenivāsānussatiñāṇa*, in which, however, we may note that the faculty of memory (*sati*) goes beyond the normal reach of the human memory. It brings the meditator back to the first-hand experiences of his past, experiences that, we might suppose, were the result of sensory perceptions. Moreover, *sati* as a mental function could be regarded, to some extent, as a sense faculty, assuming that the mind itself is the sixth sense.

The last *abhiññā*, the *āsavakkhayañāṇa*, left outside the present book, is the most Buddhist among all *abhiññās* since it is a final insight into the very nature of suffering and the noxious influxes that pollute the mind. Then, when the meditator knows and sees in this way (*evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato*; D I 84) he achieves the liberation. The text seems to refer to a type of knowledge that is not merely intellectual (*jānato*), but is also experiential (*passato*), hypostatizing it through the reference to the action of seeing. The sight is probably the sensory perception *par excellence*, and so the best candidate to embody the experiential knowledge.²⁹

From the textual evidence, we have found that, on the one hand, the stages after the development of the fourth *jhāna* are quite flexible, given that they are omitted in other accounts of the path in the Pāli canon. The stages that follow the fourth *jhāna* are all based on the state of mind that results from the meditative practice. Therefore, even if the stages may bolster each other, it could be argued that the basis for the development of each stage is only the fourth *jhāna*. On the other hand, we have noted that from a narrative point of view there is a growing climax that regards the enhancement of the body. Divine senses seem to underlie the majority of the higher knowledges. Therefore, it seems that in order to achieve knowledges that transcend the ordinary experience, the practitioner should develop extraordinary senses. The long account of the Buddhist path of liberation in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* can have, indeed, its *raison d'être*, despite the existence of shorter versions.³⁰ The theoretical nature of the extraordinary perception (and, generally

mato aññatra uppajjati; evaṃ kho mahārāja saṃsāro hotī ti (Mil 77).

28 憶識流轉：兩俱不斷，於此生世，於彼世生 (T1648.32.0443c23-24).

29 Just to give a few examples, we may note that the account of the sensory perception, from the point of view of the *cittavithi* doctrine, is more often exposed using the visual perception as an example (see Vism 21; Abhidh-s 18). Another example can be the word *sacchikiriyā*, which is connected with the verb *sacchikaroti*, which means ‘to experience’ in the sense of ‘to see with one’s eyes’ (PED s.v. “sacchikaroti”). Finally, it is worth highlighting that the Buddhist Doctrine itself, the Dhamma, is described with the adjectival compound *ehipassika*, which is composed of two imperatives *ehi* ‘come!’ and *passa* ‘see!’. Then, the Dhamma has, literally, the characteristic of ‘come and see’, that means it is approachable to the experiential knowledge.

30 *Pace* some authors who sustained that shorter versions of the path occurring in the *Majjhimanikāya* were more ‘authentic’. In this regard, see § 2.1.

speaking, of extraordinary capacities) can be understood thanks to the exegetical accounts that describe how the knowledge is reached from the point of view of the *cittavīthi* doctrine.

9.4 Extraordinary Perception and Powers in the Light of the *Cittavīthi* Doctrine

Before analysing what the *cittavīthi* doctrine may tell us about the extraordinary perception, it is worth remembering how the ordinary perception of a sensory stimulus is conceived. The ordinary perception is seen as the interaction between the physical sensory organ and the mind. This is evident from a *Visuddhimagga* passage in which a statement from the ancient teachers (*porāṇa*) is quoted:

But the Ancients said: “The eye does not see the form, because it is without mind (*acittakattā*), the mind does not see [the form], because it is without eye (*acakkhukattā*); but when there is the coming together of the [sense-]door and object, he sees by means of the consciousness which has the eye-sensitivity as basis”.³¹

This example shows the interdependence of eye and mind. Neither of them can see a physical form alone. In the case of a *dibbacakkhu* or a *dibbasota* as well, the physical organ is necessary. The role of the physical sensory organ, however, is relegated to that of basis. It seems to be fundamental only for what concerns the process of obtaining the divine sense. Here, it is worth remembering the evidence of the *Saddhammappakāsinī*:

[People] say: “The divine ear arises only for one who has a natural [i.e. physical] ear, not for the deaf. Although when the natural ear is destroyed subsequently, the divine ear is not destroyed”.³²

From this passage it is clear that the physical sensory organ is necessary in the first step to develop the divine ear, but not to keep using it. The reason behind it lies in the method prescribed to achieve it. The meditator should pay attention (*manasikaroti*) to the ordinary sounds, an action that would be definitely impossible for the deaf. The same applies to the *dibbacakkhu*. In order to develop it, the exegetical texts prescribe a preparatory work on luminous *kaṣiṇas*. The *kaṣiṇas* prescribed are all connected with the luminosity: fire (*tejas*), white (*odāta*), and light (*āloka*) (*Vism* 427-8). In order to perceive a *kaṣiṇa*, which could be an artefact or a natural phenomenon, intuitively, we need the physical eye. The physical sensory organ is then necessary for the development, but not for the use of the divine sense itself.

The process described in the light of the *cittavīthi* doctrine makes clear that it is not a common sensory perception – as one that results when a physical form comes into contact with the eye-door – but is a mental process, which notably resembles one that occurs in the achievement of a *jhāna*. In

³¹ *porāṇā pan’ āhu: cakkhu rūpaṃ na passati acittakattā, cittaṃ na passati acakkhukattā; dvārāmmaṇasangaṭṭe pana cakkhu-pasādavattukena cittaṃ passati* (*Vism* 20).

³² *dibbasotaṃ pakatisotavato yeva uppajjati, no badhirassa. pacchā pakatisote vinaṭṭhe pi dibbasotaṃ na vinassati ti vadanti* (*Paṭi-a* I 353). This passage is also quoted above in § 8.1.2.

the words of Cousins, the mind-door process “describes the situation of the individual who is absorbed in thought or memory without any direct perception of his sensory environment” (1981, 27). However, in the case of an extraordinary perception, the knowledge that is supposed to originate, according to the emic perspective, is not mere imagination but is objective and may concern the external world. The *Visuddhimagga* specifies that the *dibbacakkhu* is used to perceive forms which do not come into the range of perception of the fleshly eye, and it lists potential forms to perceive, which are in all respects real forms: “inside the belly, belonging to the heart-base, under the surface of the earth, beyond walls, mountains, and ramparts, or in another sphere of existence”.³³ Normally, the mind does not see because it is something that is without eye (*cittaṃ na passati acakkhukattā*; Vism 20), but in the case of a divine eye, it can do it. With the *dibbacakkhu* and the *dibbasota*, the mind can see and hear without being limited by the matter. Similarly, the absence of limitation from the matter occurs also during the performance of *iddhis*, in which, for instance, the monk can go beyond walls, ramparts, mountains, unattached by them (*tiro-bhāvaṃ tiro-kuḍḍaṃ tiro-pākāraṃ tiro-pabbataṃ asajjamāno gacchati*; D I 78). There is a progressive liberation of the mind from the bounds of the matter. This will result in the extinction of the noxious influxes, which is described in a common stock passage as liberation of the mind (*ceto-vimutti*):

The monk, because of the extinction of the noxious influxes, he stays in this immanent condition (*diṭṭhe va dhamme*),³⁴ having known, experienced, reached by himself the liberation of the mind (*ceto-vimutti*) and by insight (*paññā-vimutti*) that is without noxious influxes.³⁵

In summary, the analysis of how extraordinary perception is possible through the lens of the *cittavīthi* doctrine makes clear that perception is no longer bound to the fetters of materiality. The final attainment of liberation is revealed in advance by the gradual liberation attained by the body and sensory organs. Furthermore, the microscopical analysis of the *cittavīthi* doctrine not only highlights that the process is mental, but is also *jhāna*-like (see §§ 7.4.4 and 8.1.3). This point requires further elaboration.

9.4.1 Extraordinary Capacities and the State of *Jhāna*: Canonical and Exegetical Evidence

The fact that the extraordinary capacities succeed in a *jhāna*-like state demands discussion of some ideas of Eviatar Shulman (2014), whose work

³³ *anto kucchigataṃ hadayavatthunissitaṃ heṭṭhā pathavitalanissitaṃ tirokuḍḍapabbatapākāragataṃ paracakkavāḷagataṃ* (Vism 428).

³⁴ ‘Immanent condition’ is an attempt to translate the Pāli expression *diṭṭhe va dhamme*, which is often translated as ‘in this world’, ‘in the phenomenal world’, ‘in the present existence’ (see PED s.vv. “*dhamma*” and “*diṭṭha*”). Given that *dhamma* is a difficult word to translate, the expression could be literally rendered as ‘in what is visible’. I regard here ‘visible’ as something that can be experienced and, therefore, I translate it as ‘immanent’ in the sense of ‘what is within the limits of possible experience’ (opposite to ‘transcendent’). The *dhamma* here indicates the ‘state of being immanent’, so the ‘immanent condition’.

³⁵ *bhikkhu āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ ceto-vimuttiṃ paññā-vimuttiṃ diṭṭhe va dhamme sayāṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati* (D I 156).

put forward some interpretations relevant to our analysis. Shulman, indeed, bestows to the experience a prominent importance in the early Buddhist thought which is consistent with the findings of the present chapter. He writes, concerning the early Buddhist philosophy, that it was “both a description of and a prescription for meditative experience” (2014, X). This ‘meditative experience’ was, according to Shulman, both at the base of the Buddhist teachings³⁶ and part of the process of liberation.³⁷ In particular, he emphasises the importance of the fourth *jhāna*. Indeed, he sustains that the liberation of the Buddha himself occurred through the experience of the three knowledges (*tisso vijjā*) – namely the last three stages of our Buddhist path – in the fourth *jhāna*.³⁸ Shulman, apparently following Schmithausen (1981, 216),³⁹ believes that the three knowledges arise in the very state of the fourth *jhāna*. In my mind, this is questionable for at least two reasons. First, Shulman sustains his position with an argument that is not really conclusive. After admitting that “it is also possible that the understandings arise after the emergence from the *jhāna*” (2014, 21, n. 45), Shulman quotes a personal communication from Anālayo, who believes that there is an emergence from the *jhāna*, and then writes that:

The short passage between the description of the attainment of the fourth *jhāna* and the arising of the three understandings – *so evaṃ samāhite citte* (“then when my concentrated mind was...” [...] – clearly states that the mind is in *samādhi*. The *so evaṃ* – being thus” – suggests that what is now being described is happening in the state just described, i.e. in the fourth *jhāna*. (Shulman 2014, 21, n. 45)

The passage quoted by Shulman is the abbreviation of a stock passage that precedes the arising of the three knowledges:

When the mind is concentrated in this way, purified, cleaned, unblemished, deprived of impurities, malleable, fit for work, steadfast, having attained impassibility, he turns the mind to the knowledge of recollection of former existences.⁴⁰

This passage is from the *Bhayabheravasutta* (M 4), which reports the autobiographical account of the Buddha’s awakening. In this text, only the three knowledges occur. However, a similar passage precedes the development of the extraordinary capacities also in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*:

When the mind is concentrated in this way, purified, cleaned, unblemished, deprived of impurities, malleable, fit for work, steadfast, having attained

36 “The early Buddhist teachings were first of all verbalized reflections on meditative events” (Shulman 2014, X).

37 “[A]wakening was perceived as a philosophical perception and not as a philosophical understanding, which was experienced in the deep meditative state of *jhāna*” (Shulman 2014, XI).

38 For the full discussion, see Shulman 2014, 16-32.

39 See Shulman 2014, 21, n. 45.

40 *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye thite ānejjappatte pubbenivāsānussatiñāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesim* (M I 22).

impassibility, he directs and turns the mind [to develop a specific power].⁴¹ (See also above § 9.2)

This detail is relevant here because Shulman was interpreting this passage in a context in which only three knowledges were produced. Therefore, in this narrowed context, it could actually seem likely that a meditator in a seated position with a concentrated mind can give rise to the emerging of some sort of knowledge.⁴² However, if we consider that the same stock passage precedes the pericope concerning the *iddhividhā*, the interpretation provided by Shulman sounds less convincing. The psychophysical powers are, indeed, physical performances or feats, not information that somehow arises in the mind. To some extent, psychophysical powers are also regarded as knowledges (*ñāṇa*) in the *Abhidhamma* and commentarial literature,⁴³ but it is not possible to disregard the evidence that would highlight that the *iddhis* were regarded as real feats and not only a mere product of the imagination. This is particularly evident when we consider the *iddhipāṭihāriya*, the display (*pāṭihāriya*) of miraculous powers (*iddhi*). The very word ‘*pāṭihāriya*’ involves the notions of ‘display’ and ‘spectacle’ and thus involves an audience.⁴⁴ Therefore, *iddhis* are not only mere acts that happen in the meditator’s mind, but are also special performances that can be shown.⁴⁵ These performances also involve a certain degree

41 *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye thīte ānejjappatte [specific power inflected in dative/genitive] cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti.*

42 This is not, however, without problem. Indeed, even Shulman (2014, 25) noted that the three knowledges entail a sort of verbalisation, which is, however, supposed to be absent in the fourth *jhāna*.

43 See above the introductory part of Chapter 8 and De Notariis 2019a, 235-9.

44 On *pāṭihāriya*, see Gethin 2001, 98-101, and note 84 and Fiordalis 2008, 47-55. Moreover, see Vin II 112 in which monks are forbidden to display such powers in front of lay people.

45 I should highlight that there are examples in the Buddhist tradition that would suggest that the *iddhis* were also experienced in a sort of meditative state or visualisation. In the *Mahāvastu* the Buddha-to-be touches the moon and the sun when he is seated cross-legged in the hermitage (*svayam āśrame paryamkena niṣaṅṅo candramaṅḍalam ca sūryamaṅḍalam ca pāṇinā parāmṛṣati*; Mvu I 284, see also Vism 401 in which many monks affect and influence the moon and the sun but these latter remain unaffected in the reality). An often-quoted passage in the **Vimuttimaggā* seems to suggest that the loss of the meditative state during a levitation would not produce real effects, as if the meditator is doing it in his mind only: “is it possible that the meditator in the empty sky would lose the meditative state (禪; perhaps = *jhāna*; see the discussion below) and from the empty sky he would fall down to the earth? Not at all! He arises from the meditation seat and if he travels far and loses [the meditative state] he returns to the meditation seat” (問彼坐禪人於虛空或從禪退，彼從虛空轉當落地耶？答不然！是從其先坐處起，若遠行退者還至先坐處；T1648.32.0442a20-22). These passages are quoted also by Anālayo (2016, 16). The interpretation that would see *iddhis* experienced in sorts of meditative trances seems to also be endorsed by Dieter Schlingloff (2018, 1-9), who writes that “[t]he canonical explanations of the legal texts, however, leave no doubt that such faculties originally referred to trance experiences and not to displays of magical powers” (2018, 2), later describing the *iddhis* as “psychic experiences that arise in this fourth state of trance [viz. the fourth *jhāna*]” (2018, 4; square brackets mine). However, it seems to me that Schlingloff’s argument (2018, 2-3) is based on the fact that the *Vinaya* (Vin I 96-7) speaks about the prohibition to lay claims of having attained *uttari-manussa-dhammas* and that this broadly indicates many kinds of meditation attainment (and not only *iddhis*; concerning *uttari-manussa-dhamma*, see also Gethin 2001, 99, n. 75). Schlingloff emphasises the phrasing *suññāgāre abhiramāmiti* (Vin I 97), as indicating the act of choosing a proper place to meditate (cf. D I 71), thus suggesting that the text originally referred to the practice of meditation. Although interesting, this argument does not seem, at least to my mind, definitive. In the Buddhist texts there are likewise examples that would indicate that the *iddhis* would have real effects, just as when the Buddha goes to the Brahmā’s

of movement, such as when the meditator walks on the water, and indeed I am unsure whether the mobility fits well with the still state of *jhāna*. In summary, since it is not possible to state in an absolute sense whether the *iddhis* were mere visualisations or were regarded as real feats given the existence of evidence in support of both views, the explanation that would see the *iddhis* developed in the *jhāna* seems implausible if they are to be considered as real performances.

The second reason that can lead one to be sceptical concerning Shulman's position concerns the exegetical literature. In this regard, Shulman clearly writes that the latter is not part of his research sources.⁴⁶ However, from the **Vimuttimaggā* onwards, it is clear that the Theravāda tradition conceived the action of emerging from the *jhāna* state as part of the process to develop *iddhividhā* and *abhiññās*.⁴⁷ This fact is so endemic that it would certainly demand attention, even if it is attested only in texts later than the ones analysed by Shulman. Interestingly, despite that the **Vimuttimaggā* prescribes the entrance into and emergence from the *jhāna*, at least on one occasion it raises the issue of the consequences of losing the meditative absorption (禪) during a levitation (問彼坐禪人於虛空或從禪退; T1648.32.0442a20). Concerning the power of levitation, the *Visuddhimaggā* clearly mentions the emergence: "he attains the [*jhāna* produced by the] earth *kaṣiṇa* (*paṭhavīkaṣiṇa*) - desiring to perform in this way - and emerges [from the *jhāna*]".⁴⁸ In this regard, we can assume from the **Vimuttimaggā*'s evidence that the meditator who is performing levitation is in a sort of meditative state (禪), although we may wonder whether it is really the fourth *jhāna*, which is often referred to in the **Vimuttimaggā*'s exegesis of the extraordinary capacities as 第四禪 (e.g. T1648.32.0442b26). What is clear is that the text assumes the presence of a meditative state which is at least similar to the *jhāna*. Therefore, concerning the issue of whether or not the meditator is in the state of *jhāna* during the execution of extraordinary capacities, we can endorse the suggestion of Peter Harvey (2018a, 25; 2018b, 295), according to whom the mind could "step slightly aside from such a state [i.e. the fourth *jhāna*], while retaining its qualities, to focus on attending to the knowledges" (2018b, 295; emphasis in the original, square brackets mine). This seems the best solution to interpret the fact that the exegetical texts prescribe the actions of entering into and emerging from the *jhāna*, and also describe through the *cittavīthi* doctrine the process of performing extraordinary capacities as a mental process similar to the act of entering into *jhāna*. The mind seems to be in an altered state similar, but not identical, to the fourth *jhāna*. This possibility can be inferred even from the canonical texts. The *Mahālisutta* (D 6) testifies to the possibility to perceive divine (*dibba*) forms and sounds in a particular type of

world with the own physical body (S V 282), or when the Buddha is said to be able to prolong his lifespan through the mastery of the *iddhipādas* (D II 103; see Kv 456-8 which uses *iddhibala* in the context of prolongation of life). Let alone that these powers were subjected to legislative regulation and occur in many accounts as visible feats, just as when a monk levitates in order to take a sandalwood bowl, an act that led to the regulation of these kinds of miraculous display (Vin II 110-12).

46 "[C]ommentarial and Abhidhammic materials will generally be not treated as well as they reflect a later stage in which the discourses were subject to doctrinal classification" (Shulman 2014, 59).

47 This is quite evident from the primary sources I quoted and translated in Chapters 7 and 8.

48 *evaṃ kātukāmena pana pathavīkaṣiṇaṃ samāpajjitvā vuṭṭhāya* (Vism 396).

samādhi, which is not strictly said to be the state of *jhāna* (D I 152-3).⁴⁹ Divine forms and sounds seem likely to be perceived through divine eyes and ears and this would point to the fact that there is no need to assume specifically the *jhāna* state, although the state involved is not so different according to the exegesis.

9.5 Conclusion: Balancing the Data

Finally, trying to draw conclusions from the gathered data, we may note that the Buddhist path of liberation seems to have a double facet. On the one hand, there is the narrative climax, in which an escalation of the body's improvement occurs. On the other hand, there is what we can call 'the pragmatic use' of the Buddhist path of liberation. By the 'pragmatic use' I mean the fact that the path is malleable enough to allow the omission of some stages according to the circumstances and the contexts. If we consider the path from the point of view of a practitioner, we may note that the only stage that really matters is the last one, the *āsavakkhayañāna*. However, there are some accounts that even omit the *āsavakkhayañāna*, presenting short versions of the path, which probably fit a peculiar narrative context.⁵⁰ The path of liberation presented by the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* seems to be the most exhaustive version of the path. Then, we may wonder whether the long version was the result of a synthesis of the short versions or whether the short versions are abbreviated forms of the long one. A definitive answer would involve a further study on the many versions of the path, but certainly we can note that in the short versions we may partly lose the narrative crescendo of the body's improvement. This narrative climax may actually have its own coherence from the viewpoint of a gradual divinisation of the body, which would, however, be partially lost in the shortened forms. Therefore, it is difficult to establish whether the stages in the path are autonomous or whether they are linked to each other. The exegetical texts as well provide ambiguous hints. As noted above, the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* seems to suggest that the stages can, at least, bolster each other (Sv I 307). However, in the *Visuddhimagga* we find the prescription of developing the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*) before performing the *iddhi* consisting in the capability to fly like a winged bird (Vism 397), despite the fact that the *iddhis* are developed before the *abhiññās* in the canonical accounts of the path. Therefore, it may be relevant to note that at that point of the path, a divine body made of mind had already been created. Indeed, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*'s exposition of the *iddhi* which concerns the capability to travel up to the world of Brahmā suggests that the divine senses of the *abhiññās* are used to communicate with Brahmā. What we may conclude is that the path is a gradual, ideal type of path, coherent in its entirety, and valid in its partitions.

The *Sāmaññaphalasutta*'s long version of the path could suggest a process of divinisation of the body, whose senses are divinised as well. Therefore, the meditator becomes acquainted with the divine realms through the practice of *jhāna* meditation. This practice is transformative and, indeed,

⁴⁹ This was noted by Harvey (2018a, 20).

⁵⁰ E.g. D 25 and M 107, see the tables in Gethin 2020, 23, 32.

also affects the meditator's body. Hence, the knowledges the meditator gains are attained through enhanced senses, which were described as divinised all together, at least at the stage of the development of the divine ear. We might even wonder whether the senses were already divinised at the stage of development of the body made of mind, which is a divine body. As noted above (and also in § 7.4.9), in *Vism* 397 the *dibbacakkhu* is used during the performance of an *iddhi*. This might, however, seem to affect the hypothesis that would see all the senses divinised during the stage of the *dibbasotadhātu* (which is later than the *iddhividhā*). Although, rather than it being mandatory for the mechanical execution of the power of flying, the use of the *dibbacakkhu* seems to be a formalistic expedient to not break the *Vinaya*'s rule that forbids one to display such powers to lay people. This does not exclude, however, that the hypothesis remains valid according to which as one obtains a divine body, divine senses develop simultaneously.

The analysis of the extraordinary perceptions through the lens of the *cittavīthi* doctrine highlights that these perceptions are completely mental, in the sense that a physical support (e.g. the fleshly eye) is required only at the beginning for the preparatory work, but not to keep using the power. Furthermore, it is a perception attained through a mental process that resembles the entrance into the *jhāna*. The state in which the meditator performs the extraordinary capacities seems indeed to be quite similar, although not identical to the *jhāna* state. We can wonder whether this may indicate, as suggested above in the chapter on the *iddhividhā* (see § 7.5), that the boundaries between different realms of existence get blurred, and different levels of existence conflate one into the other, allowing a human being on earth to be and act like a god of the heaven. As far as I know, the Buddhist path of liberation is not usually regarded as a process of divinisation nowadays, but this does not mean that it was not so in the past. Therefore, this study suggests the existence of an actual divine dimension in the pursuing of the Buddhist path of liberation.