

From Fright to Flight Course Handouts

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B) Excerpt on the six aspects or stages of meditation on the breath from *Study and Practice of Meditation*, L. Zahler

VII) Class 7: Insight Meditation Part One – 5/25/10

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B) Excerpts on the jhanic thought process from *The Path of Serenity & Insight*, H. Gunaratana

C) Four Elements Meditation, *Practicing the Jhanas*, Snyder & Rasmussen

VIII) Class 8: Insight Meditation Part Two – 6/1/10

A) Developing Insight, *The Practice Which Leads to Nirvana*, Pa Auk Sayadaw

B) Excerpt on the stages of purification from *Practical Insight Meditation*, Mahasi Sayadaw

IX) Class 9: The Controversy – 6/8/10

A) The Buddha's Discovery, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, Ajahn Brahm

X) Class 10: Conclusion & Review – 6/15/10

A) Excerpt from Controversies Surrounding Samadhi, *The Experience of Samadhi*, R. Shankman

B) Excerpt from Interview with Ajaan Thanisarro, *The Experience of Samadhi*, R. Shankman

Posted on website but not handed out:

1. The Origins of Insight Meditation, by Lance Cousins, in *The Buddhist Forum Vol. IV*, Ed. T. Skorupski
2. Excerpts from Interviews with Contemporary Meditation Teachers, *The Experience of Samadhi*, R. Shankman
3. The Path of Spiritual Progress, Sarvastivada Adhidharma, Bhikkhu KLL Dhammajoti
4. *The Seven Stages of Purification*, Ven Matara Sri Nanarama

Key Meditation Terms

English	Pali	Sanskrit	Tibetan
calm abiding	samatha	śamatha	shiney (zhi gnas)
insight/ clear seeing mindfulness	vipassanā	vipaśyanā	lhakthong (lhag mthong)
awareness/ clear comprehension	sati	smṛti	trenpa (dran pa)
vigilance/ heedfulness	sampajañña	samprajaña	sheshin (shes bzhin)
ardency	atappa	ātapah	bakyö (bag yod)
attention/ engagement	manasikara	manaskārah	nyima (nyi ma)
foundation of mindfulness	satipaṭṭhāna	smṛtyupasthāna	yila jeypa (yid la byed pa)
mindfulness of breathing	ānāpānasati	ānāpānasṛti	trenpa neybar zagpa (dran pa nye bar gzhang pa)
concentration/ absorption	samādhi	samādhi	? trenpa (dbugs dran pa)
concentration/ absorption	jhāna	dhyāna	tendzin (ting nge dzin)
meditation/development/ cultivation	bhāvanā	bhāvanā	samten (bsam gtan)
analytical/investigative meditation	—	*vicāra-bhāvanā	gompa (sgom pa)
settling meditation	—	*sthāpya-bhāvanā	chegom (dpyad sgom)
			jokgom (jog sgom)

“in Buddhist discourse, there are three terms that together map the field of mindfulness . . . [in their Sanskrit variants] *smṛti* (Pali: *sati*), *sampajañña* (Pali: *sampajañña*) and *apramāda* (Pali: *appamāda*).”—Mindfulness and the Mind,” by Subhuti. Madhyamavani Online, <http://madhyamavani.fwbo.org/8/mindfulness.html>

In the Satipatthana Sutta, *sati* and *sampajañña* are combined with *atappa* (Pali; Sanskrit: *ātapaḥ*), or “ardency,” and the three together comprise *yoniso manasikara* (Pali; Sanskrit: *yonisās manaskārah*), “appropriate attention.”

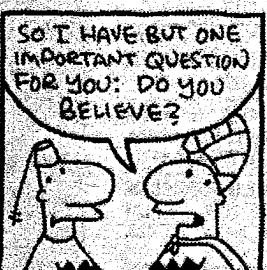
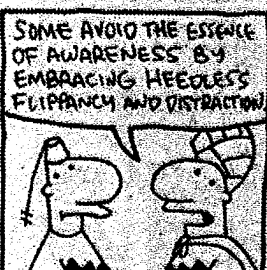
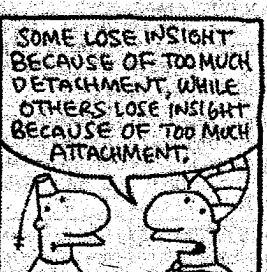
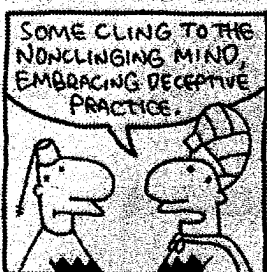
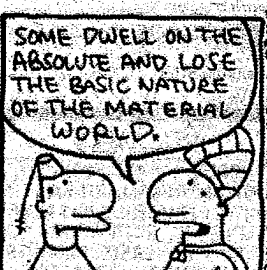
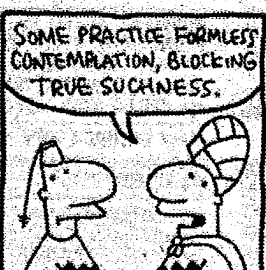
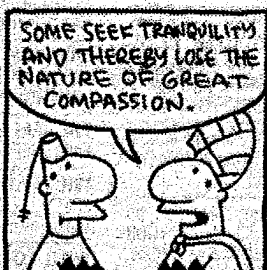
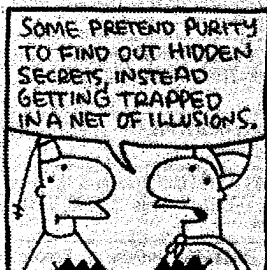
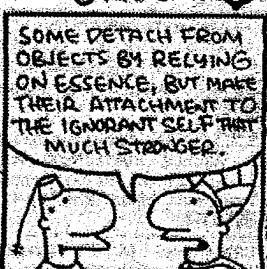
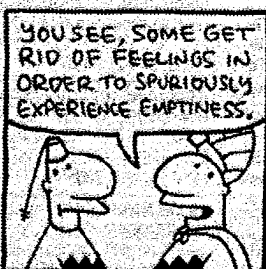
“ . . . in the proper practice of right mindfulness, *sati* has to be integrated with *sampajañña*, clear comprehension, and it is only when these two work together that right mindfulness can fulfill its intended purpose.”—Alan Wallace on the views of Ven. Nyanaponika

In linguistics, an asterisk is used to indicate an unattested term (a reconstruction or back-formation).

comics

LIFE IN HELL

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Theravāda abhidhamma

- **Seven universal mental factors** common to all; ethically variable mental factors common to all consciousnesses (*sabbacittasādhāraṇa cetasikas*)
 - Contact (*phassa*)
 - Feeling (*vedanā*)
 - Perception (*saññā*)
 - Volition (*cetanā*)
 - One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*)
 - life faculty (*jīvitindriya*)
 - Attention (*manasikāra*)
- **Six occasional or particular mental factors**; ethically variable mental factors found only in certain consciousnesses (*pakiṇṇaka cetasikas*)
 - Application of thought (*vitakka*)
 - Examining (*vicāra*)
 - Decision (*adhimokkha*)
 - Energy (*virīya*)
 - Rapture (*pīti*)
 - Desire (to act) (*chanda*)
- **Fourteen unwholesome mental factors** (*akusala cetasikas*)
 - Four universal unwholesome mental factors (*akusalasādhāraṇa*):
 - Delusion (*moha*)
 - Lack of shame (*ahirika*)
 - Disregard for consequence (*anottappa*)
 - Restlessness (*uddhacca*)
 - Three mental factors of the greed-group (*lobha*):
 - Greed (*lobha*)
 - Wrong view (*diṭṭhi*)
 - Conceit (*māna*)
 - Four mental factors of the hatred-group (*dosa*)
 - Hatred (*dosa*)
 - Envy (*issā*)
 - Miserliness (*macchariya*)
 - Regret (*kukkucca*)
 - Other unwholesome mental factors
 - Sloth (*thīna*)
 - Torpor (*middha*)
 - Doubt (*vicikicchā*)

- **Twenty-five beautiful mental factors** (*sobhana cetasikas*)
 - Nineteen universal beautiful mental factors (*sobhanasādhāraṇa*):
 - Faith (*saddhā*)
 - Mindfulness (*sati*)
 - Shame at doing evil (*hiri*)
 - Regard for consequence (*ottappa*)
 - Lack of greed (*alobha*)
 - Lack of hatred (*adosa*)
 - Balance, neutrality of mind (*tatramajjhataṭṭā*)
 - Tranquillity of mental body (*kāyapassaddhi*)
 - Tranquillity of consciousness (*cittapassaddhi*)
 - Lightness of mental body (*kāyalahutā*)
 - Lightness of consciousness (*cittalahutā*)
 - Softness/malleability of mental body (*kāyamudutā*)
 - Softness/malleability of consciousness (*cittamudutā*)
 - Readiness/wieldiness of mental body (*kāyakammaññatā*)
 - Readiness/wieldiness of consciousness (*cittakammaññatā*)
 - Proficiency of mental body (*kāyapāguññatā*)
 - Proficiency of consciousness (*cittapāguññatā*)
 - Straightness/rectitude of mental body (*kāyujukatā*)
 - Straightness/rectitude of consciousness (*cittujukatā*)
 - Three Abstinenes (*viratī*):
 - Right speech (*sammāvācā*)
 - Right action (*sammākammanta*)
 - Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)
 - Two Illimitables (*appamañña*):
 - Compassion (*karuṇā*)
 - Sympathetic joy (*muditā*)
 - One Faculty of wisdom (*paññindriya*):
 - Wisdom (*paññā*)

Sarvāstivāda abhidharma

- **Five universal mental factors** (*sarvatraga*) common to all:
 - Contact (*sparsā*)
 - Feeling (*vedanā*)
 - Perception (*saṃjñā*)
 - Volition (*cetanā*)
 - Attention (*manaskāraḥ*)
- **Five determining mental factors** (*viśayanīyata*):
 - Desire (to act) (*chanda*)
 - Decision (*adhimokṣa*)
 - Mindfulness (*smṛti*)
 - Wisdom (*prajñā*)
 - concentration *samādhi*
- **Eleven virtuous** (*kuśala*) **mental factors**
 - Faith (*sraddhā*)
 - Shame at doing evil (*hrī*)
 - Regard for consequence (*apatrāpya*)
 - Lack of greed (*alobha*)
 - Lack of hatred (*adveṣa*)
 - Nonbewilderment (*amoha*)
 - Effort (*vīrya*)
 - Pliancy (*praśrabdhī*)
 - Conscientiousness (*apramāda*)
 - Equanimity (*upekṣa*)
 - Nonharmfulness (*avihiṃsā*)
- **Six root mental defilements** (*mūlakleśa*):
 - Desire (*raga*)
 - Anger (*pratigha*)
 - Conceit (*māna*)
 - Ignorance (*avidyā*)
 - Doubt (*vichikitsā*)
 - Wrong view (*dṛṣṭi*)
- **Twenty secondary defilement** (*upakleśa*):
 - Wrath (*krodha*)
 - Resentment (*upanāha*)
 - Concealment (*mrakṣa*)
 - Spite (*pradāsa*)
 - Jealousy (*īrṣyā*)
 - Deceit (*matsarya*)
 - Dishonesty (*śāṭhya*)
 - Self-importance (*mada*)
 - Harmfulness (*vihīṃsā*)
 - Nonshame (*ahrikya*)
 - Disregard of consequence (*anapatrāpya*)
- **Four changeable mental factors** (*anīyata*):
 - Contrition (*kaukṛṭya*)
 - Sleep (*middha*)
 - Examination (*vitarka*)
 - Analysis (*vicharā*)

Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond

A Meditator's Handbook

Ajahn Brahm

foreword by Jack Kornfield



Wisdom Publications • Boston

The Jhānas III: Bliss upon Bliss upon Bliss

The Landmarks of All Jhānas

FROM THE MOMENT of entering a jhāna, one will have no control. One will be unable to give orders as one normally does. When the will that is controlling vanishes, then the “I will” that fashions one’s concept of future also disappears. Since the concept of time ceases in jhāna, the very question “What should I do next?” cannot arise. One cannot even decide when to come out. It is this absolute absence of will, and of its offspring, time, that gives the jhānas their timeless stability and allows them to last sometimes for many blissful hours.

Because of the perfect one-pointedness and fixed attention, one loses the faculty of perspective within jhāna. Comprehension relies on comparison—relating this to that, here to there, now with then. In jhāna, all that is perceived is an unmoving, enveloping, nondual bliss that allows no space for the arising of perspective. It is like that puzzle where one is shown a photograph of a well-known object from an unusual angle, and one has to guess what it is. It is very difficult to identify some objects without looking at them from different angles. When perspective is removed, so is comprehension. Thus in jhāna not only is there no sense of time but also there is no comprehension of what is going on. At the time, one will not even know which jhāna one is in. All one knows is great bliss, unmoving, unchanging, for unknown lengths of time.

Even though there is no comprehension within any jhāna, one is certainly not in a trance. One’s mindfulness is greatly increased to a level of sharpness that is truly incredible. One is immensely aware. Only mindfulness doesn’t move. It is frozen. And the stillness of the superpower

mindfulness, the perfect one-pointedness of awareness, makes the jhāna experience completely different from anything one has known before. This is not unconsciousness. It is nondual consciousness. All it can know is one thing, and that is timeless bliss that doesn't move.

Afterward, when one has emerged from the jhāna, such consummate one-pointedness of consciousness falls apart. With the weakening of one-pointedness, perspective reemerges, and the mind has the ability to move again. The mind has regained the space needed to compare and comprehend. Ordinary consciousness has returned.

Having just emerged from a jhāna, it is the usual practice to look back at what has happened and review the jhāna experience. The jhānas are such powerful events that they leave an indelible record in one's memory store. In fact, one will never forget them as long as one lives. They are easy to recall with perfect retention. One comprehends the details of what happened in the jhāna, and one knows which of the jhānas it was. Moreover, *data obtained from reviewing a jhāna form the basis of the insight that leads to enlightenment.*

Another strange quality that distinguishes jhāna from all other experience is that within jhāna, all the five senses are totally shut down. One cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or feel touch. One cannot hear a crow cawing or a person coughing. Even if there were a thunderclap nearby, it wouldn't be heard in a jhāna. If someone tapped you on the shoulder, or picked you up and let you down, in jhāna you cannot know this. The mind in jhāna is so completely cut off from these five senses that they cannot break in.⁹

A lay disciple once told me how, completely by chance, he had fallen into a deep jhāna while meditating at home. His wife thought he had died and sent for an ambulance. He was rushed to hospital in a loud wail of sirens. In the emergency room, no heartbeat registered on the ECG, and no brain activity was seen by the EEG. So the doctor on duty put defibrillators on his chest to reactivate his heart. Even though he was being bounced up and down on the hospital bed through the force of the electric shocks, he didn't feel a thing. When he emerged from the jhāna in the emergency room, perfectly all right, he had no knowledge of how he had got there, nothing of ambulances and sirens, nothing of

body-jerking defibrillators. All that long time that he was in jhāna, he was fully aware, but only of bliss. This is an example of what is meant by the five senses shutting down within the experience of jhāna.

Summary of the Landmarks of All Jhānas

It is helpful to know, then, that within a jhāna:

1. There is no possibility of thought;
2. No decision-making process is available;
3. There is no perception of time;
4. Consciousness is nondual, making comprehension inaccessible;
5. Yet one is very, very aware, but only of bliss that doesn't move;
6. The five senses are fully shut off, and only the sixth sense, mind, is in operation.

These are the features of jhāna. So during a deep meditation, if one wonders whether it is jhāna or not, one can be certain it is not! No such thinking can exist within the stillness of jhāna. These features will only be recognized upon emergence from a jhāna, using reviewing mindfulness once the mind can move again.

The First Jhāna

The Wobble (*Vitakka and Vicāra*)

All jhānas are states of unmoving bliss, almost. However, in the first jhāna, there is some movement discernible. I call this movement the "wobble" of first jhāna. One is aware of great bliss, so powerful it has subdued completely the part of the ego that wills and does. In jhāna, one is on automatic pilot, as it were, with no sense of being in control. However, the bliss is so delicious that it can generate a small residue of attachment. The mind instinctively grasps at the bliss. Because the bliss of the first jhāna is fueled by letting go, such involuntary grasping weakens the bliss. Seeing the bliss weaken, the mind automatically lets go of its grasping, and the bliss increases in power again. The mind then grasps again, then lets go again. Such subtle involuntary movement gives rise to the wobble of the first jhāna.

This process can be perceived in another way. As the bliss weakens because of the involuntary grasping, it seems as if mindfulness moves a small distance away from the bliss. Then the mindfulness gets pulled back into the bliss as the mind automatically lets go. This back-and-forth movement is a second way of describing the wobble.

This wobble is, in fact, the pair of first *jhāna* factors called *vitakka* and *vicāra*. *Vitakka* is the automatic movement back into the bliss; *vicāra* is the involuntary grasping of the bliss. Some commentators explain *vitakka* and *vicāra* as “initial thought” and “sustained thought.” While in other contexts this pair can refer to thought, in *jhāna* they certainly mean something else. It is impossible that such a gross activity as thinking can exist in such a refined state as *jhāna*. In fact, thinking ceases a long time prior to *jhāna*. In *jhāna*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* are both subverbal and so do not qualify as thought. *Vitakka* is the subverbal movement of mind back into the bliss. *Vicāra* is the subverbal movement of mind that holds on to the bliss. Outside of *jhāna*, such movements of mind will often generate thought, and sometimes speech. But in *jhāna*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* are too subtle to create any thought. All they are capable of doing is moving mindfulness back into the bliss and holding mindfulness there.

One-Pointedness (*Ekaggatā*)

The third factor of the first *jhāna* is one-pointedness, *ekaggatā*. One-pointedness is mindfulness that is sharply focused on a minute area of existence. It is one-pointed in space because it sees only the point-source of bliss, together with a small area surrounding the bliss caused by the first *jhāna* wobble. It is one-pointed in time because it perceives only the present moment, so exclusively and precisely that all notion of time completely disappears. And it is one-pointed in phenomena because it knows only one object—the mental object of *pīti-sukha*—and is totally oblivious to the world of the five senses and one’s physical body.

Such one-pointedness in space produces the peculiar experience, only found in *jhāna*, of nondual consciousness, where one is fully aware but only of one thing, and from one angle, for timeless periods. Consciousness is so focused on the one thing that the faculty of comprehension is

suspended a while. Only after the one-pointedness has dissipated, and one has emerged from the *jhāna*, will one be able to recognize these features of the first *jhāna* and comprehend them all.

The one-pointedness in time produces the extraordinary stability of the first *jhāna*, allowing it to last effortlessly for such a long period of time. The concept of time relies on measuring intervals: from past to present or from present to future or from past to future. When all that is perceived within the first *jhāna* is the precise moment of now, then there is no room for measuring time. All intervals have closed. It is replaced with the perception of timelessness, unmoving.

One-pointedness of phenomena produces the exceptional occurrence of bliss upon bliss, unchanging throughout the duration of the *jhāna*. This makes the first *jhāna* such a restful abode.

In academic terms, *ekaggatā* is a Pāli compound meaning “one-peakness.” The middle term *agga* (Sanskrit *agṛā*) refers to the peak of a mountain, the summit of an experience, or even the capital of a country (as in Agra, the old Moghul capital of India). Thus *ekaggatā* is not just any old one-pointedness; it is a singleness of focus on something soaring and sublime. The single exalted summit that is the focus of *ekaggatā* in the first *jhāna* is the supreme bliss of *pīti-sukha*.

Joy-Happiness (*Pīti-sukha*)

Indeed, the last two factors of the first *jhāna* are *pīti* and *sukha*, which I will discuss together since they are such a close-knit pair. In fact, they only separate out in the third *jhāna*, where *pīti* ceases and leaves *sukha* “widowed.” Therefore, only after the third *jhāna* can one know from experience what *sukha* is and what *pīti* was. Here, it is sufficient to explain the pair as one thing.

These two factors of the first *jhāna* refer to the bliss that is the focus of mindfulness, and which forms the central experience of the first *jhāna*. Bliss is the dominant feature of the first *jhāna*, so much so that it is the first thing that one recognizes when reviewing after emerging from the *jhāna*. Indeed, mystic traditions more recent than Buddhism have been so overwhelmed by the sheer immensity, egolessness, stillness, ecstasy,

ultimateness, and pure otherworldliness of the first jhāna that they have understood the experience as “union with God.” However, the Buddha explained that this is but one form of supramundane bliss and there are other forms that are superior. In the Buddhist experience of jhāna, one comes to know many levels of supramundane bliss. The first jhāna is the first level. Even though after emerging from the first jhāna, one cannot conceive of an experience more blissful, there is much more!

Each level of bliss has a different “taste,” a quality that sets it apart. These different qualities can be explained by the diverse causes of the bliss. Just as heat generated by sunlight has a different quality than heat caused by a wood fire, which in turn is different from heat generated by a furnace, so bliss fueled by different causes exhibits distinguishing features.

The distinguishing feature of the bliss of first jhāna is that it is fueled by the complete absence of all five sense activities. When the five senses have shut down, including all echoes of the five senses manifesting as thoughts, then one has left the world of the body and material things (*kāmaloka*) and has entered the world of pure mind (*rūpaloka*). It is as if a huge burden has dropped away. Or, as Ajahn Chah used to describe it, it is as if you have had a rope tied tightly around your neck for as long as you can remember. So long, in fact, that you have become used to it and no longer recognize the pain. Then somehow the tension is suddenly released and the rope is removed. The bliss you then feel is the result of that noose disappearing. In much the same way, the bliss of the first jhāna is caused by the complete fading away of a heavy burden, of all that you took to be the world. Such insight into the cause of the bliss of the first jhāna is fundamental to understanding the Buddha’s four noble truths about suffering.

Summary of the First Jhāna

In summary then, the first jhāna is distinguished by the five factors, here compressed into three:

- 1 + 2. *vitakka-vicāra*: experienced as the “wobble,” being the fine, subtle movement in and out of the bliss;

11. The Jhānas III: Bliss Upon Bliss Upon Bliss • 159

3. *ekaggatā*: experienced as nonduality, timelessness, and stillness;
- 4 + 5. *pīti-sukha*: experienced as a bliss surpassing anything in the material world, and fueled by the complete transcendence of the world of the five senses.

The Second Jhāna

Subsiding of the Wobble

As the first jhāna deepens, the wobble lessens and the bliss consolidates. One comes to a state where *vicāra* is still holding on to the bliss with the most subtle of grasping, but this is not enough to cause any instability in the bliss. The bliss doesn’t decrease as a result of *vicāra*, nor does mindfulness seem to move away from the source. The bliss is so strong that *vicāra* cannot disturb it. Although *vicāra* is still active, there is no longer any *vitakka*, no movement of mind back to the source of bliss. The wobble has gone. This is a jhāna state described in the suttas as without *vitakka* but with a small measure of *vicāra* (MN 128,31; AN VIII,63). It is so close to the second jhāna that it is usually included within that jhāna.

As the bliss strengthens into immutable stability, there is no purpose for *vicāra* to hold on anymore. At this point, the mind becomes fully confident, enough to let go absolutely. With this final letting go, born of inner confidence in the stability of the bliss, *vicāra* disappears and one enters the second jhāna proper.

The first feature, then, of the second jhāna described in the suttas is *avītakka* and *avīcāra*, meaning “without *vitakka* and *vicāra*.” In experience, this means that there is no more wobble in the mind. The second feature is *ajjhātari sampasādanari*, meaning “internal confidence.” In experience, this describes the full confidence in the stability of the bliss, which is the cause for *vicāra* to cease.

Perfect One-Pointedness of Mind

The third and most recognizable feature of the second jhāna is *cetaso ekodibhāvanī*, or perfect one-pointedness of mind. When there is no longer any wobble, then the mind is like an unwavering rock, more

immovable than a mountain and harder than a diamond. Such perfection in unyielding stillness is incredible. The mind stays in the bliss without the slightest vibration. This is later recognized as the perfection of the quality called *samādhi*.

Samādhi is the faculty of attentive stillness, and in the second *jhāna* this attention is sustained on the object without any movement at all. There is not even the finest oscillation. One is fixed, frozen solid, stuck with “super-glué,” unable even to tremble. All stirrings of mind are gone. There is no greater stillness of mind than this. It is called perfect *samādhi*, and it remains as a feature not only of this second *jhāna* but of the higher *jhānas* as well.

The Bliss Born of Samādhi and the End of All Doing

It is this perfection of *samādhi* that gives the bliss of the second *jhāna* its unique taste. The burden that affected the first *jhāna*, the affliction of movement, has been abandoned. Everything stands perfectly still, even the knower. Such absolute stillness transcends the mental pain born of the mind moving, and it reveals the great bliss fueled by pure *samādhi*. In the *suttas*, the bliss of the second *jhāna* is called the *pīti-sukha born of samādhi* (*samādhiya pīti-sukha*) (DN 9, 11). Such bliss is even more pleasurable, hugely so, than the bliss resulting from transcending the world of the five senses. One could not have anticipated such bliss. It is of a totally separate order. After experiencing this second *jhāna*, having realized two rare “species” of supramundane bliss that are extreme, one ponders what other levels of bliss may lie ahead.

Another salient feature of the second *jhāna* is that all doing has totally ceased, even the involuntary activity that caused the wobbling has completely vanished. The doer has died. Only when one has experience of the second *jhāna* can one fully appreciate what is meant by this term “doer”—just as a tadpole can fully appreciate what is meant by the term “water” only when water disappears during the frog’s first experience on dry land. Not only is the doer gone, it seems as if this apparently essential part of one’s eternal identity has been deleted from existence. What was seemingly obvious turns out to be a mirage, a delusion. One

penetrates the illusion of free will using the data from raw experience. The philosopher (Sartre) who proposed “to be is to do” could not have known the second *jhāna*, where “being” is without any “doing.” These *jhānas* are weird, and they defy normal experience. But they are real, more real than the world.

Summary of the Second Jhāna

Thus the second *jhāna* is distinguished by another four collections of factors:

- 1 + 2. *Avitakka-avicāra, ajjhatañi sampasādanāni*: experienced as the subsiding of the “wobble” from the first *jhāna* due to internal confidence in the stability of the bliss;
3. *Cetaso ekodibhāvanī*: perfect one-pointedness of mind due to full confidence in the bliss. This is usually experienced as rocklike stillness, or the perfection of *samādhi*;
4. *Samādhiya pīti-sukha*: being the focus of this *jhāna*, the supramundane bliss generated by the end of all movement of the mind;
5. *The end of all doing*: seen as the first time that the “doer” has completely gone.

The Third Jhāna

As the stillness of the knower continues, the stillness of the known grows ever more profound. Remember that in *jhāna*, what is known is the image of the mind, and the mind is the knower. First the knower becomes still, then its image, the known, gradually becomes still.

In the first two *jhānas*, this image of the mind is recognized as a bliss that up until now has been called *pīti-sukha*. In the third *jhāna*, the image of the mind has gone to the next level of stillness, to a very different kind of bliss.

Pīti Has Vanished

Prior to the third *jhāna* all bliss had something in common, although it differed in its taste due to the distinguishing causes. That something in

common was the combination of pīti plus sukha. Because they were always together, as inseparable as Siamese twins, it was not only pointless but even impossible to tell them apart. It was this combination that, up to now, gave all bliss a common quality. Now in the third jhāna pīti vanishes to leave only sukha, which produces a very different species of bliss altogether.

It is only after the experience of the third jhāna that one can know what sukha is, and by inference what pīti was. The pīti of the second jhāna seemed more euphoric than anything else. Yet it is now seen as the lesser part of the bliss. Sukha is the more refined part.

Great Mindfulness, Clear Knowing, and Equanimity

With all jhānas, the experiences are next to impossible to describe. The higher the jhāna, however, the more profound the experience and the more difficult it becomes to describe. These states and their language are remote from the world. At a stretch, one may say that the bliss of the third jhāna, the sukha, has a greater sense of ease, is quieter, and is more serene. In the suttas, it is accompanied by the features of mindfulness (*sati*), clear knowing (*sampajañña*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), although these qualities are said in the *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111) to be present in all jhānas. Perhaps these features are emphasized as qualities of the third jhāna in order to point out that in this very deep jhāna one is exceptionally mindful, very clear in the knowing, and so still that one looks on without moving, which is the root meaning of equanimity (*upekkhā*).

The Same Rocklike Stillness and Absence of a Doer

The third jhāna retains the perfect samādhi, the rocklike stillness, the absence of a doer, and the inaccessibility from the world of the five senses. It is distinguished from the second jhāna by the nature of the bliss, which has soared up to another level and appears as another species of bliss altogether. So much so that the suttas quote the enlightened one's description of the third jhāna as "abiding in bliss, mindful, just looking on" (DN 9, 12).

Summary of the Third Jhāna

Thus the third jhāna has the following features:

1. The bliss has separated, losing the coarse part that was pīti;
2. The bliss that remains, sukha, exhibits the qualities of great mindfulness, clear knowing, and the sense of just looking on;
3. The same absolute rocklike stillness, and absence of a doer, as in the second jhāna.

The Fourth Jhāna

As the stillness of the knower calms that which is known, the bliss that was the central feature of the first three jhānas changes again when one enters the fourth jhāna. Only this time it changes more radically. Sukha completely disappears. What remains is an absolute still knower seeing absolute stillness.

From the perspective of the fourth jhāna, the bliss of the previous jhānas is seen as a residual movement of the mental object, and an affliction obscuring something much greater. When the bliss subsides, all that is left is the profound peace that is the hallmark of the fourth jhāna. Nothing moves in here, nothing glows. Nothing experiences happiness or discomfort. One feels perfect balance in the very center of the mind. As in the center of a cyclone, nothing stirs in the center of the mind's eye. There is a sense of perfection here, a perfection of stillness and of awareness. The Buddha described it as the purification of mindfulness, just looking on (*upekkhā sati pañisuddhi*) (DN 9, 13).

The peace of the fourth jhāna is like no other peace to be found in the world. It can only be known having passed through the experience of the previous three jhānas. That passage is the only way of later confirming that the unmoving peace that one felt was indeed that of fourth jhāna. Furthermore, the state of fourth jhāna is so very still that one remains on its plateau for many hours. It seems impossible that one could experience the fourth jhāna for any less time.

Though pīti and sukha have both ceased in the fourth jhāna and all that is left is the perfection of peace, such an experience is later recognized,

upon reviewing, as supremely delightful. The perfect peace of the fourth jhāna is seen as the best bliss so far. It is the bliss of no more bliss! This is not playing with words, trying to sound clever and mystical. This is how it is.

Summary of the Fourth Jhāna

Thus the fourth jhāna has the following features:

1. The disappearance of sukha;
2. An extremely long-lasting, and unchanging, perception of the perfection of peace, reached only through the lower three jhānas;
3. The same absolute rocklike stillness, and absence of a doer, as in the second and third jhāna;
4. The complete inaccessibility from the world of the five senses and one's body.

The Buddha's Similes for the Four Jhānas

The Buddha would often describe the experience within the four jhānas by evocative similes (e.g., MN 39, 15–18; 77, 25–28). Before explaining these similes, it is helpful to pause and clarify the meaning of *kāya*, a key Pāli word used in all the similes. *Kāya* has the same range of meanings as the English word “body.” Just as “body” can mean things other than the body of a person, such as a “body of evidence,” for example, so too *kāya* can mean things other than a physical body, such as a body of mental factors, *nāma-kāya* (DN 15, 20). In the jhānas the five senses do not operate, which means that there is no experience of a physical body. The body has been transcended. Therefore, when the Buddha states in these four similes, “so that there is no part of his whole kāya unpervaded (by bliss and so on),” this can be taken to mean “so that there is no part of his *whole mental body of experience unpervaded*” (MN 39, 16). This point is frequently misunderstood.

The Buddha's simile for the first jhāna is a ball of clay (used as soap) with just the right amount of moisture, neither too dry nor too wet. The ball of clay stands for the unified mind, wherein mindfulness has been

restricted to the very small area created by the “wobble.” The moisture stands for the bliss caused by total seclusion from the world of the five senses. The moisture that completely pervades the clay ball indicates the bliss that thoroughly pervades the space and duration of the mental experience. This is later recognized as bliss followed by bliss, and then more bliss, without interruption. That the moisture is not in excess, and so does not leak out, describes how the bliss is always contained in the space generated by the wobble, never leaking out of this area of mind-space into the world of the five senses, as long as the jhāna persists.

The second jhāna is likened to a lake with no external entry for water but with an internal spring that replenishes it with cool water. The lake represents the mind. The complete absence of any way that water from outside can enter the lake describes the inaccessibility of the mind by any influence from outside. Not even the doer can enter such a mind in this jhāna. Such hermetic inaccessibility is the cause of the rocklike stillness of the second jhāna. The internal spring that supplies the cool water represents *ajjhataṃ sampasādamī*, the internal confidence in the bliss of second jhāna. This internal confidence causes complete letting go, cooling the mind into stillness and freeing it from all movement. The cooling stands for the bliss itself, born of samādhi or stillness, which pervades the whole mental experience, unchanging throughout the duration of the jhāna.

The third jhāna is described by the metaphor of a lotus flower that thrives immersed in the cool water of a lake. The lotus represents the mind in the third jhāna. Water can cool the petals and leaves of a lotus but can never penetrate the lotus, since all water rolls off. The coolness stands for sukha, and the wetness stands for pīti. So like the lotus immersed in water, the mind in the third jhāna is cooled by sukha but is not penetrated by pīti. The mind in the third jhāna experiences only sukha. In the third jhāna, the mind continues to experience a rocklike stillness, never moving outside, just as the lotus in the simile always remains immersed within the water. Just as the cool water causes the lotus to thrive, so the bliss of the third jhāna sustains the mind therein. Once again, just as the cool waters in the simile pervade the lotus with

coolness from its roots to its tips, so the unique bliss of the third *jhāna* pervades the whole mental experience from beginning to end.

The fourth *jhāna* is likened to a man draped from head to toe in a clean white cloth. The man represents the mind, while the cloth represents the perfect purity of equanimity and mindfulness that is the hallmark of the fourth *jhāna*. The mind in the fourth *jhāna* is stainless, spotless as a clean cloth, perfectly still and just looking on, purely and simply. This absolute purity of peacefulness pervades the whole body of mental experience, from the start to the end, just as the white cloth completely covers the man's body from head to toe.

Such is the meaning of the four similes for *jhāna*, as I understand them.

Moving from *Jhāna* to *Jhāna*

As I've indicated before, in a *jhāna* one cannot make any move. One cannot formulate any decision to proceed from this *jhāna* to that. One cannot even make a decision to come out. All such control has been abandoned within the *jhāna*. Furthermore, the profound stillness of mindfulness in *jhāna* freezes the mental activity of comprehension to the extent that, while in *jhāna*, one can hardly make sense of one's experience. The landmarks of *jhāna* are only recognized later, after emerging and reviewing. Thus, within any *jhāna* not only can one not move, but also one cannot know where one is nor where to move to! So how then does movement from *jhāna* to *jhāna* occur?

Imagine a four-room house with only one entrance door. Going through that door, one enters the first room. One must walk through the first room to enter the second, through the second room to enter the third, and through the third to enter the fourth. When leaving the house, one exits the fourth room and goes back to the third room, then to the second, then to the first. So one leaves the house by the same door through which one entered. Now suppose that the floors in all the rooms are so slippery that one cannot apply any additional momentum. Thus, if one enters the house with only a little momentum, one slides to a halt in the first room. With a greater amount of entry

momentum, one may come to a stop in the second, the third, or the fourth room.

Such a simile describes how moving from *jhāna* to *jhāna* actually occurs. Within a *jhāna* one has no control. If one enters into *jhānas* with little momentum, one stops in the first *jhāna*. With greater momentum, one reaches the second or third *jhānas*. And with yet more entry momentum, one may reach the fourth *jhāna*. The entry momentum can only be generated outside of *jhāna*, when control is possible.

The momentum referred to here is that of letting go. One cultivates letting go *before* entering *jhāna*, to the point where it becomes an involuntary inclination of the mind, a strong natural tendency. If one enters the doorway into the *jhānas* with a modicum of letting-go momentum, one will stop in the first *jhāna*. With a stronger automatic tendency to let go, one reaches the second or third *jhānas*. With a very strong inclination to let go, one attains to the fourth *jhāna*. But one cannot increase the strength of letting-go momentum while inside the *jhānas*.

One can cultivate this momentum of letting go outside of *jhāna* by reviewing the experiences of bliss and by recognizing the obstacles called attachments. When the mind recognizes the great happiness of letting go, the inclination to let go grows. Sometimes I have taught my stubborn mind by thinking, "See, mind! See! See how much more bliss there is in the states of letting go. See, mind! Don't forget, mind, okay?" The mind then leans ever more strongly to letting go. Or the mind can recognize the obstacles to deeper bliss, which are the various levels of attachment. When the mind learns, through reviewing, to recognize the enemies to its own happiness—the attachments—then its inclination to let go becomes empowered by wisdom.

For another way to understand how one moves from *jhāna* to *jhāna*, recall the simile of the thousand-petaled lotus that opens in the sun. The first *jhāna* can be compared to a rare and delicate row of petals very near the center. Just as the petals of this row, now being warmed by the sun, conceal an even more fragrant row of petals underneath, so the rare and delicate first *jhāna*, now being warmed by still mindfulness, opens to reveal an even more blissful second *jhāna*. Thus the second *jhāna* lies

within the first jhāna, the third within the second, and the fourth within the third, like the inner rows of lotus petals, one within the other.

When one has had much experience of jhāna, one can move from jhāna to jhāna using the power of *adhiṭṭhāna*. In this context, the word *adhiṭṭhāna* refers to the Buddhist way of programming the mind. At the beginning of one's meditation, one can program the mind to enter a specified jhāna for a predetermined length of time. Of course, this works only for an accomplished meditator who is familiar with the destination and is well acquainted with the route. It is like setting the automatic pilot shortly after takeoff. Even accomplished meditators, however, must traverse the usual path to reach a specified jhāna. For example, if one programs the mind to enter the third jhāna, then one must pass through the first and second jhānas first, although one may do so quickly.

The Immaterial Attainments

In the simile of the thousand-petaled lotus, four of the innermost rows of petals represent the jhānas. The eighth innermost row is the first jhāna; the seventh innermost, the second jhāna; the sixth innermost, the third jhāna; and the fifth innermost, the fourth jhāna. You now are probably wondering what the last four rows of petals represent. Beyond the four jhānas lie the four immaterial attainments. It is noteworthy that the Buddha never calls these attainments "jhānas" in the suttas. Only the commentaries, compiled a thousand years later, call them that. The four immaterial attainments are as follows:

- the mind-base of unlimited space
- the mind-base of unlimited consciousness
- the mind-base of nothingness
- the mind-base of neither perception nor nonperception

Just as the fourth jhāna lies within the third jhāna, so the first immaterial attainment lies within the fourth jhāna, the second immaterial attainment within the first immaterial attainment, and so on like the rows

of petals in a lotus. Thus, of necessity, all four immaterial attainments possess the following features carried over from the jhāna:

- ♦ The mind remains inaccessible to the world of the five senses and all knowledge of the body;
- ♦ The mind persists in rocklike stillness, incapable of forming any thought or making any plan, for long periods of time;
- ♦ Comprehension is so frozen that one can hardly make sense, at the time, of one's experience. Comprehension is achieved after emerging;
- ♦ The pure equanimity and mindfulness of the fourth jhāna remains as a foundation for each immaterial attainment.

Just as the first three jhānas take different forms of bliss as their object, and the fourth jhāna takes a sublime state of pure peace as its object, so each of the immaterial attainments takes a pure mental object. The perceptions of these objects I call *mind-bases*, since they are the mental platforms on which the immaterial attainments rest. These unmoving mind-bases become ever more refined, and empty, the higher the immaterial attainment.

Back in the fourth jhāna, mindfulness is powerful and still, just looking on at the perfection of peace well beyond the world of the five senses and precisely one-pointed. In states of precise one-pointedness, ordinary concepts derived from the world are squeezed out, and other unworldly perceptions replace them.

For example, when a meditator in the early stages becomes perfectly focused in the present moment, which means one-pointed in time, ordinary concepts of time are squeezed out, and unworldly perceptions of time replace them. When one is fully centered within the present moment, on the one hand it feels timeless and, on the other hand, it feels as if one has all the time in the world. Within the point of absolute now, time is without edges, undefined, empty, and immeasurable. It is infinite and nothing at the same time. It is unlimited (*ananta*). The experience of one-pointedness in time, seen early in the meditation, can be the key to

understanding the simultaneous sense of infinity and emptiness in the immaterial attainments.

The Mind-Base of Unlimited Space

From the fourth jhāna, the mind can look into the perfect peace to perceive absolute one-pointedness in space. This is one of the features of the fourth jhāna always available for inspection, as it were, and it is the doorway into the immaterial attainments. In this absolute one-pointedness, space is perceived as both infinite and empty, a sort of no-space. Because it is perceived as empty of that which usually limits space, that is, material form (*rūpa*), this attainment and those following are called immaterial (*arūpa*) attainments.

The first immaterial attainment, then, is the mind-base of unlimited space, perceived as both infinite and empty, immeasurable and undefined. This is the perception that fills the mind thoroughly and persists without blinking for the long duration of the attainment. Mindfulness, powerful, still, and purified, looks on at this perception with utter contentment.

The Mind-Base of Unlimited Consciousness

Within the perception of unlimited space lies the perception of no-space, of space losing its meaning. When the mind attends to this feature within the first immaterial attainment, space disappears and is replaced by the perception of absolute one-pointedness of consciousness. In this state, consciousness simultaneously feels infinite and empty, immeasurable and undefined. One has entered the second immaterial attainment of the mind-base of unlimited consciousness. This perception fills the mind completely and persists without wavering for even longer periods of time.

The Mind-Base of Nothingness

Within the perception of unlimited consciousness lies the perception of no-consciousness, of consciousness now losing its meaning as well. When the mind focuses on this feature within the second immaterial attainment, all perceptions of consciousness disappear. Perceptions of material

form and space have already disappeared, so all that is left is the one-pointedness of nothingness. One has entered the third immaterial attainment of the mind-base of nothingness. This concept fills the mind totally, persisting unchangingly for yet longer periods of time.

The Mind-Base of Neither Perception nor Nonperception

Within the perception of nothingness lies the perception of not even nothing! If the mind is subtle enough to see this feature, then the perception of nothingness disappears and is replaced by the perception of neither perception nor nonperception. All that one can say about this fourth immaterial attainment is that it is, in fact, a perception (AN IX, 42). In the simile of the thousand-petaled lotus, this state is represented by the last row of petals, still closed, with all the other petals fully open. This last row of petals is almost not like petals at all, being the most subtle and sublime, for it clasps within its gossamer fabric the famous “jewel in the heart of the lotus,” *nibbāna*.

Nibbāna, the Cessation of All Perception

Within the perception of neither perception nor nonperception lies the end of all perception, the cessation of all that is felt or perceived, *nibbāna*. If the mind attends to this, the mind stops. When the mind starts again, one gains the attainment of arahant or anāgāmi. These are the only possibilities.

Gradual Cessation

Another way of viewing the jhānas and the four immaterial attainments is by placing them in the sequence of gradual cessation. The process that leads into the first jhāna is the cessation of the world of the five senses together with the body and all doing. The path from the first to the fourth jhāna is the cessation of that part of the mind that recognizes pleasure and displeasure. The road from the fourth jhāna to the fourth immaterial attainment is the cessation, almost, of the remaining activity of mind called “knowing.” And the last step is the cessation of the last vestige of knowing. Through jhānas and the immaterial attainments, first

one lets go of the body and the world of the five senses. Then one lets go of the doer. Then one lets go of pleasure and displeasure. Then one lets go of space and consciousness. Then one lets go of all knowing. When one lets go of an object, the object disappears, ceases. If it remains, one hasn't let go. Through letting go of all that can be known, the knower ceases. This is the cessation of everything, including the mind. This is the place where consciousness no longer manifests, where earth, water, fire, and air find no footing, where name-and-form are wholly destroyed (DN 11,85). Emptiness. Cessation. Nibbāna, the jewel in the heart of the lotus.

In this chapter on the jhānas, I have led you on a journey from theory to practice, up to the high mountain ranges where lie the great summits that are the jhānas, and up higher to the rarefied peaks that are the immaterial attainments. Though the tour may seem way beyond you today, tomorrow you may find yourself well advanced along the route. So it is helpful even today to have this road map before you.

Moreover, these jhānas are like immensely rich gold mines, but carrying the most precious of insights rather than a precious metal. They supply the raw material, the unexpected data, which build those special insights that open one's eyes to nibbāna. The jhānas are jewels that adorn the face of Buddhism. They are essential to the experience of enlightenment, and they are possible today.

I conclude this chapter with the words of the Lord Buddha:

There is no jhāna without wisdom;
 There is no wisdom without jhāna;
 But for one with both jhāna and wisdom,
 They are in the presence of nibbāna.
 (Dhp 372)

The Nature of Deep Insight

INSIGHT IS COMMON; deep insight is rare. Insight is comforting; deep insight is challenging, sometimes terrifying. Insight makes little impression on one's character; deep insight changes one's life.

For example, two monks were arguing over a flag in the wind. One said that the flag moved. The other said that the wind moved. They went to see a Zen master who told them that they were both wrong. The mind moved. Then a Theravāda forest monk came along and said that all three of them had missed the point. The problem was that their mouths moved! That's insight.

A monk I know told me that as a layman he had once had a powerful meditation experience of deep prolonged bliss, better than sexual orgasm, wherein the body had vanished and everything was still. That unusual experience challenged his previous understanding of happiness; it overturned it and changed his whole life. He became a monk for the rest of his life. That was a *deep* insight.

The Tenfold Path

In the collection of suttas called the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha's sermons are arranged according to the number of items mentioned in the text. For example, the four right efforts, the four roads to power, and many other fourfold groups are collected in the chapter titled "Fours." When I first read the "Eights" chapter in this collection, I expected to find the most famous of the eights, the eightfold path. It wasn't there, and I was stunned. You see, in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the famous eightfold

possible between sitting periods when engaged in all other activities. When walking, eating, showering, and so on, continue to direct your attention to the breath crossing the ānāpāna spot.

Some people experience too much persistence, which comes from trying too hard. This often manifests as restlessness and striving. The opposite of too much persistence, too little persistence, produces laziness, sloth, and torpor. One example the Buddha used to demonstrate the proper tension in our meditation practice is the strings on a lute.¹ When the strings are too tight, the lute sounds strained, and the strings, being under pressure, eventually break. Should the strings be too loose, too lax, the sound is equally poor, sometimes producing no sound at all. When we apply the proper amount of persistence, the strings are neither too loose nor too tight, but have an appropriate tension—and the resonant sound is beautiful. Meditation also deepens naturally when persistence is balanced and consistent.

THE EIGHT LANDMARKS FROM FIRST SIT TO FIRST JHĀNA

The vast majority of meditators who undertake concentration meditation practice spend significant time in the territory preceding first jhāna. We have identified the following eight landmarks between the first sitting period and full absorption in the first material jhāna:

1. first sit
2. nimitta commences
3. nimitta increases
4. nimitta becomes stable
5. nimitta becomes solid and energized
6. nimitta moves toward merging with the ānāpāna spot
7. nimitta and the ānāpāna spot merge and become the "ānāpāna nimitta"
8. ānāpāna nimitta draws the awareness into first jhāna

PRACTICING THE Jhānas

*Traditional Concentration
Meditation as Presented by the
Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw*

STEPHEN SNYDER AND
TINA RASMUSSEN



SHAMBHALA
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Landmark 1: First Sit

Most of this book up to this point has described elements of practice relevant to preparing for the first sit. We have described numerous aspects of practice that yogis undertake, both on and off the cushion, in developing concentration.

The span of time between landmarks 1 and 2 can be long. For many meditators, a whole retreat or many retreats can pass without the appearance of the nimitta. Regardless of whether a retreat encompasses the entire samatha path or simply this first landmark, it is vital to know that something worthwhile is happening. Meditators who diligently undertake practice are building the “muscle of concentration,” cultivating serenity, and—most important—purifying the mind stream.

Landmark 2: Nimitta Commences

Nimitta is an important component of this practice. It is a sign of powerful concentration. It arises in access concentration as a sign that the mind is unifying. References to the arising of the nimitta can be found in descriptions of modern meditation teachers such as Dīpa Ma, who described a light when she meditated, even during vipassanā practice.²

The nimitta usually starts as a faint flickering of light. It may also start as a smoky experience of the breath, like exhaling in cold winter temperatures. Others may perceive it as a round light, similar to a train or truck headlight. The nimitta can appear in a variety of colors and shapes. Sometimes the nimitta appears at a distance. Attach no significance to the features or location of the nimitta. Persist with maintaining your awareness on the meditative object exclusively.

The nimitta is light seen in the mind’s eye, not light seen with the human eye(s). The nimitta arises on its own as a product of the natural unification of mind that develops with concentration. At first, we cannot will it to arise or make it arise. (Later,

as mastery increases, the nimitta arises upon invitation, as do the jhānas.)

Whatever the nimitta looks like, or however it behaves, at this point do not shift awareness to it or look directly at it. The breath crossing the ānāpāna spot continues to be the sole meditation object. As enticing as the nimitta is, don’t even glance at it. Despite explicit instruction, nearly everyone tries to look at or move attention toward the nimitta. When this happens, the nimitta usually fades or disappears. It’s similar to trying to grab a cloud in your clenched fist. No matter how strong the desire to hold the cloud, it always eludes your grasp.

Many yogis strain so hard to “see” the nimitta that they begin to experience stress, headaches, and even eyestrain. Please do not do this to yourself! The nimitta cannot be either perceived with the physical eyes or produced through your trying or wanting to see it. It is generated in the mind, as a by-product of the unification of the awareness. Additionally, if you want to see the nimitta so badly that the illusion of nimitta arises, this will not ultimately result in jhāna, because it is not actually a sign of concentration. Imagining the nimitta or trying to create it is pointless. As always, doing the practice as it is designed and staying with the breath at the ānāpāna spot as your sole object is the most skillful possible action you can take. So, at this point, keep your attention on the breath crossing the ānāpāna spot despite any excitement or desire to go to, or purposefully develop, the nimitta.

Landmark 3: Nimitta Increases

Once the nimitta begins appearing, it will continue to do so provided that you stay with the meditative object—the breath as it crosses the ānāpāna spot. Further, if you are on retreat, do not allow long periods of time to pass without meditating. On retreat, it helps not to let more than an hour pass without a formal sitting period, thereby increasing your continuity of deep

practice. In addition, by staying with the object of meditation while meditating, walking, eating, or lying down, you further develop continuity of practice.

The nimitta will arise more and more often as continuity of practice continues. It will gradually increase in size and be present more continuously throughout sitting meditation and even while the meditator is moving around with eyes open. We each had the experience of seeing the nimitta, on occasion, when our eyes were open while walking or eating. For Tina, at some points the nimitta was visible consistently while walking around with eyes open. This is not required or necessary but can happen. Once the nimitta is present for the duration of nearly every meditation period, it is considered to be stable.

Landmark 4: Nimitta Becomes Stable

The nimitta eventually becomes very stable. Each time you close your eyes, the nimitta is present. It is best to restrict all outflows of attention and energy, keeping your eyes downcast and your movements measured, and straying away from any inner or outer talking. The nimitta develops further if you are patient and vigilantly maintain awareness on the meditative object. If you attempt to go to the nimitta before concentration is developed sufficiently, anticipating its merging with the breath, it customarily breaks apart, fades, or disappears. If this happens, return the attention to the breath crossing the ānāpāna spot and wait for nimitta to again arise and stabilize.

Landmark 5: Nimitta Becomes Solid and Energized

As the nimitta becomes more solid and apparent, it will begin to be energized. Conceptually the difference between the solid and energized nimitta is much like a neon business sign. When turned off, the sign can still be clearly read during daylight hours yet may be unreadable at night. This is due to the lack of inherent energy flowing through the sign. When the nimitta becomes energized, the energy field containing the nimitta be-

comes crisp and bright. For some people who are not yet seeing the nimitta, at this point in the practice the energy field where the nimitta will eventually appear is palpable.

The energized nimitta is a sign of deepening access concentration. The student here usually experiences the jhāna factors strongly and feels very relaxed yet highly energized. Staying on the object becomes increasingly effortless. Again, there can be a strong desire to chase the nimitta and shift to it as the object, or try to “make” it merge with the breath. Doing so will dissipate the nimitta and weaken the concentration. The process of chasing the nimitta and eventually letting go serves to weaken the hindrance of desire and attachment while cultivating a sense of surrender to the practice as it naturally unfolds, always purifying the mind stream.

Landmark 6: Nimitta Moves toward Merging with the Ānāpāna Spot

When you stay with the breath crossing the ānāpāna spot and do not chase the energized nimitta, the nimitta moves closer to the ānāpāna spot. Without your expending any effort, the nimitta is drawn to the breath at the ānāpāna spot. As they move closer together, stay with the breath crossing the ānāpāna spot and ignore the nimitta, until the nimitta merges by itself with the breath at the ānāpāna spot. When you stay with the breath at the ānāpāna spot and do not chase the nimitta, the two will eventually merge together—in a sudden snap.

This merging of the nimitta with the breath happens only when the time is ripe. It is like trying to pet a very shy animal. If you pursue the animal, it flees. If you wait at a safe distance, however, in its own time, the animal comes to you.

Landmark 7: Nimitta and the Ānāpāna Spot Merge and Become the “Ānāpāna Nimitta”

When ripe, by itself, the breath crossing the ānāpāna spot and the nimitta merge into one. We cannot say how this happens,

but it does as the mind further unifies. Once the ānāpāna spot merges with the nimitta, you then have the “nimitta/ānāpāna spot” combination as your object. Throughout the remainder of the book, we refer to this merged “nimitta/ānāpāna spot” as the “ānāpāna nimitta.” This is a new phase of practice and a very exciting one! We both had the ānāpāna nimitta break or fade on us several times, as we were initially too excited to wait for it to merge on its own. For some people, during this phase the ānāpāna nimitta envelops the entire body. If this happens, let it do so; just make sure you can still maintain your awareness of it as your meditative object.

Over time, the ānāpāna nimitta stabilizes. Again, surrender your own agenda and allow the ānāpāna nimitta and the jhāna factors to strengthen and deepen in their own time. Just stay with your object, as always. It is common here to feel excitement, sometimes wondering whether this is the first jhāna. Since this is a progression, you can expect to spend a fair amount of time with the ānāpāna nimitta in access concentration as the mind is being purified before the first material jhāna arises. Just remain in silence internally, allowing the practice to do its work.

Landmark 8: Ānāpāna Nimitta Draws the Awareness into First Jhāna

The Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw encourages yogis to maintain meditative stability on the ānāpāna nimitta continuously for a minimum of thirty minutes (the longer you maintain it, the more stable and focused the concentration is) and then make a resolve to enter first jhāna. If the resolve feels like a distraction and you do not want to use one, you can just wait until concentration is strong enough and then let the jhāna arise on its own. Regardless of whether you make a resolve, only when concentration is strong enough will awareness be drawn into the first material jhāna. It feels like being physically “grabbed by the lapels and pulled face-first” into the absorption. It is very distinct and unmistakable, quite different from access concentra-

tion. If you repeatedly resolve to enter first jhāna before the time is ripe, your concentration will wane, being more focused on the resolve than on the meditation object, and you will remain in access concentration. While access concentration is very pleasant and serene, with all the jhāna factors being present, it is not full absorption into jhāna.

SKILLFUL EFFORT

In this practice, there is a vital need to understand the concept of effort and how it should be implemented. Most of us living in this modern, fast-paced world find ourselves rewarded for proactively applying our effort to our assignments. We undertake specific action with a particular goal in sight. We use the skills and tools at our disposal to reach that goal while deflecting interference. Our schools and employers have overwhelmingly supported, rewarded, and even taught this approach. Alas, proactive effort is only half of the spectrum of effort in this practice! There is a very fine distinction between “proactive effort” and “receptive effort.”

Proactive effort is more “doing” in tone. It is the energy that reaches out into the universe. Receptive effort is more “allowing” in tone. It is quieter and more inviting. Both energies are necessary in the samatha practice, supporting each other as the practice refines and deepens.

Proactive Effort

Your task in this timeless practice is to identify, cultivate, and maintain intimacy with the object of meditation. In ānāpānasati meditation, this means maintaining your awareness on the breath as it crosses the ānāpāna spot. Period! When the awareness shifts away or falls off the object, gently and nonjudgmentally return it. This is proactive effort. It is the “doing” portion of the practice.

Think of the metaphor of driving a car. When you first put a

Progression of Practice

SAMATHA

IMMATERIAL JHĀNAS

J5 J6 J7 J8

Kasīnas

(earth, water, fire, wind, nila, yellow, red, white, light)

J5 J6 J7 J8

Kasīnas

(white, nila, yellow, red, earth, water, fire, wind, light, space)

J1 J2 J3 J4

white kasīna

skeleton

32 body parts

MATERIAL JHĀNAS

J1 J2 J3 J4

ānāpānasati

START HERE

(in most cases)

VIPASSANĀ

(further practices)

analyzing kalāpas

THIS BOOK ENDS HERE

RŪPA-KALĀPAS

crystal body

4 elements

START HERE

(in fewer cases)

Protective Meditations

J1

Sublime Abidings

J1 J2 J3 J4

Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam

of Vasubandhu



Volume III

Translated into French by Louis de La Vallée Poussin

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What is the nature of the loathsome? To how many spheres does it belong? What is its object? By whom is it produced?

11c-d. The loathsome is non-desire; it is in ten spheres; it has the visible of Kāmadhātu for its object; it is generated by humans.⁷⁹

Its nature is non-desire.⁸⁰

The ten spheres in which the ascetic can be found in order to produce them are the Four Dhyanas, the four *sāmantakas* (preparatory stages or thresholds of the Four Dhyanas, viii.22), *dhyānāntara* and Kāmadhātu.

Its object is the visibles of the sphere of Kāmadhātu. "Visible" signifies color and shape. This means that it has a "thing" and not a "name" for its object.

Only humans generate it;⁸¹ not beings of the other realms of rebirth, nor much less beings of the higher spheres. Also, among humans, the inhabitants of Uttarakuru do not produce it.

As its name, "the loathsome" (*aśubhā*), indicates, it is a visualization of a repulsive or unclean thing: thus it has the repulsive for its "aspect". [It does not have the aspect of impermanence, etc.: it contemplates a visible thing as horrible and not as impermanent, etc.]

In the past, it had a past object; in the present, it has a present object; and in the future, it will have a future object: in other words, its object is contemporaneous to it. When it is not destined to arise, its object is tritemporal.

Since it is an act of attention on an imaginary object, it is impure.⁸²

Accordingly as it has been, or not, cultivated in a previous existence, it is obtained through detachment or through cultivation (vii.41d, 44b).

Such are the characteristics of the loathsome.

12a-c. Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasmṛti*) is *prajñā*, belonging to the five spheres, having wind for its object, and it is cultivated by beings in Kāmadhātu.⁸³

Ana is in-breathing, the entry of wind; *apāna* is out-breathing, the leaving of the wind. The mindfulness (*smṛti*) that bears on both of these is *ānāpānasmṛti*.⁸⁴

[Mindfulness of breathing is by nature *prajñā*, a knowledge bearing on in-breathing and out-breathing.] This *prajñā* is called mindfulness, *smṛti*, the same as the applications of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthānas*), because this knowledge of in-breathing and out-breathing, *ānāpānaprajñā*, is provoked by the force of mindfulness.⁸⁵

It can be cultivated in five spheres, namely the first three *sāmantakas*, *dhyānāntara*, and Kāmadhātu, because it is associated with indifference (see viii.7, 23, etc.).⁸⁶ In fact, says the School, agreeable and painful sensations [in Kāmadhātu] are favorable to imagining: thus mindfulness of breathing, which is the opposite of imagining, cannot be associated with happiness or with suffering. On the other hand, the two agreeable sensations [of the Dhyanas] form an obstacle to the application of the mind to any object, and mindfulness of breathing can only be realized by this application.

But according to the masters who believe that the fundamental Dhyanas include the sensation of indifference (*Vibhāṣā*, TD 27, p. 134bl), mindfulness of breathing can exist in eight spheres, by adding the first three Dhyanas: higher spheres are no longer spheres in which one breathes (see viii.7).

The object of the mindfulness of breathing is wind.

Its support is Kāmadhātu, that is, it is cultivated by humans

and by the gods of Kāmadhātu, because imagination abounds there. It is obtained either by detachment or by cultivation. It is attention bearing on a real thing (*tattvamanasikāra*).⁸⁷ It belongs only to the Buddhists.

12c. Not to outsiders.

In fact, on the one hand, the teaching of mindfulness of breathing is absent among them;⁸⁸ and on the other hand, they are incapable of discovering the subtle *dharmas* by themselves.

12d. It has six aspects, counting, etc.

It is perfect when it is endowed with six operations: counting, following, fixing, observing, modifying, and purifying.⁸⁹

i. Counting. One fixes the mind on in-breathing and out-breathing, without effort or contention; one lets the body and mind be as they are;⁹⁰ and one counts from one to ten only in the mind. One does not count to less than ten, nor to more than ten, for fear of contention and of mental distraction (vii.11).

There are three faults to avoid: a. to omit counting, by taking two for one; b. counting too high, by taking one for two; c. counting in a confused manner, by taking in-breathing for out-breathing, and vice versa. The counting that avoids these faults is correct. If, in the course of this cultivation the mind becomes distracted, then one should count anew from the beginning until absorption (*samādhi*) is attained.

ii. Following. Without contention, follow the progress of the air which enters and leaves until it goes into two senses: does the air breathed in occupy all of the body or does it go into only one part of the body? The ascetic follows the air breathed in into the throat, the heart, the navel, the kidneys, the thigh, and so on to the two feet; the ascetic follows the air breathed out to a distance of a

hand and a cubit.

According to other masters,⁹¹ he follows the air breathed out to the "circle of air" (*vāyumaṇḍala*)⁹² which holds up the universe and to the Vairambha Winds.⁹³

This opinion is not admissible, for mindfulness of breathing is an attention to things as they really are (*tattvamanasikāra*).

iii. Fixing.⁹⁴ Fix the attention on the tip of the nose, or between the eyebrows, or in another area all the way down to the toes; fix the mind; see the breath held in the body like the thread of a pearl necklace;⁹⁵ state that it is cold or hot, unfavorable or favorable (*Vibhāṣā*, TD 27, p. 135a15).

iv. Observing. Observe that "These breaths are not only air, but the four primary elements, and again physical matter derived from these four; and the mind with its mental *dharmas* rests on them": in this way the ascetic discovers the five *skandhas* through analysis.

v. Modifying. The ascetic modifies the mind that had the air as its object and now directs his mind to better and better *dharmas* [for example, to the *smṛtyupasthānas*, vi.14, and the *uśmagatas*, vi.17, etc.] up to and including the transworldly *dharmas* (vi.19b).

vi. Purifying. The ascetic enters the Path of Seeing (vi.26) and the Path of Meditation.

According to some other masters (*Vibhāṣā*, TD 27, p. 135a27), modification is progressive elevation from the foundations of mindfulness (the *smṛtyupasthānas*) up to Vajropamasamādhī (vi.44c). Purifying is the Knowledge of Extinction (*kṣayaśīlāna*), the Knowledge of Non-Arising (*anutpādajñāna*) and the Right Views of the Arhat (*āśaikṣī samyagdṛṣṭi*, vi.50c).

There is a summarizing stanza: "One teaches that the mindfulness of breathing has six aspects: counting, following, fixing, observing, modifying, and purifying."

13a. In-breathing and out-breathing are like the body.⁹⁶

The two breaths, being part of the body, belong to the same sphere as does the body.

In-breathing and out-breathing do not exist among beings in Ārūpyadhātu, among embryonic beings, among non-conscious (*acitta*) beings, and among beings who have entered into the Fourth Dhyāna: their existence therefore presupposes a body [and bodies do not exist in Ārūpyadhātu], a certain body [a body has cavities, which embryonic beings do not have], a mind [which is absent among non-conscious beings], and a certain type of mind [which is absent in the Fourth Dhyāna]. When the body has cavities in it, and when the mind belongs to a sphere in which there is breathing, then there is in-breathing and out-breathing (*Vibhāṣā*, TD 27, p. 132bl).

There is in-breathing at birth and at the moment when one leaves the Fourth Dhyāna. There is out-breathing at death and at the moment when one enters the Fourth Dhyāna.

13b. It belongs to living beings.

It belongs to living beings, and not to non-living beings (i.10b).

13b. It is not taken up.

It does not form part of any sense organ (i.34c-d).

13c. It is an outflowing.⁹⁷

It diminishes when the body increases; cut off, it recovers: therefore it is not an increase (*appacayikī*, i.37), and it does not arise from retribution. In fact, the physical matter arisen from retribution does not recover after having been cut off (i. English translation note 156).

13c-d. It is not observed by an inferior mind.⁹⁸

In-breathing and out-breathing is observed by a mind of its own sphere or by a mind in a higher sphere; but not by an *airyāpatbhika* mind, nor by a *nairmāṇika* mind of a lower sphere.

We have spoken of the two teachings, the visualization of loathsome things, and mindfulness of breathing. Having attained absorption (*samādhi*) by these two portals, now, with a view to realizing insight (*vipaśyanā*),

14a-b. Having realized stilling, he will cultivate the foundations of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthānas*).⁹⁹

How is this?

14c-d. By considering the twofold characteristics of the body, sensation, the mind, and the *dharmas*.

By considering the unique characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*) and the general characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*)¹⁰⁰ of the body, sensation, the mind, and the *dharmas*.

"The unique characteristics" means its self nature (*svabhāva*).

"The general characteristics" signifies the fact that "All conditioned things are impermanent; all impure *dharmas* are suffering; and that all the *dharmas* are empty (*śūnya*) and not-self (*anātmaka*)."

What is the unique nature of the body? The primary elements and physical matter derived from these primary elements (i.12,

Study and Practice of Meditation
Tibetan Interpretations of the Concentrations
and Formless Absorptions

Leah Zahler

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Since Ge-luk-pa scholars typically regard calm abiding as a meditative stabilization and special insight as a wisdom consciousness,³ juxtaposition of the two passages might have suggested that the types of breath meditation discussed in the *Treasury* (and also in Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*) not only, in their initial stages, serve to pacify discursiveness and calm the mind but can also, in their higher developments, lead to special insight and beyond; for the first passage, with its reference to the four mindful establishments, associates mindfulness and wisdom, and the second passage states that cultivation of the four mindful establishments—preceded, in one mode of practice, by mindfulness of breathing leading to the attainment of calm abiding—leads to the attainment of special insight. But somehow, the juxtaposition was not made.

There may be two reasons for the Ge-luk failure to associate Vasubandhu's and Asaṅga's presentations of the higher stages of breath meditation with special insight. The first reason is that the main Ge-luk presentation of special insight is not drawn from the Indian source texts for the topic of the concentrations and formless absorptions; rather, it is Tsong-kha-pa's Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka presentation, based on Chandrakīrti's *Clear Words*, in the *Middling and Great Exposition(s) of the Stages of the Path*. The second reason is that practice traditions related to Vasubandhu's or Asaṅga's presentations of breath meditation were probably not transmitted to Tibet.

The practice tradition suggested by the *Treasury* itself—and also by Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*—is one in which mindfulness of breathing becomes a basis for inductive reasoning on such topics as the five aggregates; as a result of such inductive reasoning, the meditator progresses through the Hearer paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation. It seems at least possible that both Vasubandhu and Asaṅga presented their respective versions of such a method, analogous to but different from modern Theravāda insight meditation, and that Ge-luk-pa scholars were unable to reconstruct it in the absence of a practice tradition because of the great difference between this type of inductive

stri, p. 602. See also La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 158 and Pruden, vol. 3, p. 925. The Tibetan version of the *Autocommentary* is closer to Hsüan Tsang's, as given by La Vallée Poussin and Pruden, than to Shastri's.

³ Paṅ-chen Sö-nam-drak-pa, "Concentrations," 155b.6–156a.1; Jam-yang-shay-pa (followed by Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po) gives "meditative stabilization" and "wisdom" as the key terms in the definitions of "calm abiding" and "special insight," respectively (Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 110.6 and 162.3; Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 557.3 and 563.6).

meditative reasoning based on observation and the types of meditative reasoning using consequences (*thal 'gyur*, *prasaṅga*) or syllogisms (*sbyor ba*, *prayoga*) with which Ge-luk-pas were familiar.⁴ Thus, although Ge-luk-pa scholars give detailed interpretations of the systems of breath meditation set forth in Vasubandhu's and Asaṅga's texts, they may not fully account for the higher stages of breath meditation set forth in those texts.

According to the *Treasury* (6.12d and its *Autocommentary*),⁵ meditation on the exhalation and inhalation of the breath has six aspects, or stages:

- 1 counting (*grangs pa, gaṇanā*)
- 2 following (*rjes su 'gro ba, anugama*)
- 3 placement (*'jog ba, sthāna*)
- 4 investigation (*nye bar rtog pa, upalakṣaṇā*)
- 5 change (*yongs su sgyur ba, vivartanā*)
- 6 purifying (*yongs su dag pa, parisuddhi*)

Following the *Autocommentary* closely, Gedün Lodrö explains the first, counting, as "the ability to withdraw the mind inside and count the breaths from one to ten single-pointedly without confusing the order."⁶

The second, following, involves observation and recognition of where the breath goes in the body; the meditator examines whether the breath fills all or only part of the body. The *Autocommentary* lists some of the places in the body into which the meditator follows the breath—"the throat, the heart, the navel, the kidneys, the thigh, and so on to the two feet," and "out to a distance of a hand and a cubit."⁷ Lati Rinpoche seems to explain this as a method of breathing—"breathing in all the way to the feet and breathing out to a distance ranging from a fathom or a hand's span, depending on the strength of

⁴ See *Meditation on Emptiness*, pp. 360–61, 431–32, 443–53—and indeed, the entire work is an extended presentation of the use of reasoning in meditation.

⁵ Vasubandhu, *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge and Autocommentary*, 6.12d (P5591), vol. 115, 245.2.4–245.3.8; Shastri, part 3, pp. 899–900; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, pp. 154–56; Pruden, vol. 3, pp. 922–23).

⁶ "Investigation" is an English translation of the Tibetan *nye bar rtog pa*; a more literal translation of the Sanskrit *upalakṣaṇā* would be "characterization."

⁷ Gedün Lodrö, p. 115.

⁸ Vasubandhu, *Autocommentary on the "Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,"* 6.12d (P5591), vol. 115, 245.3.1–4; Shastri, part 3, pp. 899–900; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 154; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 922.

the individual"^a—rather than as an aspect of *mindfulness* of breathing—that is, as part of the process of *observing* the breath. Gedün Lodrö introduces from Tibetan meditational physiology the notion of analyzing the “many coarse and subtle channels (*rtsa, nāḍī*) through which the breath passes,”^b which is not found at this point in the *Autocommentary*.

As Gedün Lodrö notes, the third way of meditating on the breath, **placement**, involves examination of “how the breath brings help or harm to the body.”^c Lati Rinpoche, paraphrasing the *Autocommentary*, explains the meditator’s method:

...one observes the breath abiding like a string for a necklace from the tip of the nose to the bottom of the feet. Then one considers whether this abiding wind is harming or helping the body, or whether it is hot or cold.^d

Thus, Lati Rinpoche explains placement in terms of observation of the breath, although he had explained following in somewhat different terms.

Gedün Lodrö, developing his earlier reference to analysis of the channels in the body, explains placement as involving the straightening of channels which, up to that time, had been “bent or contracted.” According to him,

The beginning meditator imagines the wind moving through all the coarse and subtle channels of the body and considers if it is helping or harming. Initially this is an aspiration, but with practice unsuitable winds can be stopped and a wind developed through the force of meditation can be directed through the coarse and subtle channels down to the feet. At this time the coarse channels straighten out.^e

Thus, Gedün Lodrö seems to understand placement as something other than observation; he interprets the *Autocommentary*’s reference to “a [straight] string in a rosary,” or necklace, as referring to “a rosary grasped at two ends and pulled taut,” and, therefore, as alluding to the process he describes—perhaps because of the implicit analogy between

^a Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 39.

^b Gedün Lodrö, p. 116.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 116.

^d Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 39.

^e *Ibid.*, p. 40; Gedün Lodrö adds that he does not think the *Vaibhāṣikas*’ method (as he understands it) affects the subtle channels.

the taut rosary and the straightened channels.”

All accounts of the fourth way of meditating on the breath, **investigation**, agree that it differs radically from the first three: whereas the first three involve counting and observation of the breath itself, the fourth involves an inductive analysis, based on observation, that leads to the experiential discovery of the five aggregates. According to the *Autocommentary*, which summarizes the meditator’s process of analysis and states its conclusion, “Not only are there just the winds (*vāyu*); there are the four great elements (*mahābhūta*), along with the [secondary] materiality (*rūpa*) resulting from the great elements [and] the minds and mental factors based on these; thus [the meditator] investigates [and characterizes] (*upalakṣayati*) the five aggregates.”^b

Gedün Lodrö notes that the first three and the last three meditations on the breath differ in function, but it appears that neither he nor Lati Rinpoche recognizes that the fourth meditation involves experiential discovery through inductive rather than deductive analysis. Rather, Gedün Lodrö suggests that “the first three...are primarily for beginners attempting to achieve or deepen calm abiding,” whereas “the last three meditations are primarily used for developing proficiency in the calm abiding one has already achieved or for attaining special insight”; his categories overlap, since he also suggests that “the second and third can also be used by those with calm abiding for cultivating special insight.”^c Summarizing and extending the brief analysis given in the *Autocommentary*, Gedün Lodrö explains that the first “three ways of meditating on the breath all involve meditation on the breath itself, which is a tangible object (*reg bya, spraṣṭavya*),” whereas the fourth involves “putting aside the examination of [breath as] wind” and investigating “what is and is not of the nature of the five aggregates in relation to wind.”^d Lati Rinpoche, who also briefly summarizes the analysis given in the *Autocommentary*, notes that “when considering the breath in the above way, one is investigating its mode of existence.”^e However, he too does not seem to consider the possibility that the meditator discovers the mode of existence of the breath through an investigation begun inductively through mindfulness.

According to the *Autocommentary*, the fifth stage of mindfulness of

^a *Ibid.*, p. 40.

^b Vasubandhu, *Autocommentary on the “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,”* 6.12d (P5591, vol. 115, 245.3.4–8; Shastri, p. 900; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 156; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 923).

^c Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 40.

^d Gedün Lodrö, pp. 116.

^e Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 40.

breathing, change, involves "modifying the mind that has wind as its object of observation," so that the meditator "practices with respect to higher and higher virtuous roots up to the supreme [mundane] qualities" (*jig rten pa'i chos kyi mchog, laukikāgyadharmā*) of the path of preparation.⁴ The *Autocommentary's* descriptions of the fifth and sixth stages are brief and do not give specific practical instructions or describe the meditator's actual procedure in detail. Thus, the literal wording of the text, especially with regard to the fifth stage, is ambiguous. It can be read to imply that the meditator—who, up to that point, had been observing the breath and, on the basis of that observation, drawing conclusions concerning the aggregates—either changes the object of observation in some way, or attains the four levels of the path of preparation, or both.

Lati Rinpoche's interpretation includes both meanings:

"Change" involves the transformation of the object of observation from the breath to the paths of preparation. One now observes the heat stage of the path of preparation through to the stage of highest mundane phenomena..., changing the mind in to the four levels of the path of preparation.⁵

Similarly, in his interpretation of the sixth stage of mindfulness of breathing, purification, Lati Rinpoche states that "one transforms the mind into the paths of seeing and meditation."⁶

Gedün Lodrö, however, emphasizes the change of object of observation, both in his lectures on calm abiding and in his comments on the sixth chapter of the First Dalai Lama's *Path of Liberation*.⁷ Although he explains, in the latter context, that observation of the path of preparation by someone who has attained calm abiding can lead to attainment of the heat level of the path of preparation and, subsequently, to attainment of its remaining levels—peak, forbearance, and supreme mundane qualities—he seems to imply that, if a meditator attains the path of preparation during the fifth stage of breath meditation, or the paths of seeing and meditation during the sixth, those attainments are the successful result of having taken those paths as objects of observation: "while one contemplates the paths as objects of observation, one

⁴ Vasubandhu, *Autocommentary on the "Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,"* 6.12d (P5591, vol. 115, 245.3.6-7; Shastri, p. 600; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 156; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 923).

⁵ Aronson, "The Buddhist Path," p. 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷ Gedün Lodrö, p. 117; Aronson, "The Buddhist Path," pp. 40-41.

is also subjectively cultivating them."^a

The two contemporary Tibetan commentators, Lati Rinpoche and Gedün Lodrö, explain the first three stages of Vasubandhu's system in practical terms, for the most part, since the first two, especially, are practices a beginning meditator might use to overcome discursiveness, and the third still involves direct observation of the breath, although it also involves drawing conclusions from that observation. However, they do not state that, in the last three, the meditator progresses through the Hearer paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation by using mindfulness of breathing and inductive reasoning based on such mindfulness, even though Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and its *Autocommentary* explicitly lay out such a correspondence.

Moreover, neither scholar posits a relationship between the attainment of the heat stage of the path of preparation at the beginning of the fifth stage of Vasubandhu's system of breath meditation with the attainment of special insight. Although such a correlation would have been consistent with the synthetic system-building methods of Ge-luk religious scholarship, and although Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, in his *Condensed Statement*, twice states the commonly held Ge-luk assertion that the attainment of the heat stage of the path of preparation and the attainment of special insight are simultaneous, he does so only in the context of meditation on emptiness or selflessness as such meditation was understood by Ge-luk-pas.^b It appears that neither Ge-luk-pa textbook writers nor modern scholars such as Lati Rinpoche and Gedün Lodrö were in a position to conclude that the first moment of the fifth stage of Vasubandhu's system of breath meditation coincides with the attainment of special insight and that, therefore, the first four stages must be a method for cultivating special insight.

THE PRESENTATION OF ASAṄGA'S GROUNDS OF HEARERS

Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* has been, for the most part, unexplored by Western scholarship; an examination of the theories of meditation and practical instructions set forth in it would require a separate study. It

^a Aronson, "The Buddhist Path," p. 41.

^b Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 552.2 ("the attainment of the wisdom arisen from meditating on [emptiness], of the special insight on [emptiness], and of the heat [stage of the] Mahāyāna path of preparation are simultaneous") and 575.6 ("a state arisen from meditation which analyzes the object, selflessness; the mental contemplation [arisen from] belief; [and] the heat stage of the Hearer path of preparation...are attained simultaneously").

A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma

The Abhidhammattha Sangaha
of Ācariya Anuruddha

Bhikkhu Bodhi, General Editor

Pali text originally edited and translated by
Mahāthera Nārada

Translation revised by
Bhikkhu Bodhi

Introduction and explanatory guide by
U Rewata Dhamma & Bhikkhu Bodhi

Abhidhamma tables by
U Silānanda

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A definite relation nevertheless exists between the spheres of consciousness and the planes of existence: a particular sphere of consciousness comprises those types of consciousness which are typical of the corresponding plane of existence and which *frequent* that plane by tending to arise most often there. Consciousness of a particular sphere is not tied to the corresponding plane, but may arise in other planes of existence as well; for instance, fine-material and immaterial-sphere cittas can arise in the sensuous plane, and sense-sphere cittas can arise in the fine-material and immaterial planes. But still a connection is found, in that a sphere of consciousness is *typical* for the plane that shares its name. Moreover, the kammically active cittas of any particular sphere, the cittas that generate kamma, tend to produce rebirth into the corresponding plane of existence, and if they succeed in gaining the opportunity to generate rebirth, they will do so only in that plane, not in any other plane. Hence the tie between the spheres of consciousness and the corresponding planes of existence is extremely close.

Sense-sphere consciousness (*kāmāvacaracitta*): The word *kāma* means both subjective sensuality, i.e. craving for sense pleasures, and objective sensuousness, i.e. the five external sense-objects—visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibles. The *kāmabhūmi* is the sensuous plane of existence, which comprises eleven realms—the four woeful states, the human realm, and the six sensuous heavens. Sense-sphere consciousness includes all those cittas that have their proper domain in the sensuous plane of existence, though they may arise in other planes as well.

Fine-material-sphere consciousness (*rūpāvacaracitta*): The fine-material sphere is the plane of consciousness corresponding to the fine-material plane of existence (*rūpabhūmi*), or the plane of consciousness pertaining to the states of meditative absorption called the *rūpajjhānas*. Any consciousness which mostly moves about in this realm is understood to belong to the fine-material sphere. The *rūpajjhānas* are so called because they are usually attained in meditation by concentrating on a material object (*rūpa*), which may be a device such as the earth-kasina, etc. (see IX, §6) or the parts of one's own body, etc. Such an object becomes the basis on which the jhānas are developed. The exalted states of consciousness attained on the basis of such objects are called *rūpāvacaracitta*, consciousness of the fine-material sphere.

Immaterial-sphere consciousness (*arūpāvacaracitta*): The immaterial sphere is the plane of consciousness corresponding to the immaterial plane of existence (*arūpabhūmi*), or the plane of consciousness pertaining to the immaterial absorptions—the *arūpajjhānas*. Any consciousness which mostly moves about in this realm is understood to

belong to the immaterial sphere. When one meditates to attain the formless meditative states beyond the *rūpajjhānas*, one must discard all objects connected with material form and focus upon some non-material object, such as the infinity of space, etc. The exalted states of consciousness attained on the basis of such objects are called *arūpāvacaracitta*, consciousness of the immaterial sphere.

Supramundane consciousness (*lokuttaracitta*): The word *lokuttara*, supramundane, is derived from *loka* = world, and *uttara* = beyond, transcendent to. The concept of "world" is threefold: the world of living beings (*sattaloka*), the physical universe (*okāsaloka*), and the world of formations (*sankhāraloka*), that is, the totality of conditioned phenomena, physical and mental. The notion of world relevant here is the world of formations, that is, all mundane phenomena included within the five aggregates of clinging. That which transcends the world of conditioned things is the unconditioned element, Nibbāna, and the types of consciousness that directly accomplish the realization of Nibbāna are called *lokuttaracitta*, supramundane consciousness. The other three types are called, in distinction, *lokiyacitta*, mundane consciousness.

* * *

We thus see that consciousness can be classified by way of plane into four broad divisions: sense-sphere consciousness, fine-material-sphere consciousness, immaterial-sphere consciousness, and supramundane consciousness. Consciousness can also be classified on the basis of other principles besides plane. One principle of classification that plays an important role in the Abhidhamma philosophy is kind or nature (*jāti*).

With respect to its nature, consciousness divides into four classes: unwholesome, wholesome, resultant, and functional. Unwholesome consciousness (*akusalacitta*) is consciousness accompanied by one or another of the three unwholesome roots—greed, hatred, and delusion. Such consciousness is called unwholesome because it is mentally unhealthy, morally blameworthy, and productive of painful results. Wholesome consciousness (*kusalacitta*) is consciousness accompanied by the wholesome roots—non-greed or generosity, non-hatred or loving-kindness, and non-delusion or wisdom. Such consciousness is mentally healthy, morally blameless, and productive of pleasant results.

Both wholesome and unwholesome consciousness constitute *kamma*, volitional action. Those cittas or states of consciousness that arise through the ripening of kamma are called resultants (*vipāka*). These constitute a third class of citta distinct from the former two, a class that comprises both the results of wholesome kamma and the results of unwholesome kamma. It should be understood that both kamma and its results are

**THE PATH OF
SERENITY AND INSIGHT**

An Explanation of the Buddhist Jhānas

HENEPOLA GUNARATANA

FOR FAVOR OF REVIEW

MOTILAL BANARSIDASS
Delhi Varanasi Patna Madras

when these are arisen that *jhāna* is said to be arisen, which is why they are called the five factors of possession.¹

The Jhāna Thought-Process

The commentaries and later analytical treatises of the Theravāda tradition connect the process of *jhāna* attainment with a special account of the cognitive process (*cittavithi*) based upon the Abhidhamma. The Abhidhamma analyzes experience into a succession of discrete, causally connected occasions of consciousness called *cittas* or *citt'upphādas*. Each *citta* endures for only a small fraction of a second, undergoing three stages: arising (*upphāda*), duration (*hiiti*), and dissolution (*bhaṅga*). *Cittas* succeed one another with inconceivable rapidity, so much so that it is impossible for an average person to note the distinct mental moments. Experience as we know it is a coarse fusion of a sequence of *cittas* indiscernible in their uniqueness and discreteness as they rise and fall away.

According to the Abhidhamma philosophy, *cittas* do not occur in isolation but as parts of a series. These series are of two types. One is the passive stream of consciousness which functions as the underlying "limb of becoming," the life-continuum (*bhavāṅga*). The second type is the process of active consciousness, by which clear perceptions are made, thoughts and volitions generated, and actions performed. This active series is called the cognitive process (*cittavithi*).

The life-continuum is made up of a succession of *cittas* proceeding through beginningless time. With each new life the continuum springs up in the mother's womb at the moment of conception (in the case of human or animal life), rooted in ignorance, supported by the desire to exist and given its specific form and character by the generative *kamma* of the past. Through the course of a lifetime it continues to function whenever the mind is free from active thought processes. It is most conspicuous in deep sleep, but it also occurs very briefly innumerable times during waking life between occasions of active perception and cognition.

When a sensory datum or idea impinges on the mind, the

passive flow of the life-continuum is interrupted. The mind then enters a phase of active consciousness, after which it returns to its passive state. The process of *jhāna* attainment occurs as such an active process of cognition. When the mind has been freed from the hindrances and fully prepared for the attainment of absorption, the mind which has subsided into the life-continuum is stimulated to break out from it by the force of previous intention. This break consists of three moments. The first is simply the past moment of the life-continuum (*atitabhavāṅga*); the second is the vibration of the continuum (*bhavāṅga calana*), caused by the decisive intention; the third is the cutting off or arrest of the passive stream of consciousness (*bhavāṅga upaccheda*), as active consciousness is about to supervene. Immediately after this arrest moment the mind, well-impressed with the counterpart sign of the meditation subject, rises up in active form, adverting to the object through the "mind-door" (*manodvāra*) as a datum of internal perception.

Following the act of adverting, there takes place the most important part of the cognitive process—a succession of highly active occasions of consciousness called *javanas*. We will translate *javana* as "impulsion." As the hindrances have been suppressed the four or five impulsions that arise in the *jhānic* process following the advertance are associated with unusually intense applied thought, sustained thought, rapture, happiness, and one-pointedness. The first impulsion in this series is called "the preliminary work" (*parikkamma*), since it prepares the mind for the first *jhāna*. In the case of a quick-witted meditator, the moment of preliminary work is skipped over and the series begins with the next moment. The second impulsion is called "access" (*upacāra*) as it brings the mind to the neighborhood of *jhāna*. The third, called "conformity" (*anuloma*), qualifies the mind further for the *jhāna*. The fourth, called "change-of-lineage" (*gotrabhū*), is the act by which the stream of consciousness crosses over from the sense-sphere plane (*kāmāvacara*) to the *jhānic* plane. These four moments gain the general designation "access concentration" (*upacārasamādhi*), though technically speaking only one is singled out as the moment of access. Immediately after this sequence the *jhāna* consciousness arises. On the occasion of initial attainment it lasts for only one great thought-moment. Then the *jhāna* thought passes away and the mind returns to the passive state of

1. PP., p. 152. *Vism.*, p. 118.

the life-continuum, since the first *jhāna* consciousness is close to the passive continuum.

This process can be made more vivid by the following diagram:

A	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17	B
	bh 1 a g jh bh bh bh bh bh bh bh bh bh bh bh bh	

Here line A represents the four great thought moments preceding the *jhāna* process. This comprises the past life-continuum (bh), its vibration (1), its cutting off (ch), and the mind's advertance to the counterpart sign through the mind-door (m). Line B represents the lapsing of the mind back into the passive life-continuum after the *jhāna* attainment is over. P represents the moment of preliminary work (*parikamma*), u the moment of access (*upacāra*), a the moment of conformity (*anuloma*), and g the moment of change-of-lineage. The following jh represents the first *jhāna*. After this the mind relapses into the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*) which is represented by bh repeated seven times. The groups of three dots in each *citta* represent the arising (*upāda*), duration (*thiti*), and dissolution (*bhaṅga*) of each thought moment.¹

It is evident from this diagram that on the occasion of initial attainment *jhāna* lasts only for a single thought moment. Unless the meditator masters this attainment by the five ways of mastery to be explained he cannot sustain it. But when he has mastered the *jhāna*, a succession of *jhāna* thought-moments will continue on for as long as he determined before entering the attainment. Therefore if we were to represent this situation diagrammatically we would find a repetition of *jh* rather than *bh* after the first *jh* in our diagram.

Perfecting the First *Jhāna*

The elevated forms of concentration, as we mentioned, are divided into two basic stages, access concentration (*upacāra-*

samādhi) and absorption concentration (*appanāsamādhi*). Access concentration is obtained when the hindrances have been suppressed and the mind has become focussed on the counterpart sign. Absorption concentration develops later when the *jhāna* factors become manifest in full force. The difference between access and absorption lies in the relative strength of the *jhāna* factors. In access the factors are still weak, so that concentration is intermittent. Just as a young child, lifted to its feet, stands for a while and then falls down, the mind in access remains focussed on the sign for a short while and then falls away. In absorption the *jhāna* factors are strong and fully developed; thus the mind can remain continuously in concentration just as a healthy man can remain standing on his feet for a whole day and night.

Absorption concentration is the concentration of the four *jhānas* and access the concentration immediately preceding entrance upon the *jhānas*. Once the meditator gains access and the counterpart sign appears to him, he still has to strive to attain absorption. To develop his practice the *Vissuddhimagga* recommends several essential measures based on the testimony of the ancients. He has to live in a suitable dwelling place, rely upon a suitable alms resort, avoid profitless talk, associate only with spiritually-minded companions, make use only of suitable food, live in a congenial climate, and maintain his practice in a suitable posture.¹

Beyond these measures the earnest yogi should rely on the ten kinds of skill in absorption.² The first is "making the basis clean," which means that he should clean his lodging and his physical body so that they conduce to clear meditation. The second is "balancing the spiritual faculties" (*indriyasamattakappādana*). Of the five spiritual faculties, faith must be balanced with wisdom and energy with concentration; the fifth faculty, mindfulness, is always useful and has no opposite counterpart. Third, the yogin must be skilful in producing and developing the sign of concentration. Measures four through seven involve exerting the mind (*paggaha*) on an occasion when it is slack and needs to be exerted, restraining it (*niggaha*) on an occasion when it is agitated and needs to be restrained, encouraging it (*sampahaṅsa*)

1. PP., pp. 132-34. Vism., pp. 103-104.

2. PP., pp. 134-40. Vism., pp. 104-110.

1. For a more detailed account of the citta-vīthi see Nārada, *Manual*, pp. 214-19; Vism., pp. 111-12; Compendium, pp. 54-55.

[7] Purification by Knowledge and Vision

Change-of-lineage

The last purification, purification by knowledge and vision, consists of the knowledge of the four supramundane paths—the path of stream-entry, the path of the once-returner, the path of the non-returner, and the path of arahatship. However, immediately after conformity knowledge and before the moment of the first path, there occurs one thought-moment called change-of-lineage knowledge (*gotrabhūñāna*). This knowledge has the function of adverting to the path. Because it occupies an intermediate position it belongs neither to purification by knowledge and vision of the way nor to purification by knowledge and vision, but is regarded as unassignable. It receives the name “change-of-lineage” because by reaching this stage of knowledge the meditator passes out of the “lineage of the worldling” (*puthujjhānagotta*) and enters the “lineage of the noble ones” (*ariyagotta*).¹ In bringing about such a radical transformation change-of-lineage is clearly a most important and crucial moment of spiritual development.

The three kinds of conformity knowledge—preliminary work, access, and conformity proper—dispel the “murk of defilements” that conceals the Four Noble Truths. Each of the three clears away a degree of delusion, permitting the truths to become more and more manifest. However, though conformity-knowledge dispels the delusion that conceals the truths, it cannot penetrate them. For the truths to be penetrated *nibbāna* must be realized as object. Change-of-lineage knowledge, which arises right after conformity, is the first state of consciousness to make *nibbāna* its object. It is the initial advertance to *nibbāna*, and the proximate, immediate and decisive-support condition for the arising of the first path.

The first path and fruit

Change-of-lineage knowledge perceives *nibbāna* but cannot destroy the defilements. The eradication of defilements is the work of the four supramundane paths (*lokiitarāmagga*). Each path attainment is a momentary experience apprehending *nib-*

1. PP., p. 785. *Vism.*, p. 577.

bāna, understanding the Four Noble Truths, and cutting off certain defilements. The first path, as Buddhaghosa explains, arises in immediate succession to change-of-lineage:

...After, as it were, giving a sign to the path to come into being it [change-of-lineage] ceases. And without pausing after the sign given by that change-of-lineage knowledge the path follows upon it in uninterrupted continuity, and as it comes into being it pierces and explodes the mass of greed, the mass of hating, and the mass of delusion, never pierced and exploded before.¹

The first path is called the path of stream entry (*sotāpattimagga*) since the disciple who has reached this path has entered the stream of the Dhamma (*dhammasota*), the Noble Eightfold Path, which will take him to *nibbāna* as surely as the waters in a stream will be carried to the ocean.² On entering this path he has passed beyond the level of a worldling and become a noble one, an *ariyan*, who has seen and understood the Dhamma for himself.

When the path-knowledge arises it breaks through the mass of greed, hatred, and delusion, the root-defilements which drive living beings from birth to birth in beginningless *saṃsāra*. Each supramundane path has the special function of eradicating defilements. The defilements cut off by the successive paths are classified into a set of ten “fetters” (*saṃyojana*), so called because they keep beings chained to the round of existence. The ten fetters, which all arise out of the three unwholesome roots, are: [1] wrong views of personality, [2] doubt, [3] clinging to rites and rituals, [4] sensual desire, [5] ill will, [6] lust for fine material existence, [7] lust for immaterial existence, [8] conceit, [9] restlessness, and [10] ignorance.³ The ten are divided into two groups: the first five are called the fetters pertaining to the lower worlds (*orambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni*) because they keep beings tied to the sensuous realms; the last five are called the fetters pertaining to the higher worlds (*uddhambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni*) because they remain operative even in the fine material and immaterial

1. PP., pp. 787-88. *Vism.*, p. 579.

2. SN. 5:347.

3. In Pali: [1] sakkāyaditṭhi, [2] vicikicchā, [3] silabbataparāmaṣa, [4] kāmaccchanda, [5] vyāpāda, [6] rūpatāgā, [7] arūparāgā, [8] māna, [9] uddhacca, and [10] avijjā.

realms.¹ Some of these fetters—doubt, sensual desire, ill will, and restlessness—are identical with the five hindrances abandoned by *jhāna*. But whereas mundane *jhāna* only suppresses them, leaving the latent tendencies untouched, the supramundane paths cut them off at the root. With the attainment of the fourth path the last and subtlest of the fetters are eradicated. Thus the arahat, the fully liberated one, is described as “one who has eliminated the fetters of existence” (*parikkhīṇabhava-samyojana*).²

The path of stream-entry eradicates the first three fetters—the fetters of false views of personality, doubt, and clinging to rites and rituals. The first is the view that the five aggregates can be identified with a self or can be seen as containing, contained in, or belonging to a self.³ The more theoretical forms of this view are attenuated by insight-knowledge into impermanence suffering, and selflessness, but the subtle latent holding to such views can only be destroyed by path-knowledge. “Doubt” is uncertainty with regard to the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, and the training; it is eliminated when the disciple sees for himself the truth of the Dhamma.⁴ “Clinging to rites and rituals” is the belief that liberation from suffering can be obtained merely by observing rites and rituals. Having followed the path to its climax, the disciple understands that the Noble Eightfold Path is the one way to the end of suffering, and so can no more fall back on rites and rituals. The path of stream entry not only cuts off these fetters but also eliminates greed for sense pleasures and resentment that would be strong enough to lead to states of loss, i.e. to rebirth in the four lower realms of the hells, tormented spirits, animals, and titans.⁵ For this reason the stream-enterer is released from the possibility of an unfortunate rebirth.

The path of stream-entry is always followed by another occasion of supramundane experience called the fruit of stream entry (*soḷāpatipphala*). Fruition follows the path necessarily and immediately, succeeding it without a gap. It occurs as the result of the path, sharing its object, *nibbāna*, and its world-transcending character. But whereas the path performs the active function of

1. AN. 5:17.
2. MN. 1:4.
3. MN. 1:300.
4. MN. 1:101.
5. Dhs., p. 208.

cutting off defilements, the fruit simply enjoys the bliss and peace that result from the path's completion of its function. Also, whereas the path is limited to only a single moment of consciousness, fruition covers either two or three moments. In the case of a quick-witted meditator who passes over the moment of preliminary work the cognitive process of the path contains only two moments of conformity knowledge. Thus in his thought-process, immediately after the path has arisen and ceased, three moments of fruition occur. In the case of an ordinary meditator there will be three moments of conformity knowledge and thus, after the path, only two moments of fruition.

The three moments of conformity knowledge and the moment of change-of-lineage are wholesome states of consciousness pertaining to the sense sphere (*kā mā ā va ca ra ku sa la ci t ta*). The path consciousness and the fruition that follows it are supramundane states of consciousness (*lo ku t ta ra ci t ta*), the former wholesome (*ku sa la*) and the latter resultant (*vi p ā ka*). The path and fruit necessarily occur at the level of one of the *jhānas*—from the first to the fourth *jhāna* in the fourfold scheme, from the first to the fifth in the fivefold scheme. They partake of the character of *jhāna* because they contain the *jhāna*-factors endowed with an intensity of absorption corresponding to that of the fine material sphere *jhānas*. But unlike the mundane *jhānas* these *jhānas* of the path and fruit are supramundane, having an altogether different object and function than their counterparts, as we will see in the next chapter.

The following diagram illustrates the thought-process of the path and fruit of stream-entry in the case of a normal meditator with three moments of conformity preceding the path and two moments of fruition succeeding it:

A

B

... ..
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17
 bh l ch d p u a g m ph bh bh bh bh bh bh bh bh

Here line A represents the four thought-moments preceding the path process. This comprises the past *bhavaṅga* or life-consciousness (*bh*), its vibration (*l*), its cutting off (*ch*), and the mind's advertance to formations as impermanent, suffering, or selfless

through the mind-door (*d*). Line *B* represents the lapsing of the mind back into the passive life-continuum after the fruition phase is over. *P* represents the moment of preliminary work (*parikkamma*), *u* the moment of access (*upacāra*), *a* the moment of conformity (*anuloma*), and *g* the moment of change-of-lineage (*gotrabhū*) where the ordinary stream of consciousness belonging to the sensual plane changes over to the lineage of the noble path. The following *m* represents the noble path consciousness (*magga-citta*), which is necessarily limited to a single thought-moment. After this there are two *pi*'s representing the fruit of stream-entry, then the mind relapses into the life-continuum, represented by *bh* repeated six times. The groups of three dots in each *citta* represent the birth (*uppāda*), duration (*thiti*), and dissolution (*bhaṅga*) of each thought moment.¹

After the attainment of fruition the stream-enterer reviews the path, fruition, and *nibbāna*. He will generally also review the defilements he has destroyed by the path and the defilements remaining to be destroyed by the higher paths; this, however, is not invariably fixed and is sometimes omitted by some meditators.² The ariyan disciples who have passed through the next two fruitions will likewise review their attainments in the same way. Thus for each there will be at a minimum three and at a maximum five items to be reviewed. For the arahat, however, there will be a maximum of four since he has no more defilements to be eliminated. In this way there are a maximum of nine kinds of reviewing (*paccavekkhana*) following the supramundane attainments.

The disciple at the moment of the path of stream-entry is called "one standing on the path of stream-entry" or the first noble person; from the moment of fruition up to the attainment of the next path he is called a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), reckoned as the second noble person. Though conventionally the person standing on the path and the one abiding in the fruit can be described as one and the same individual at two different moments, the philosophical perspective requires another kind of descriptive device. From the standpoint of ultimate truth, accor-

1. Adopted from Nārada, *Manual*, pp. 214-19. *Vism.*, pp. 111-12. *Commentārum*, pp. 54-55.
2. Nārada, *Manual*, p. 410. *Vism.*, p. 581.

ding to Buddhism, an individual endures as such for only one thought-moment. Therefore, in classifying the types of noble persons, the Buddha drew upon the distinction between the thought-moments of path and fruition as the basis for a distinction between two types of noble persons. This bifurcation applies to each of the four stages of deliverance: for each, the individual at the path-moment is reckoned as one type of noble person, the same individual from the moment of fruition on as another type of noble person.

The texts extoll the stream-enterer as acquiring incalculable benefits as a result of his attainment. He has closed off the doors to rebirth in the woeful states of existence and can declare of himself:

Destroyed for me is rebirth in the hells, in the animal kingdom, in the spirit realm, in the planes of misery, the bad destinations, the downfall. I am a stream-enterer, no longer subject to decline, assured of and destined for full enlightenment.¹

He can be certain that he is released from five kinds of fear and hostility: the fear and hostility that come from taking life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from taking intoxicants. He is endowed with the four factors of stream-entry (*sotāpattiyaṅgāni*): unwavering confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, and unblemished moral discipline. He has penetrated and seen the truth with correct understanding.² By so penetrating the truth he has limited his future births to a maximum of seven in the happy realms of the human and heaven worlds, drying up the great ocean of suffering that laid beyond this. Thus the Buddha says that for the stream-enterer who has seen the Dhamma the amount of suffering that remains is like a pinch of dust on the finger nail, while the suffering that has been exhausted is like the dust on the mighty earth.³

1. SN. 2:68.
2. *Ibid.* 69-70

3. Stream-enterers are divided into three kinds: assuming that they will not go further in that same lifetime, one with sluggish faculties will be reborn seven times in the happy destinations; one with medium faculties will be reborn an intermediary number of times; and one with keen faculties will be reborn once more in the human world and there make an end of suffering. (See PP., pp. 833-34. *Vism.*, pp. 611-12.)

PRACTICING THE
Jhānas

*Traditional Concentration
Meditation as Presented by the
Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw*

STEPHEN SNYDER AND
TINA RASMUSSEN



SHAMBHALA
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Four Elements Meditation

FOUR ELEMENTS MEDITATION is a critical practice to develop well. All students of the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw must develop this meditation to undertake the vipassanā portion of the Buddha's path. In this practice, we experientially learn and know that all that appears "real," including our own bodies, is comprised of a combination of the four elements. The belief in, and attachment to, the body becomes difficult to sustain after this practice is thoroughly experienced.

There are two ways in which a student undertakes the four elements meditation. For those who have completed the practices as outlined in this book, the four elements meditation is the next practice in the samatha sequence. Those students who can attain jhāna using the ānāpānasati meditation take up four elements meditation after the sublime abidings and protective meditations, discussed in the preceding chapter. The sublime abidings and protective meditations are undertaken to allow greater ease in facing the rigors of the kalāpa practice that are experienced as a result of the four elements meditation. The four elements meditation then serves as the bridge that completes the



*To the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw
with gratitude and respect*

samatha practices and begins the vipassanā practice. Practitioners completing the samatha portion as outlined in this book would be considered “samatha yogis.”

The Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw indicates that if someone finds, after exhaustive effort, that she or he cannot progress through the jhānas beginning with ānāpānasati meditation, the student may be directed to try four elements meditation. (This is why our practice chart reflects the four elements as an alternate beginning point to ānāpānasati meditation.) These practitioners would be considered “vipassanā yogis” or “dry-insight yogis,” as they are proceeding directly to the vipassanā practice.

The four elements meditation allows you to experience your body as being composed entirely of a blend of the four elements. It is not possible to attain jhāna using the four elements as an object, as they are objects of momentary concentration. However, four elements meditation can lead to access concentration.

Four elements meditation in its later application is used to directly discern (see) and analyze rūpa-kalāpas. Rūpa-kalāpas are tiny subatomic particles that make up all objects in the world of materiality. We will not discuss using four elements meditation beyond the point of seeing kalāpas because that is the end of the samatha practice, which is the focus of this book.

FOUR ELEMENTS MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS

The four elements are earth, water, fire, and air, with their associated characteristics.

1. earth element: hardness, roughness, heaviness, softness, smoothness, lightness
2. water element: flowing, cohesion
3. fire element: heat, coldness
4. air element: supporting, pushing

Pairing each element with its opposite allows an easier initial progression through the characteristics of each of the four elements. After learning the pairs in this way, you should then complete the four elements meditation in the traditional order.

We present the characteristics below in an order that we believe is easier to learn. The progression we recommend first is:

1. hardness, softness
2. roughness, smoothness
3. heaviness, lightness
4. flowing, cohesion
5. heat, cold
6. supporting, pushing

To begin the four elements practice, if you have previously completed the jhāna practice, you should use white kaṣiṇa as an object to progress through the first, second, third, and fourth jhānas. If you have not completed the jhāna practice, you can proceed to start the four elements meditation directly.

In either case, begin by seeking all hardness in your body. Examples of hardness are teeth, bones, and nails. Experientially locate each area of hardness in your body. When you can find and simultaneously hold all areas of hardness in your body without division or distraction, begin searching your body for softness, ignoring hardness entirely at this time.

Softness is everything that is not hardness. Literally, your experience in the body during this pairing is either of hardness or of softness when evaluating just these two characteristics of the earth element. If you can easily hold hardness, you can shift your attention to everywhere else in your body to find all that is softness. Then alternate between hardness and softness until you can discern and feel each in literally an instant. Then hold hardness and softness distinctly and simultaneously.

Next, examine the characteristics of roughness and smoothness. An example of roughness might be the tough skin on the

bottom of your feet. Discover and experience all roughness in your body, until you can feel it at once everywhere.

You can find smoothness by running your tongue over your lip, as one example. The tongue also feels quite smooth on the teeth. Seek smoothness everywhere in your body. Then alternate between roughness and smoothness. When you can find roughness and smoothness quickly, both separately and simultaneously, advance to heaviness and lightness.

You can feel heaviness where the bottom of your body (that is, legs, feet, or buttocks) touches the meditation cushion, chair, or floor. Once you can know this everywhere in the body at once, shift your meditative awareness to lightness. One example of how lightness might be experienced is the hair on your arms. Continue to explore your body, searching everywhere for lightness. When you can clearly sense lightness and heaviness throughout the body, sense them by quickly shifting from one to the other. Then hold heaviness and lightness simultaneously and distinctly.

Flowing and cohesion are the next characteristics to look for in your body. You can sense flowing as the blood or other liquids moving throughout your body, for example. Detect all areas of flowing in the body. Feel each area of flowing at once before moving to cohesion. Cohesion is felt as how the body holds itself together. The various muscles, blood vessels, and organs remarkably stay within the skin of this body. Feel cohesion everywhere in the body at once. Then alternate between flowing and cohesion. When you can experience each of these completely in one instant, shift to feeling both of these together distinctly and simultaneously.

Heat and cold need no explanation. It is fairly easy to find these characteristics in your body. Again, experience these by alternating one and then the other, until each can be distinctly experienced simultaneously with the other in an instant.

Supporting and pushing are a little tricky to find. Supporting is how the various organs are held in place by their location and

other factors you discover. Likewise, you can feel pushing when your breath is drawn into your body with deep deliberation. The wind pushes in your lungs expanding the chest, allowing your body to breathe. Explore the body to find every area of supporting. Then, once all areas of supporting are found, shift attention to pushing, locating all places of pushing in the body. As you clearly discern these and learn to know them deeply, alternate attention from supporting to pushing and back again. Feel each characteristic as completely distinct from the other characteristic and then discern them simultaneously.

Once you can easily identify each characteristic in each of the four elements, proceed to locating these characteristics in the traditionally prescribed order.

ORDER OF CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH ELEMENT AS IN THE TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

After you have learned all the characteristics in the above order, begin to locate the characteristics of each element in the following order, as is done traditionally. Again, the order of the traditional instruction is:

1. earth element: hardness, roughness, heaviness, softness, smoothness, lightness
2. water element: flowing, cohesion
3. fire element: heat, cold
4. air element: supporting, pushing

Once you have sufficiently experienced all the characteristics separately, experience each group as an entire element. For instance, the characteristics of the water element are flowing and cohesion. Once you have learned these separately, sense them simultaneously in the body, holding them as the water element.

When you can experience each characteristic for each element, cycle through each element, feeling all its characteristics

separately at once. When you can hold each element, with all its characteristics, proceed to run through the elements in order of earth, water, fire, and air. When you can distinctly feel each element in the body, cycle through all the elements to the point where you can do three complete rounds of all the elements in a minute, with each element being distinctly experienced. You are likely to experience the body as a combination of these elements, not as a distinct body. There is no part of the body that does not reflect one characteristic of an element. There comes a time when you can hold each element with its distinctness with all the other elements at once.

The Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw then instructed us to use the wisdom eye to obtain a vantage point just above and behind the body, as if we were looking slightly down on our own body from right above and in back of the head. With continued deep meditation on the four elements, there develops a light, a kind of glow around the body. Do not shift your meditative attention to the glow but allow it to develop on its own. Our experience, at this point, was of seeing the entire body in its four elements as a white, cloudlike form. Despite the white, cloudlike form, continue to maintain meditative attention cycling through the four elements. Over time this white form begins to become crystal-like.

The white form transmutes into a perceived crystal body—your crystal body. Over time, the crystal body becomes brilliant in its glow and is perceived as diamond-hard. This diamondlike body begins to glow with a brilliant light, which expands in every direction. You can see the emanating light during meditation. At this time, the brilliant crystal body feels very clear and pure.

As with many of these practices, we were not sure what would happen when we started or what to expect. But, by staying true to the practice and maintaining awareness on the object, the practice did progress as described.

VARIATIONS ON HOW AND WHEN TO DO THIS PRACTICE

In Stephen's case, because of physical issues, he undertook four elements meditation at the beginning before going on to the ānāpānasati practice. You can use the four elements meditation to balance the four elements and characteristics, should they be out of balance. For example, a meditator might seek softness or flowing in a part of the body that is stiff and painful. For Stephen, doing four elements meditation first enabled his bodily energies to smooth out before undertaking the ānāpānasati meditation. As mentioned earlier, in most cases the teacher will encourage students to do the ānāpānasati meditation first and, if they are not successful, to then proceed to the four elements practice.

In Tina's case, she completed the practices in the sequence given by the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw in his book *Knowing and Seeing*. If you are doing the four elements meditation in this way—that is, after having completed all of the jhānas, kasīnas, related practices, and protective meditations—you should also continue practicing the jhānas up to the eighth jhāna during one meditation period each day to maintain a high level of jhāna concentration. If you have completed fourth jhāna, or even first jhāna, continue to do one sitting per day up to the highest jhāna obtained to maintain concentration. This makes for a powerful entry into the beginning of the vipassanā practice, starting with the four elements meditation. It ensures that the concentration developed over the many days, weeks, and months of practice is sustained and available to use in the vipassanā portion of the Buddhist path.

The four elements meditation is very different from jhāna practice, in that it is fast-moving and requires the use of momentary concentration rather than absorption. You will not experience absorption in doing the four elements meditation; rather, you use momentary concentration to develop a high level of

access concentration. Practicing the jhānas at one sitting per day allows for a high level of concentration; then you can switch to doing the four elements meditation practice for the rest of the day.

RŪPA-KALĀPAS

Toward the end of the retreat with the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw, after spending some days on the four elements meditation and progressing to the crystal body, Tina started perceiving a vibrating sensation internally during meditation with eyes closed and externally with eyes open while moving around. This is common once the perception of the crystal body becomes stable, and it is seen in block form for at least thirty consecutive minutes of access concentration. At this point, the meditator is instructed to look for the space element in the transparent form of the crystal body.

As this practice progresses, the crystal body can suddenly break down into small particles called rūpa-kalāpas, which are the subatomic particles of materiality that comprise all matter. Seeing rūpa-kalāpas is the final stage of samatha practice before you begin analyzing the rūpa-kalāpas. Analyzing rūpa-kalāpas is the first stage of the vipassanā practice, according to the Buddha's teaching as presented by the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw.

In Tina's experience, seeing rūpa-kalāpas had a significant and permanent impact on her perception of materiality/physical reality. Having a direct experience of seeing everything one looks at (including one's own body) as moving subatomic particles alters the perception of "me" and of the substantiality of what we regard as "normal" reality. Stephen experienced a moment, a brief flash, of seeing rūpa-kalāpas. Due to the limited duration of his experience, it had less of an impact.

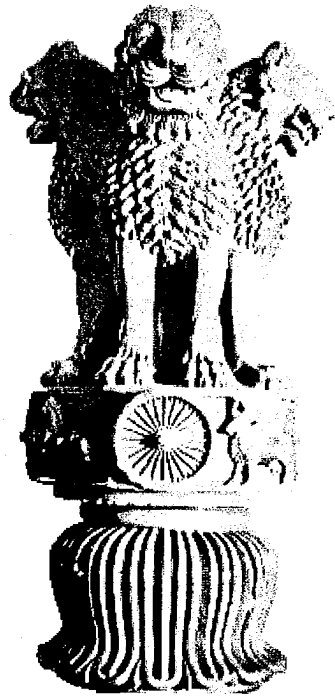
It is useful to remember that the samatha portion of the Buddhist path is traditionally described as the "purification of mind," while the vipassanā portion is described as the "purifica-

tion of view." The internal purification of one's mind stream lays the groundwork for purifying the internal and external "view" of reality as we come to know it as it actually is rather than as the conditioned mind has taken it to be. Seeing, and later analyzing, rūpa-kalāpas is the beginning of seeing materiality as it actually is without the overlay of conceptual thought.

This completes the samatha meditations we learned under the guidance of the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw. Your experience may be slightly different from ours, given the unique nature of the solitary journey upon which we embark in the purification of mind offered by these ancient practices.

The Practice Which Leads To Nibbāna

(Part 1)



Pa Auk Sayadaw

(Compiled and Translated by U.Dhamminda)

meditation subjects easily with the assistance of the concentration he has attained in his initial meditation.

Developing Insight

After the meditator has thus completed the development of concentration his mind is then pliant, usable and ready to begin the development of insight practise.

If he developed his concentration by using mindfulness of breathing then he again develops that concentration as described above. He attains the fourth jhāna based on mindfulness of breathing, then discerns the 32 parts of the body a few times internally and externally, then using the white colour of the bones he progressively enters the fourth jhāna based on the white kasina. Then he directs his mind towards the discernment of the four elements in the body.

As described above he develops concentration based on the four elements until he finds his whole body appears to be white. Then as he continues to discern the four elements in the white form of the body his whole body becomes clear like a block of ice.

The meditator then continues to discern the four elements in the clear form of his body and as he does this he will find that it breaks up into tiny particles. If it does not break up into particles while he is meditating in this way then he directs his attention to discerning the element of space in the body. He finds that there are spaces all over the body such as the pores in the skin and as he discerns these spaces the clear form breaks up into particles because he is able to discern the space between particles.

When he is able to easily discern these particles, which are called rūpa kalāpas, he will notice at first that they are arising and passing away very quickly. He should not pay much attention to them arising and passing away, but just continue to observe the four elements in each rūpa kalāpa.

He will notice that the particles are of two main kinds those that are clear or transparent and those that are not clear or transparent. The transparent particles are those which are sensitive to the five sense objects of light, sound, odours, tastes, and touch. There are therefore five types of transparent particles. Of these the body sensitive element is found dispersed throughout the body, while the other sensitive elements are found only in their respective place which is the eye, ear, nose, and tongue.

So the meditator is then trained to discern the four elements in individual particles and also becomes proficient in the analysis of different kinds of particles. As he trains progressively and systematically he will eventually be able to recognise and identify all of the 28 different types of matter that occur in the body and outside of the body as well. He is also trained to discern which of these rūpas are produced by kamma, consciousness, temperature, and nutriment (kamma, citta, utu, and āhāra)

The 28 kinds of matter are briefly:

4 Primary Elements

1. earth, 2. water, 3. fire, 4. air,

24 Kinds of derived matter

1. eye sensitivity, 2. ear sensitivity, 3. nose sensitivity, 4. tongue sensitivity, 5. body sensitivity, 6. light, 7. sound, 8. odour, 9. taste, (note that touch is made of the primary elements of earth, fire, and air) 10. matter that causes one to be male, 11. matter that causes one to be female, 12. heart base matter, 13. life force, 14. nutriment, 15. space, 16. bodily intimation, 17. verbal intimation, 18. lightness, 19. softness, 20. wieldiness, 21. growth of matter, 22. continuity of matter, 23. ageing of matter, 24. dissolution of matter.

When a meditator is able to analyse matter and discern all these 28 kinds of matter then he discerns them as a group and knows them as "matter".

The meditator then moves on to the discernment of mentality which entails the analysis of all of the different types of consciousness that occur in himself, discernment of all of the individual mental factors that are present in each consciousness, and the discernment of the processes of consciousness called "vīthi" that occur at the six doors of the senses.

Discerning Mentality

In Buddhist Abhidhamma the mind is seen as consisting of consciousness which knows an object and concomitant mental factors which arise together with consciousness. There are 52 such mental factors for example:

contact, feeling, perception, intention, one pointedness, life faculty and attention. (phassa, vedanā, saññā, cetanā, ekaggatā, jīvitā, manasikāra)

There are a total of 89 types of consciousness which can be classified according to whether they are wholesome, unwholesome or indeterminate, and also classified according to their plane of existence, rūpa, arūpa, or kāmāvacara.

There are six types of sequences of consciousness called vīthi in which consciousness occurs. Five of them are sequences that occur when each of the five objects of the five senses are known by the mind. These sequences of consciousness enable the mind to know objects at each of the five sense doors such as visible objects seen by the eye or sounds heard by the ear. The sixth sequence is one that occurs when the mind has a mental phenomenon as its object. So that there are five sense door processes or vīthi and one mind door process or vīthi which make a total of six vīthi.

The analysis of mentality is made up of three parts:

1. The analysis of all of the different types of consciousness that occur in oneself.

2. Discernment of all of the individual mental factors that are present in each consciousness.

3. The discernment of the processes of consciousness called "vīthi" that occur at the six doors of the senses.

If a meditator wants to discern mentality he must have already completed the development of concentration beginning with either mindfulness of breathing, some other tranquillity subject of meditation or with four elements meditation. He should also have finished the discernment of matter (rūpa kamaṭṭhāna). Then only after that should he attempt to discern mentality (nama kamaṭṭhāna).

If the meditator has attained jhāna concentration using mindfulness of breathing or another object then the best place to start to discern mentality is by discerning the consciousness and mental concomitants that are associated with the jhāna state that he has attained.

There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that he has already observed the five jhāna factors when developing jhāna and so he has some experience in discerning the mental factors associated with jhāna. The second reason is that the jhāna impulsion consciousnesses (jhāna javana cittas) that are present during the experience of jhāna occur many times in succession and are therefore prominent and easy to discern. This is in contrast to the normal kāmāvacara vīthi in which each javana only occurs seven times before a new vīthi occurs.

So if a meditator has attained jhāna and wishes to discern mentality he begins by entering the first jhāna and then after leaving the first jhāna discerns the five jhāna factors according to their individual characteristics and practises until he can discern the five factors all together at once in each first jhāna javana citta. The five factors are:

1. Vitakka = initial application of the mind; is the directing and placing of the mind on the object of the paṭibhāga nimitta.
2. Vicāra = sustained application of the mind; is the sustained keeping of the mind on the object of the paṭibhāga nimitta.
3. Pīti = joy and liking for the paṭibhāga nimitta.
4. Sukha = pleasant feeling or happiness associated with experiencing the paṭibhāga nimitta.
5. Ekaggatā = one pointedness of mind on the paṭibhāga nimitta.

Then after the meditator can discern these five mental factors he then attempts to discern each of the other mental factors present in the first jhāna javana citta. He begins by discerning either consciousness (viññāna), contact (phassa) , or feeling (vedanā) first. Whichever of these three is prominent he discerns it and then continues to discern it in every first jhāna javana citta. After that he discerns each of the remaining types of mentality adding one type at a time, so that he is able to see 1 types of mentality in each first jhāna javana citta, then 2 types, then 3 types, etc., until eventually he can see all 34 types of mentality present in each first jhāna javana citta.

When the meditator can discern all the 34 types of mentality present in the first jhāna javana citta he then tries to discern all the types of mentality present in each and every consciousness that occur in a mind door thought process (mano dvāra vīthi).

A mind door thought process of the first jhāna consists of a sequence of six types of functional consciousness.

Firstly there occurs mind door adverting consciousness (manodvārāvajjana) in which he can discern 12 types of mentality.

Then after that there occurs one preliminary consciousness (parikkamma) in which he can discern 34 types of mentality.

Then after that there occurs one access consciousness (upacāra) in which he can discern 34 types of mentality.

Then after that there occurs one adaptation consciousness (anuloma) in which he can discern 34 types of mentality.

Then after that there occurs one change of lineage consciousness (gotrabhu) in which he can discern 34 types of mentality.

Then after that there occurs an uninterrupted sequence of jhāna impulsion consciousnesses (jhāna javana) in which he can discern 34 types of mentality.

To discern this the meditator must first enter into the first jhāna and then after arising from that jhāna he can then observe that previously occurring jhāna mind door process. He then begins to observe each of the different functional consciousnesses in the first jhāna mind door process and discern all the types of mentality that occur in each functional consciousness whether it be 12 or 34.

After the meditator can discern all the types of mentality that arise in each consciousness of a first jhāna mind door process he then discerns the common characteristic of all mentality which is their characteristic of bending towards and sticking to an object. Then he simply discerns all the 34 types of mentality present in the first jhāna as mentality (nāma).

After that the meditator performs the same type of discernment and analysis of mentality of the second, third, and fourth jhāna of mindfulness of breathing and also of any other jhānas that he is able to attain using other meditation subjects. For example, repulsiveness of the body, white kaṣiṇa, lovingkindness etc.

Then after that the meditator discerns the different types of mentality that occur when a wholesome mind door thought process of the sensual plane occurs (kāmvācāra kusala mano dvāra vīthi).

practical insight meditation

the Venerable
Mahasi Sayadaw



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MINDFULNESS
SERIES

2

only after cognizing the disappearance of an object, they notice the new object that arises. Thus they have a clear knowledge of the initial, the intermediate and the final phases of the object noticed.

At this stage when the meditator becomes more practiced he perceives in every act of noticing that an object appears suddenly and disappears instantly. His perception is so clear that he reflects thus: "All comes to an end; all disappears. Nothing is permanent; it is truly impermanent." His reflection is quite in line with what is stated in the Commentary to the Pali Text: "All is impermanent, in the sense of destruction, nonexistence after having been." He reflects further: "It is through ignorance that we enjoy life. But in truth, there is nothing to enjoy. There is a continuous arising and disappearing by which we are harassed ever and anon. This is dreadful indeed. At any moment we may die and everything is sure to come to an end. This universal impermanence is truly frightful and terrible." His reflection agrees with the commentarial statement: "What is permanent is painful, painful in the sense of terror; painful because of oppression by rise and fall." Again, experiencing severe pains he reflects thus: "All is pain, all is bad." This reflection agrees with what the Commentary states: "He looks on pain as a barb; as a boil; as a dart." He further reflects: "This is a mass of suffering, suffering that is unavoidable. Arising and disappearing, it is worthless. One cannot stop its process. It is beyond one's power. It takes its natural course." This reflection is quite in agreement with the Commentary; "What is painful is not self, not self in the sense of having no core, because there is no exercising of power over it." The meditator must notice all these reflections and go on contemplating as usual.

Having thus seen the three characteristics by direct experience, the meditator, by inference from the direct experience of the objects noticed, comprehends all the objects not yet noticed as being impermanent, subject to suffering, and without a self.

In respect of objects not personally experienced, he

concludes: "They too are constituted in the same way: impermanent, painful and without a self." This is an inference from his present direct experience. Such a comprehension is not clear enough in the case of one with less intellectual capacity or limited knowledge who pays no attention to a reflection but simply goes on noticing objects. But such a comprehension occurs often to one who yields to reflection, which, in some cases, may occur at every act of noticing. Such excessive reflecting, however, is an impediment to the progress of insight. Even if no such reflections occur at this stage, comprehension will nevertheless become increasingly clear at the higher stages. Hence, no attention should be given to reflections. While giving more attention to the bare noticing of objects, the meditator must, however, also notice these reflections if they occur, but he should not dwell on them.⁸

After comprehending the three characteristics, the meditator no longer reflects but goes on with noticing those bodily and mental objects which present themselves continuously. Then at the moment when the five mental faculties, namely, faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and knowledge, are properly balanced, the mental process of noticing accelerates as if it becomes uplifted, and the bodily and mental processes to be noticed also arise much quicker. In a moment of in-breathing the rising of the abdomen presents itself in quick succession, and the falling also becomes correspondingly quicker. Quick succession is also evident in the process of bending and stretching. Slight movements are felt spreading all over the body. In several cases, prickly sensations and itching appear in quick succession momentarily. By and large, these are feelings hard to bear. The meditator cannot possibly keep pace with that quick succession of varied experiences if he attempts to notice them by name. Noticing has here to be done in a general manner, but with mindfulness. At this stage one need not try to notice details of the objects arising in quick succession, but one should notice them generally. If one wishes to

name them, a collective designation will be sufficient. If one attempts to follow them in a detailed manner, one will get tired soon. The important thing is to notice clearly and to comprehend what arises. At this stage, the usual contemplation focused on a few selected objects should be set aside and mindful noticing should attend to every object that arises at the six sense doors. Only when one is not keen on this sort of noticing, then one should revert to the usual contemplation.

Bodily and mental processes are many times swifter than a wink of an eye or a flash of lightning. Yet, if the meditator goes on simply noticing these processes he can fully comprehend them as they happen. Then mindfulness becomes very strong. As a result, mindfulness seems as if plunging into an object that arises. The object too seems as if alighting on mindfulness. One comprehends each object clearly and singly. Therefore the meditator then believes: "Bodily and mental processes are very swift indeed. They are as fast as a machine or an engine. And yet, they all can be noticed and comprehended. Perhaps there is nothing more to know. What is to be known has been known." He believes so because he knows by direct experience what he has not even dreamt of before.

Again, as a result of insight, a brilliant light will appear to the meditator. There arises also in him rapture, causing "goose flesh," falling of tears, tremor in the limbs. It produces in him a subtle thrill and exhilaration. He feels as if on a swing. He even wonders whether he is just giddy. Then, there arises tranquility of mind and along with it appears mental agility. When sitting, lying, walking or standing, he feels quite at ease. Both body and mind are agile in functioning swiftly, they are pliant in being able to attend to any object desired; they are wieldy in being able to attend to an object for any length of time desired. One is free from stiffness, heat or pain. Insight penetrates objects with ease. Mind becomes sound and straight, and one wishes to avoid all evil. Through firm faith, mind is very bright. At times, when there is no

object to be noticed, the mind remains tranquil for a long time. There arise in him thoughts like these: "Verily, the Buddha is omniscient. Truly, the body-and-mind process is impermanent, painful and without self." While noticing objects he comprehends lucidly the three characteristics. He wishes to advise others to practice meditation. Free from sloth and torpor, his energy is neither lax nor tense. There also arises in him equanimity associated with insight. His happiness exceeds his former experiences. So he wishes to communicate his feelings and experiences to others. There arises further a subtle attachment of a calm nature that enjoys the insight associated with the brilliant light, mindfulness and rapture. He comes to believe it to be just the bliss of meditation.

The meditator should not reflect on these happenings. As each arises, he should notice them accordingly: "Brilliant light, faith, rapture, tranquility, happiness and so on."⁹ When there is brightness, one should notice it as "bright," until it disappears. Similar acts of noticing should be made in the other cases too. When brilliant light appears, at the beginning one tends to forget noticing and enjoys seeing the light. Even if the meditator applies mindful noticing to the light, it will be mixed with feelings of rapture and happiness, and it is likely to linger on. However, one later gets used to such phenomena and one will continue to notice them clearly until they disappear. Sometimes the light is so brilliant that one finds it difficult to make it vanish by the mere act of noticing it mindfully. Then one should cease to pay attention to it and turn energetically to the noticing of any object that arises in one's body. The meditator should not ponder as to whether the light is still there. If he does so, he is likely to see it. If such a thought arises, he should disperse it by vigorously directing his attention to that very thought. While concentration is intense, not only a brilliant light but also several other extraordinary objects arise and may continue if one inclines to one or the other of them. If such inclination happens to arise, the meditator must notice it quickly. In some cases, even

if there is no such inclination towards any object in particular, faint objects appear one after the other like a train of railway carriages. The meditator should then respond to such visual images simply by "seeing, seeing," and each object will disappear. When the meditator's insight becomes weaker, the objects may become more distinct. Then, each of them must be noticed until the whole train of objects disappears finally.

One must recognize the fact that cherishing an inclination towards such phenomena as a brilliant light, and being attached to them, is a wrong attitude. The correct response that is in conformity with the path of insight is to notice these objects mindfully and with detachment until they disappear.¹⁰ When the meditator continues to apply mindfulness to body-and-mind, his insight will grow in clarity. He will come to perceive more distinctly the arising and disappearing of the bodily and mental processes. He will come to know that each object arises at one place and on the very place it disappears. He will know that the previous occurrence is one thing and the succeeding occurrence is another. So, at every act of noticing, he comprehends the characteristics of impermanence, painfulness and egolessness. After thus contemplating for a considerable time, he may come to believe: "This is surely the best that can be attained. It can't be better." He becomes so satisfied with his progress that he is likely to pause and relax. He should, however, not relax at this stage, but go ahead with his practice of noticing the bodily and mental processes continuously for a still longer time.¹¹

With the improvement of practice and when knowledge becomes more mature, the arising of the objects is no longer apparent to the meditator; he notices only their ceasing. They pass away swiftly. So also do the mental processes of noticing them. For instance, while noticing the rising of the abdomen, that movement vanishes in no time. And in the same manner vanishes the mental process of noticing that movement. Thus it will be clearly known to the meditator that both the rising and the

noticing vanish immediately, one after another. The same applies in the case of the falling of the abdomen, of sitting, bending or stretching of an arm or leg, stiffness in the limbs, and so on. The noticing of an object and the knowledge of its ceasing occur in quick succession. Some meditators perceive distinctly three phases: noticing an object, its ceasing, and the passing away of the consciousness that cognizes that ceasing—all in quick succession. However, it is sufficient to know, in pairwise sequence, the dissolution of an object and the passing away of the consciousness of noticing that dissolution.

When a meditator can clearly notice these pairs uninterruptedly, the particular features such as body, head, hand, leg are no longer apparent to him, and there appears to him the idea that everything is ceasing and vanishing. At this stage he is likely to feel that his contemplation is not up to the mark. But in fact, it is not so. Mind as a rule takes delight in dwelling on the sight of particular features and forms. Because of their absence, mind is wanting in satisfaction. As a matter of fact, it is the manifestation of the progress of insight. At the beginning, it is features that are clearly noticed first, but now their ceasing is noticed first, because of the progress. Only on repeated reflection, features appear again, but if they are not noticed the fact of dissolution reappears to remain. So one comes to know by direct experience the truth of the wise saying: "When a name or designation arises, a reality lies hidden; when a reality reveals itself, a name or designation disappears."

When the meditator notices the objects clearly, he thinks that his notices are not close enough. In fact, the insight is so swift and clear that he comes to know even the momentary subconsciousness in between the processes of cognition. He intends to do something, for instance, bending or stretching an arm, and he readily notices that intention which thereby tends to fade away, with the result that he cannot bend or stretch for some time. In that event, he should switch his attention to contemplating the occurrences at one of the six sense

doors.

If the meditator extends his contemplation over the whole body, as usual, beginning with the noticing of the rising and the falling of the abdomen, he will soon gain momentum, and then he should continue noticing touching and knowing, or seeing and knowing, or hearing and knowing and so on, as one or the other occurs. While so doing, if he feels that he is either restless or tired, then he should revert to noticing the rising and falling of the abdomen. After some time, when he gains momentum, he should notice any object that arises in the whole body.

When he can contemplate well in such a spread out manner, even if he does not notice an object with vigor, he knows what he hears fades away, what he sees dissolves in broken parts, with no continuation between them. This is seeing things as they really are. Some meditators do not see clearly what is happening because the vanishing is so swift that they feel their eyesight is getting poorer or they are giddy. It is not so. They are simply lacking the power of cognition to notice what happens before and after, with the result that they do not see the features or forms. At such a time, they should relax and stop contemplating. But the bodily and mental processes continue to appear to them, and consciousness, of its own accord, continues to notice them. The meditator may decide to sleep, but he does not fall asleep; and yet he remains fit and alert. He need not worry about the loss of sleep, because on this account he will not feel unwell or fall ill. He should go ahead with noticing energetically and he will feel that his mind is quite capable to perceive the objects fully and clearly.

When engaged in noticing continuously both the dissolution of the objects and the act of knowing it, he reflects: "Even for the wink of an eye or a flash of lightning nothing lasts. One did not realize this before. As it ceased and vanished in the past so will it cease and vanish in the future." One must notice such a reflection.¹² Besides, in the midst of contemplations, the meditator is likely to have an awareness of fearfulness. He

reflects: "One enjoys life, not knowing the truth. Now that one knows the truth of continuous dissolution it is truly fearful. At every moment of dissolution one can die. The beginning of this life itself is fearful. So are the endless repetitions of the arisings. Fearful it is to feel that in the absence of real features and forms the arisings appear to be real. So are the efforts to arrest the changing phenomena for the sake of well-being and happiness. To be reborn is fearful in that it will be a recurrence of objects that are ceasing and vanishing always. Fearful indeed it is to be old, to die, to experience sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair." Such reflection should be noticed and then dismissed.

Then the meditator sees nothing to depend on and becomes as it were weakened in mind as well as in body. He is seized with dejection. He is no longer bright and spirited. But he should not despair. This condition of his is a sign of the progress of insight. It is nothing more than being unhappy at the awareness of fearfulness. He must notice such a reflection and as he continues to notice objects as they arise, one after another, this unhappy feeling will disappear soon. However, if he fails to contemplate for some time, then grief will assert itself and fear will overpower him. This kind of fear is not associated with insight. Therefore, care must be taken to prevent the oncoming of such undesirable fear by energetic contemplation.¹³

Again in the midst of noticing objects, he is likely to find faults, in this manner: "This body-and-mind process, being impermanent, is unsatisfactory. It was not a good thing to have been born. It is not good either to continue in existence. It is disappointing to see the appearance of seemingly definite features and forms of objects while in fact they are not realities. It is in vain that one makes efforts to seek well-being and happiness. Birth is not desirable. Dreadful are old age, death, lamentation, pain, grief and despair." A reflection of this nature must likewise be noticed.¹⁴

Then, one tends to feel that body-and-mind as the

object and the consciousness of noticing it are very crude, low or worthless. By noticing their arising and disappearing he gets sick of them. He might see his own body decaying and decomposing. He looks upon it as being very fragile.

At this stage, while the meditator is noticing all that arises in his body and mind he is getting disgusted with it. Although he cognizes clearly their dissolution by a series of good notices he is no longer alert and bright. His contemplation is associated with disgust. So he becomes lazy to contemplate. But nevertheless he cannot refrain from contemplating. For example, it is like one who feels disgusted at every step when he has to walk on a muddy and dirty path and yet he cannot stop going. He cannot help but go on. At this time, he sees the human abode as being subject to the process of dissolution, and he does not relish the prospect of being reborn as a human being, man or woman, king or multimillionaire. He has the same feelings towards the celestial abodes.¹⁵

When through this knowledge he feels disgusted with regard to every formation noticed, there will arise in him a desire to forsake these formations or be delivered from them.¹⁶ Seeing, hearing, touching, reflecting, standing, sitting, bending, stretching, noticing—he wishes to get rid of them all. He should notice this wishing. He now longs for the liberation from bodily and mental processes. He reflects: "Every time I notice them, I am meeting with repetitions, which are all bad. I had better stop noticing them." He should take notice of such a reflection.

Some meditators, when so reflecting, actually stop noticing the formations. Although they do so, the formations do not stop taking place, namely, rising, falling, bending, stretching, intending and so on. They go on as ever. Noticing of the distinct formations also continues. So, reflecting thus, he feels pleased: "Although I stop noticing the body-and-mind, formations are taking place all the same. They are arising, and consciousness of them is there, by itself. So liberation from them cannot be achieved by mere stopping to notice them. They cannot

be forsaken in this way. Noticing them as usual, the three characteristics of life will be fully comprehended and then no heed being given to them, equanimity will be gained. The end of these formations, *nirvana*, will be realized. Peace and bliss will come." So reflecting with delight, he continues to notice the formations. In the case of those meditators who are not capable of reflecting in this way, they continue their meditation once they become satisfied with the explanation of their teachers.

Soon after continuing meditation they gain momentum and at that time usually various painful feelings arise in some cases. This need not cause despair. It is only the manifestation of the characteristic inherent in this mass of suffering, as stated in the Commentary thus: "Seeing the five aggregates as painful, as a disease, a boil, as a dart, a calamity, an affliction, etc." If such painful feelings are not experienced, one of the forty characteristics of impermanence, suffering or no-self¹⁷ will be apparent at every noticing. Although the meditator is properly noticing he feels that he is not doing well. He thinks that the consciousness of noticing and the object noticed are not close enough. This is because he is too eager to comprehend fully the nature of the three characteristics. Not satisfied with his contemplation he changes his posture often. While sitting, he thinks he will do better walking. While walking he wants to resume sitting. After he has sat down he changes the position of his limbs. He wants to go to another place; he wants to lie down. Although he makes these changes he cannot remain long in one particular position. Again, he becomes restless. But he should not despair. All this happens because he has come to realize the true nature of the formations, and also because he has not yet acquired the "knowledge of equanimity about formations." He is doing well and yet he feels otherwise. He should try to adhere to one posture, and he will find that he is comfortable in that posture. Continuing to notice the formations energetically, his mind will gradually become composed and bright. In the end his restless feelings will disappear

totally.¹⁸

When the "knowledge of equanimity about formations" becomes mature, the mind will be very clear and able to notice the formations very lucidly. Noticing runs smoothly as if no effort is required. Subtle formations, too, are noticed without effort. The true characteristics of impermanence, pain and no-self are becoming evident without any reflection. Attention is directed to a particular spot at any part of the body wherever a sensation occurs, but the feeling of touch is as smooth as that of cotton. Sometimes, the objects to be noticed in the whole body are so many that noticing has to be accelerated. Both body and mind appear to be pulling upwards. The objects being noticed become sparse and one can notice them easily and calmly. Sometimes the bodily formations disappear altogether leaving only the mental formations. Then the meditator will experience within himself a feeling of rapture as if enjoying a shower of tiny particles of water. He is also suffused with serenity. He might also see brightness like a clear sky. These marked experiences, however, do not influence him excessively. He is not overjoyed. But he still enjoys them. He must notice this enjoyment. He must also notice rapture, serenity and bright light. If they do not vanish when being noticed, he should pay no heed to them and notice any other object that arises.

At this stage he becomes satisfied with the knowledge that there is no I, mine, he or his, and that only formations arise; formations only, are cognizing formations. He also finds delight in noticing the objects one after another. He is not tired of noticing the objects one after another. He is not tired of noticing them for a long time. He is free from painful feelings. So whatever posture he chooses he can retain it long. Either sitting or lying he can go on contemplating for two or three hours without experiencing any discomfort, spending his time tirelessly. Intending to contemplate for a while, he may go on for two or three hours. Even after that time his posture is as firm as before.

At times formations arise swiftly and he is noticing them well. Then he may become anxious as to what would happen to him. He should notice such an anxiety. He feels he is doing well. He should notice this feeling. He looks forward to the progress of insight. He should notice this anticipation. He should notice steadily whatever arises. He should not put forth a special effort nor relax. In some cases, because of the anxiety, joy, attachment or anticipation, noticing becomes lax and retrogressive. Some who think that the goal is very near contemplate with great energy. While doing so, noticing becomes lax and retrogression sets in. This happens because a restless mind cannot concentrate properly on formations. So when noticing is in good swing the meditator must go on steadily; that means he should neither relax nor put forth special effort. If he does go on steadily, he will rapidly gain insight into the end of all the formations and realize *nirvana*. In the case of some meditators, they may, at this stage, rise higher and again fall several times. They should not give way to despair but instead hold fast to determination. Heed must be paid also to noticing whatever arises at all the six sense doors. However, when noticing is going on smoothly and calmly, contemplation in such a spread out manner is not possible. So this manner of noticing should begin with the gaining of the momentum in contemplation until it becomes smooth and calm.

If the meditator begins either with the rising and falling of the abdomen or with any other bodily and mental object, he will find that he is gaining momentum. And then the noticing will go on of its own accord smoothly and calmly. It will appear to him that he is watching with ease the ceasing and vanishing of the formations in a clear manner. At this point, his mind is quite free from all the defilements. However pleasant and inviting an object may be, it is no longer so to him. Again, however loathsome an object may be, it is no longer so to him. He simply sees, hears, smells, tastes, feels a touch or cognizes. With six kinds of equanimity described in the Texts he notices all the formations. He is

not even aware of the length of time he is engaged in contemplation. Nor does he reflect in any manner. But if he does not develop sufficient progress of insight to gain the "knowledge of the path and its fruition" (*magga* and *phala*) within two or three hours, concentration becomes slack and reflection sets in. On the other hand, if he is making good progress he may anticipate further advance. He will become so delighted with the result that he will experience a fall. Then he must dispel such an anticipation or reflection by directing bare noticing to it. A steady contemplation will achieve smooth progress again. But if sufficient strength of insight has not yet been achieved, concentration becomes slack again. In this way, some meditators progress and fall back several times. Those who are acquainted with the stages of the progress of insight by way of study (or by hearing about them) encounter such ups and downs. Hence it is not good for a pupil who meditates under the guidance of a teacher to get acquainted with these stages before meditation begins. But for the benefit of those who have to practice without the guidance of an experienced teacher, these stages have been indicated here.

In spite of such fluctuations in his progress the meditator must not allow himself to be overcome by disappointment or despair. He is now, as it were, at the threshold of *magga* and *phala* (the entry and the fruition of the stages of sainthood). As soon as the five faculties (*indriya*) of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are developed in an even manner, he will soon reach *magga* and *phala* and realize *nirvana*.

How Nirvana is Realized

The ups and downs of insight knowledge occurring in the aforesaid manner are comparable to a bird let loose from a sea-going ship. In ancient times the captain of a sea-going ship, finding it difficult to know whether the ship was approaching land, released a bird that he had taken with him. The bird flies in all four directions to look for a shore. Whenever it cannot find any land, it comes back to the ship. As long as insight knowledge is not mature enough to grow into path and fruition knowledge and thereby attain to the realization of *nirvana*, it becomes lax and retarded, just as the bird returns to the ship. When the bird sees land, it flies on in that direction without returning to the ship. Similarly, when insight knowledge is mature, on having become keen, strong and lucid, it will understand one of the formations, at one of the six sense doors, as being impermanent or painful or without self. That act of noticing any one characteristic out of the three which has a higher degree of lucidity and strength in its perfect understanding, becomes faster and manifests itself three or four times in rapid succession. Immediately after the last consciousness in this series of accelerated noticing has ceased, *magga* and *phala* (path and fruition) arises, realizing *nirvana*, the cessation of all formations.

The acts of noticing are now more lucid than the previous ones immediately before the realization. After the last act of noticing, the cessation of the formations and realization of *nirvana* become manifest. That is why

those who have realized *nirvana* would say:

The objects noticed and the consciousness noticing them cease altogether; or, the objects and the acts of noticing are cut off as a vine is cut by a knife; or, the objects and acts of noticing fall off as if one is relieved of a heavy load; or, the objects and acts of noticing break away as if something one is holding breaks asunder; or, the objects and acts of noticing are suddenly freed as if from a prison; or, the objects and acts of noticing are blown off as if a candle is suddenly extinguished; or, they disappear as if darkness is suddenly replaced by light; or, they are released as if freed from an embroilment; or, they sink as if in water, or abruptly stop as if a person running were stopped by a violent push; or, they cease altogether.

The duration of realizing the cessation of formations is, however, not long. It is so short that it lasts just for an instant of noticing. Then the meditator reviews what has occurred. He knows that the cessation of the material processes noticed and the mental processes noticing them is the realization of *magga-phala-nirvana*. Those who are well-informed know that the cessation of the formations is *nirvana*, and the realization of cessation and bliss is *maggaphala*. They would say inwardly: "I have now realized *nirvana* and have attained *sotāpatti maggaphala*." Such a clear knowledge is evident to one who has studied the scriptures or heard sermons on this subject.¹⁹

Some meditators review defilements—those already abandoned and those remaining to be abandoned. After having reviewed in this way, they still continue the practice of noticing bodily and mental processes. While doing so, the bodily and mental processes, however, appear to be coarse. Both the arising and the passing away of the processes are clearly evident to the meditator. And yet the meditator now feels as if his noticing is lax and has regressed. As a matter of fact he has come back to the knowledge of arising and passing away. It is true, his noticing has become lax and regressed. Because he has come back to this stage, he is likely to see bright lights or shapes of objects. In some cases, this reversion results in

unbalanced contemplation in that the objects noticed and acts of noticing do not go together. Some meditators experience slight pain for a while. By and large, the meditators notice that their mental processes are clear and bright. At this stage, the meditator feels that his mind is absolutely free from any encumbrance; he feels happily unhindered. In such a frame of mind he cannot notice the mental process, and even if he does so, he cannot notice it distinctly. He cannot think of any other thing either. He simply feels bright and blissful. When this feeling loses its vigor he can again notice the bodily and mental processes and know their arising and passing away clearly. After some time he reaches the stage where he can notice the formations smoothly and calmly. Then, if the insight knowledge is mature, he can again attain to the "knowledge of the cessation of the formations." If the power of concentration is keen and firm, then such knowledge can repeat itself frequently. In these times, the object of the meditators is to attain to the knowledge of the first *magga-phala*, and consequently they regain that knowledge repeatedly. Thus far has been described the method of meditation, the progressive stages of insight knowledge and the realization of *sotāpatti maggaphala*.

One who has attained the knowledge of path and fruition is aware of the distinct change of his temperament and mental attitude and feels that his life has changed. His faith or trustful confidence in the three sacred gems becomes very strong and firm. Due to this strengthened faith he also gains in rapture and serenity. There arises in him a spontaneous upsurge of happiness. Because of these ecstatic experiences he cannot notice the objects in a distinct manner although he endeavors to do so right after the attainment of *magga-phala*. However, these experiences wane gradually after some hours or days, and he will then be able again to notice the formations distinctly. In some cases, the meditators, having attained *magga-phala*, feel relieved of a great burden, free and easy, and do not wish to go on contemplating. Their

Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond

A Meditator's Handbook

Ajahn Brahm

foreword by Jack Kornfield



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The Jhānas I: Bliss

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IN THE ORIGINAL Buddhist scriptures there is only one word for “meditation” and that is *jhāna*. According to the fully enlightened Ven. Ānanda in the *Gopaka-Moggallāna Sutta* (MN 108,27) the only kind of meditation that the Buddha recommended was *jhāna*. Thus *jhāna* designates Buddhist meditation proper, where the meditator’s mind is stilled of all thought, secluded from all five-sense activity, and is radiant with otherworldly bliss. Put bluntly, if it isn’t *jhāna* then it isn’t true Buddhist meditation! Perhaps this is why the culminating factor of the Buddha’s noble eightfold path, the one that defines *right* meditation, is nothing less than the four *jhānas*.

The Buddha’s Discovery

The ancient Buddhist texts state that the Buddha discovered *jhāna* (SN 2:7; AN IX,42). Not once in the original texts does it say that the Buddha discovered *vipassanā*. These authoritative texts also state that the four *jhānas* only arise with the appearance of a *buddha* (SN 45,14–17). The fact that the Buddha discovered *jhāna* should not be overlooked, for the discovery was a central act in the drama of enlightenment.

When it is said by no less an authority than the arahant Ānanda that the Buddha discovered *jhāna*, it is not to be understood that no one had ever experienced *jhāna* before. For instance, in the era of the previous *buddha*, Kassapa, countless men and women achieved *jhāna* and subsequently realized enlightenment. But in the India of twenty-six centuries ago, all knowledge of *jhāna* had disappeared. For example, the famous

leader of the Jains and contemporary of the Buddha, Mahāvīra, publicly dismissed jhānas as an impossibility after hearing them described (SN 41,8). Either the most prominent (according to many scholars) religious leader of that time was unbelievably ignorant of common spiritual practices, or else jhāna was indeed an original discovery of the Buddha. The latter is far more plausible, and it is further supported by the observation that there is no mention at all of jhāna in any religious text before the time of the Buddha.

Some might raise the objection that the Buddha's earlier teachers, Alāra Kālāma and Udaka Rāmaputta, taught jhāna because the texts say that they instructed the Bodhisatta (the Buddha-to-be) in the attainment of the state of nothingness and in the attainment of the state of neither perception nor nonperception (MN 26). Although these two attainments are never called jhāna in the early texts (the term *anupa-jhāna* first appears in the much later commentarial literature), it is implicit that they can only be accessed by first proceeding through each of the four jhānas step by step. So did these two early leaders know the four jhānas and teach them to the Bodhisatta?

If they did, then why did the Buddha state that their methods did not lead to nibbāna (MN 26,16) but that jhāna did lead to nibbāna (MN 36,31; 52,4-7; 64,9-12)? And why, when the Bodhisatta abandoned asceticism and asked, "Could there be another path to enlightenment?" (MN 36,30), did he recall the more distant memory of first jhāna as a boy under the rose-apple tree instead of a more recent and intense experience of jhāna under his two early teachers? These questions need to be satisfactorily answered by anyone who still maintains that Alāra Kālāma and Udaka Rāmaputta taught jhāna.

An answer to the question of what these two early teachers taught, one that maintains the Buddha's consistency in rejecting the efficacy of their teachings while praising the efficacy of jhāna (MN 108,27), is that Udaka Rāmaputta and Alāra Kālāma never taught jhāna, and that the two formless attainments that they espoused were not the real thing, most likely diluted versions of the original from the time of the previous Buddha Kassapa. Just as today some teachers present a level of meditation and

call it "jhāna" when it is clearly less than the real thing, or some colleges will, for a fee, send a university degree by return mail when the degree is not the real thing, so the attainments taught by Alāra Kālāma and Udaka Rāmaputta could not have been the real thing. The "real thing," the attainment of the sphere of nothingness, *does* lead to enlightenment (MN 52,14), but the different experience of the same name taught by Alāra Kālāma did not.

Another reason why jhāna was unknown before the arising of the Buddha was that the cause of jhāna, the practice of the Middle Way, was also unknown then. Ancient texts such as the *Dhammacakkā-ppavattana Sutta* (the first sermon, SN 56,11) state that the Buddha discovered the Middle Way and that the Middle Way is synonymous with the noble eightfold path. Another sutta states that the Buddha discovered the noble eightfold path, like a long-lost path to an ancient city (SN 12,65). It should also be noted that the noble eightfold path, the Middle Way, is a gradual path that culminates in jhāna (AN X,103). Thus if one accepts that the Buddha discovered the Middle Way, the noble eightfold path, one must also accept that the Buddha discovered the final stage of the way, the end portion of the path, which is jhāna.

The *Arāna-vibhanga Sutta* (MN 139) equates the Middle Way with the pursuit of jhāna. The sutta explains in detail that one should not pursue asceticism nor pleasure of the five senses, but instead one should pursue the Middle Way. If one does not pursue suffering in any of the six senses (asceticism) and one does not pursue pleasure in the five senses (*kāmasukha*), then the only pursuit remaining is for the happiness of the sixth sense (mind), and this must be the Middle Way. This sutta continues with the Buddha encouraging the pursuit of internal happiness, obviously the Middle Way, only here he defines it as the pursuit of the four jhānas. Conclusion: the Middle Way is the pursuit of jhāna.

In the story of the Buddha's awakening, once the Bodhisatta realized that jhāna was the way to enlightenment (MN 36,31), he immediately recognized that it was impractical to attain jhāna with an emaciated body and so began eating well. Seeing this, his first five disciples left him in disgust, thinking he had given up striving (MN 36,32). This indicates that

the gentle practices that lead to tranquility of the body and then on to jhāna were not recognized before the arising of the Buddha as a valid path by learned seekers such as these five disciples. When the path to jhāna was not widely recognized as worthwhile, it is no wonder that the path was not pursued and jhāna was not achieved. It should also now be clear why the first part of the first sermon of the newly awakened Buddha was the teaching of the Middle Way, the noble eightfold path, that opens the way to jhāna and the enlightenment beyond.

I have written at length on this point, citing many original texts, because it is a new idea to the West. What is groundbreaking is bound to be controversial. I ask all sincere readers to put aside their existing views for a while, since the Buddha said that attachment to views can be an obstacle to insight, and fairly consider the evidence presented here. After all, the *Panicātanūko Sutta* (SN 2.7) is certainly an original sutta, because it is referred to elsewhere in the canon (AN IX.42) and was thus confirmed as authentic Dhamma by the five hundred arahants at the First Council—and it states that the Buddha discovered jhāna.

Can One Be Attached to Jhāna?

When the Bodhisatta had the insight that jhāna was the way to enlightenment, he then thought, “Why am I afraid of that pleasure which has nothing to do with the five senses nor with unwholesome things? I will not be afraid of that pleasure [of jhāna]!” (MN 36,32). Even today, some meditators mistakenly believe that something as intensely pleasurable as jhāna cannot be conducive to the end of all suffering, and they remain afraid of jhāna. However, in the suttas the Buddha repeatedly stated that the pleasure of the jhāna “is to be followed, is to be developed, and is to be encouraged. It is not to be feared” (MN 66.21).

In spite of this clear advice from the Buddha himself, some students of meditation are misled by those who discourage jhāna on the grounds that one can become so attached to jhāna that one never becomes enlightened. It should be pointed out that the Buddha’s word for attachment, *upādāna*, refers only to attachment to the comfort and pleasure of

the five-sense world or to attachment to various forms of wrong view (such as a view of a self). It never means attachment to wholesome things like jhāna.⁶

Simply put, jhāna states are stages of letting go. One cannot be attached to letting go, just as one cannot be imprisoned by freedom. One can indulge in jhāna, in the bliss of letting go, and this is what some people are misled into fearing. But in the *Pāsādikā Sutta* (DN 29,25), the Buddha said that one who indulges in the pleasure of jhāna may expect only one of four consequences: stream winning, once-returning, non-returning, or full enlightenment! In other words, indulging in jhāna leads only to the four stages of enlightenment. Thus, in the words of the Buddha, “One should not fear jhāna.”

For some meditators, the jhānas seem far from their experience and thus irrelevant. This is not so. Discussing such sublime states can create inspiration, as well as map out the territory ahead. More crucially, discussion informs one about what to do when one draws close to any of these profound states of freedom. Finally, it gives a deeper understanding of the Dhamma, especially into the third noble truth, the cessation of all suffering. This is because the rapture and bliss of jhāna is directly related to the amount of saṃsāra that is abandoned, albeit temporarily. Thus, discussing the jhānas is well worthwhile, even if they may seem distant.

Some readers may have already gotten close enough to be able to understand this discussion from their own experience, and it may help them make that last leap into the jhānas. Furthermore, when meditators experience a profound state of meditation, they want to find out exactly what it was, to recognize the state in terms of the Buddha’s descriptions. So it is important to be able to correctly identify the levels of depth in meditation.

It is also important to generate some inspiration in one’s achievement. Such a positive emotion will encourage further letting go. It is my intention to show you how wonderful and profound these states of jhāna are, and to illustrate how crucial their experience is to the event of enlightenment.

Eventually, the seeds that are planted in you through reading a discussion

on jhāna will someday bear fruit. At the right time, the mind will know automatically what it must do. For example, when *nimittas* arise, the mind will spontaneously know how to respond. Then sometime later you might reflect, "Where did that response come from?" The answer is that it came from reading discussions such as this. Sometimes it comes from what one has learned in a past life!

So please do not think that just because you have not yet reached the jhānas this discussion is of no use to you. In fact it will be very useful. You will realize this when, having achieved one of the jhānas, you recognize that such instructions as given here came to your help just at the right time.

The Beautiful Breath: The Beginning of the Journey into Jhānas

Having discussed the jhānas from a historical and theoretical point of view, I will now explain the jhānas in terms of their practice. It is best to begin the description of the journey into jhāna from the starting point of the beautiful breath. Before this stage is accomplished, the mind has insufficient contentment, awareness, or stability to launch itself into the higher states of consciousness. But when you are able to maintain an effortless awareness on the breath without a break for long periods of time, when the mind has settled into such a rich awareness that the breath appears delightful, then you are ready to set off on the journey into jhāna.

Do not fear delight in meditation. Happiness in meditation is important! Moreover, you deserve to bliss out. Blissing out on the breath is an essential part of the path. So when delight does arise alongside the breath, cherish and guard it like a valuable treasure.

The delight that arises at the stage of the beautiful breath is the glue that holds the mind's attention onto the breath. It results in the mindfulness staying with the breath without effort. One stays with full attention on the breath because the mind enjoys watching the breath and doesn't want to go anywhere else. It remains with the breath automatically, and all wandering ceases.

Without the experience of delight, there will be some discontent.

And discontent is the source of the wandering mind. Before one reaches the stage of the beautiful breath, discontent pushes mindfulness away from the breath. Then the only way to keep mindfulness upon the breath is through an effort of will, through control. But when the stage of the beautiful breath is achieved, when delight generates long-lasting contentment, then the mind will not wander. Control can be relaxed, effort relieved, and the mind remains motionless, naturally.

Just as gasoline is the fuel that propels a car, so discontent is the fuel that moves the mind. When a car runs out of gas, it gently rolls to a stop. One doesn't need to use the brake. In the same way, when the mind runs out of discontent, through the arising of the beautiful breath, it gently comes to a stop. One doesn't need to use the brake of willpower. The mind comes to a state of stillness quite naturally.

Pīti-sukha—Joy and Happiness

In Pāli, the compound word *pīti-sukha* means the combination of joy with happiness. One can use those words for many kinds of experiences, even worldly ones. But in meditation, *pīti-sukha* refers only to that joy and happiness that is generated through letting go.

Just as various types of fire can be distinguished by their fuel, such as a wood fire, oil fire, or bushfire, so can the various types of happiness be differentiated by their cause. The joy and happiness that arises with the beautiful breath is fueled by the letting go of the burdens of past and future, internal commentary, and diversity of consciousness. Because it is a delight born of letting go, it cannot produce attachment. One cannot be attached and let go at the same time. The delight that arises with the beautiful breath is, in fact, a clear sign that some detachment has taken place.

Pīti-sukha may arise from sensual excitement, from personal achievement, or from letting go. These three types of happiness differ in their nature. The happiness generated by sensual excitement is hot and stimulating but also agitated and therefore tiring. Repetition makes it fade. The happiness caused by personal achievement is warm and fulfilling but

also fades quickly, leaving a vacant hole. But the happiness born of letting go is cool and long-lasting. It is associated with the sense of real freedom.

Moreover, the happiness generated by sensual excitement produces ever-stronger desires, making the happiness unstable and tyrannical. The happiness caused by personal achievement produces more investment in being a control freak and encourages the illusion of personal power. The controller then kills any happiness. The happiness born of letting go inspires more letting go and less interference. Because it encourages one to leave things alone, it is stable and effortless. It is the happiness most independent of causes and closest to the unconditioned, the uncaused.

It is important for success in meditation to recognize the different types of happiness. If the happiness that arises with awareness of the breath is of the sensual excitement type—for example, waves of physical pleasure coursing through your body—it will soon disappear when effort is relaxed, leaving you heavy and tired. If the happiness is associated with the sense of achievement—“Wow! At last I’m getting somewhere in my meditation”—it will often disintegrate, destroyed by the arousal of the controller, ruined by the interfering ego. But if the happiness that arises with the beautiful breath is that born of letting go, then you feel that you don’t need to say anything or do anything. It becomes the happiness whose brother is freedom and whose sister is peace. It will grow all by itself in magnificent intensity, blossoming like a flower in the garden of jhāna.

In addition to the beautiful breath, there are many other objects of meditation: loving-kindness (*mettā*), parts of the body (*kāyagatāṅgāni*), simple visualizations (*kaṣiṇi*), and others. However, in all meditation that develops into jhāna there must come a stage where the pīti-sukha born of letting go arises. For example, loving-kindness meditation opens into a wonderful, gorgeous, unconditional love for the whole cosmos, filling the meditator with delicious joy. Pīti-sukha born of letting go has arisen, and one is at the stage of “beautiful mettā.” Some meditators focus on parts of the human body, often a skull. As the meditation deepens, as mindfulness rests on the inner image of a skull, an amazing process

unfolds. The image of the skull in one’s mind starts to whiten, then deepen in color, until it appears to glow with intense luminosity as the “beautiful skull.” Again, pīti-sukha born of letting go has appeared, filling the whole experience with joy and happiness. Even some monks who practice *asubha* (loathsomeness) meditation, on a decaying corpse, for instance, can experience the initially repugnant cadaver suddenly changing into one of the most beautiful images of all. Letting go has aroused so much happiness that it overwhelms the natural disgust and floods the image with pīti-sukha. One has realized the stage of the “beautiful corpse.”

In meditation on the breath, the Lord Buddha taught the arousing of pīti-sukha along with the experience of one’s breath as the fifth and sixth steps of the sixteen-step ānāpānasati method. I dealt with this crucial stage of meditation at length above.⁷

When pīti-sukha doesn’t arise, it must be because there is not enough contentment, that is, *one is still trying too hard*. One should reflect on the first two of the five hindrances. The first hindrance, sensory desire, draws the attention toward the object of desire and thus away from the breath. The second hindrance, ill will, finds fault with the experience of breath, and the dissatisfaction repels the attention from the breath. Contentment is the “middle way” between desire and ill will. It keeps one’s mindfulness with the breath long enough for pīti-sukha to arise.

The Way into Stillness

Stillness means lack of movement. Since will causes the mind to move, to experience stillness one must remove all will, all doing, all control. If you grasp a leaf on a tree and try your hardest to hold it still, no matter how hard you try, you will never succeed. There will always be some vibration caused by slight tremors in your muscles. However, if you don’t touch the leaf and just protect it from the breeze, then the leaf comes to a natural state of stillness. In exactly the same way, you cannot achieve stillness by holding the mind in the grip of the will. But if you remove the cause of movement in the mind, the will, the mind soon becomes still.

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4

Controversies Surrounding Samādhi

Having released knots, a sage here in the world does not follow any faction when disputes arise. Calmed among those who are not calm, equanimous, he does not take up opinions, saying "Let others take them up."

The Buddha, Sutta Nipāra, 912

IT IS EASY TO SEE WHY THERE IS A RANGE OF VIEWS ABOUT SAMĀDHI and the nature of jhāna, and easy to understand why later commentators were eager to clarify the meaning of the Pāli suttas according to their own understandings. Many of the meditative states and techniques for attaining them are described very concisely in the suttas, using compressed formulas with little or incomplete explanatory detail, and so are only partially adequate as practical meditation guides. Sutta passages often rely on standard prescribed phrases, which served to assist in memorization for their oral transmission in the early centuries before they were finally codified in written form. A few of them sketch out a full map for the practice, but none of them fill in all the details. Although perhaps the details would have been enough for a practitioner during the time when the suttas were composed, the original meanings of some words, as intended within a sutta's context, may not be clearly understood by modern Pāli scholars (it is also quite possible that greater detail was provided orally, outside the formulaic pattern of the suttas). There is reason to suspect that certain passages were

inserted at later dates. Unless we want to pick and choose the portions of the suttas we are inclined to accept as original, leaving the rest, we must accept the suttas as they exist today. We can find either inconsistency or congruency among the wide range of practices in the canonical and commentarial texts, depending on our viewpoint.

There is disagreement about what *jhāna* is, and the term is used to describe a range of experiences by various teachers. *Jhāna* is always defined by the standard formula, in which the presence or absence of five *jhāna* factors and other supplemental elements characterize the various levels of *jhāna*. Because these factors are present, to varying degrees, throughout a wide range of levels and types of *samādhi*, various meditation teachers, each presenting a different idea of what *jhāna* is, can legitimately claim to be teaching the "real" *jhāna*. There is no consensus on whether or not *jhāna* is necessary to realize the deeper stages of insight, and scriptural evidence can be found to support either view.

The scriptural sources can be conflicting. The Buddha of the early Pāli suttas taught contextually, varying his advice depending on his audience and the immediate circumstances. The suttas, therefore, are not entirely consistent, presenting an array of styles and approaches to practice that vary to suit the range of human temperaments, and lending themselves to various interpretations regarding the path of meditation.

Now that we have examined the range of ways *samādhi* and *jhāna* are described in the suttas and the *Visuddhimagga*, some of the controversy and disagreement surrounding *samādhi* and how it is taught can be discussed. The approach taken here is to remain open and receptive to reconciling the suttas and the *Visuddhimagga*, without having to do so, recognizing that there may be points of tension and incompatibility between the two. If the beginning premise is that the *Visuddhimagga* is the authority for understanding the suttas correctly, then the two sources must agree, and one will be predisposed to interpret the suttas in light of the *Visuddhimagga*. One will be disposed to construe the words and phrases of the suttas in the light of the explanations given by the *Visuddhimagga*. In the preceding chapters each has been viewed on its own terms, and they can now be compared in order to highlight their similarities and differences, convergences and inconsistencies. Various teachers and methods can then be surveyed without passing judgment on their interpretations.

The debates surrounding *samādhi* can roughly be summarized by three broad questions: (1) What is *jhāna*? (2) Are concentration and insight two distinct paths of meditation practice or one? (3) Is *jhāna* necessary for *Visuddhimagga* is taken to be the authoritative interpretation of the suttas, and upon which interpretation of the suttas one adopts.

What Is *Jhāna*?

Competing views about the nature of *jhāna* arise, in part, because the descriptions given in the standard sutta definition can reasonably be understood and interpreted in more than one way. The passages do not contain a lot of detail. If we define *jhāna* only in terms of the *jhāna* factors, we may be confused. Though *jhāna* is defined by the standard formula, elsewhere the suttas make it clear that other factors must be present and working together. In order to understand what the suttas are conveying, the definition must be viewed within the context of the suttas' entire range of teachings and descriptions of *samādhi* and *jhāna*, which depict a dynamic state of sharpened clarity and awareness. Even if the definition is viewed within the wider framework of all the suttas' various depictions of *jhāna*, we are liable to disagree since the experience of *jhāna* is hard to describe.

A basic dispute regarding *jhāna* is whether one is aware of the body while in *jhāna*. There is controversy as to whether the mind is unified and aware of changing experience or one-pointed, whether it is a state of mindfulness and clear connection with body awareness or a purely mental state of fixed concentration in which there is no awareness of the body at all.

No suttas state explicitly that there is sense experience, as we normally understand it, in the *jhānas*. However, the suttas put much emphasis on mindfulness of the body as a key feature of the *jhānas*, emphasizing the integration of breath and whole-body meditation. An intimate connection with body awareness that is maintained and refined throughout all four *jhānas* is an essential component comprising *jhāna* in the suttas. This important aspect of *jhāna* is highlighted in the expanded *jhāna* similes, which repeatedly refer to the body being filled with rapture, pleasure, or awareness.

Heightened awareness of and connection with the body is both a characteristic of *jhāna* and a practice leading to it, as emphasized in the *Kāyagatāsari* (Mindfulness of the Body) Sutta, which states unambiguously that through attaining *jhāna* one develops mindfulness of the body.¹ The sutta begins with the exact text of the six contemplations on mindfulness of the body from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: mindfulness of breathing, the four postures, full awareness of all activities, the constituent parts of the body, the four elements, and the nine contemplations of a decaying corpse. A new passage is added in this sutta at the end of each contemplation: "As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned; with their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. That is how a monk develops mindfulness of the body."²

A seventh section is then added on *jhāna*, using the standard *jhāna* definition and simile, and concluding with the same phrase: "As he abides thus diligent . . . that too is how a monk develops mindfulness of the body." The sutta adds that one of the benefits of cultivating mindfulness of the body is the ability to obtain the four *jhānas* at will. Thus, the sutta states explicitly that body awareness is present in *jhāna*, which is the seventh in an ever subtler progression of practices and insights into the body. As the mind becomes tranquil and is brought to singleness, rather than losing awareness of the body in *jhāna*, mindfulness of the body is enhanced, as underscored by the *jhāna* similes.

In contrast to the suttas, the *Visuddhimagga* clearly describes *jhāna* as a state in which body awareness is lost as the mind absorbs into a nimitta, a mental image. *Jhāna* in the *Visuddhimagga* is a purely mental state characterized by fixed concentration in which no changing phenomena, including awareness of the physical body, can be experienced. All awareness of the body, and any changing experience, disappears as the mind absorbs into the nimitta and the *jhāna* factors, which is why one cannot do insight practice in *Visuddhimagga jhāna*. The *Visuddhimagga* reconciles this with the sutta descriptions, in which *jhāna* is a state of heightened body awareness, by stating that when the suttas refer to the body in conjunction with *jhāna*, they are referring to a metaphorical "mental" body:

"Now, as to the clause *he feels pleasure with his body* [from the definition of the third *jhāna*, the only place the body is mentioned in the

standard formula]: here although in one actually possessed of the third *jhāna* there is no concern about feeling pleasure, nevertheless he would feel the pleasure associated with his mental body, and after emerging from the *jhāna* he would also feel pleasure since his material body would have been affected by the exceedingly superior matter originated by that pleasure associated with the mental body."²

It is possible to interpret *jhāna* in the *Kāyagatāsari Sutta* in this way, as referring to the mental body, since the word *kāyā* means "group," "aggregate," "collection," or "body," and so could be used to refer to any group or "body," either physical or mental. However, the *Kāyagatāsari Sutta* is clearly about mindfulness of the physical body, beginning with the entire first *satipaṭṭhāna* on mindfulness of the body—mindfulness of breathing, four postures, all activities, and so on. In the seventh section on *jhāna*, there is no mention that the term *body* is going to have a new meaning in the following discussion. It is hard to conceive that the entire sutta would focus on mindfulness of the physical body and then switch to mindfulness of the "mental body" just in this last section on *jhāna*. It is unlikely that the Buddha would switch meanings for the word *kāyā* without signaling that he is doing so, especially if it is so essential to *jhāna* that *kāyā* not mean "physical body." Adding *jhāna* in the *Kāyagatāsari Sutta* emphasizes the connection of *jhāna* with mindfulness of the physical body.

So, while some sort of connection with or awareness of the body seems to be indicated in the suttas, the nature of this body awareness is less clear. Perhaps the suttas are referring to a subtler type of body awareness, not accessible through the normal sense apparatus.

Revisiting the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*

One could argue that *samādhi* in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is meant to be a pre-*jhāna* level. We have seen that the *Kāyagatāsari Sutta* begins by presenting all six contemplations in the first foundation of mindfulness from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, adding at the end of each that "this is how one practices mindfulness of the body." The meditator is instructed in each of the six contemplations to bring the mind to singleness and concentration, further strengthening the argument that this sutta is talking about *jhāna*. But *jhāna* is then added to the *Kāyagatāsari Sutta* as a seventh contemplation,

implying that jhāna is an attainment separate from the satipaṭṭhāna practices and that the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is concerned with a level of concentration below jhāna. Otherwise, why add jhāna as an additional practice? One answer is that jhāna is added here to indicate that jhāna is an outcome of the first six practices, as well as to highlight body awareness as a crucial aspect of jhāna.

The Jhāna Factors Vitakka-Vicāra

As I mentioned in chapter 2, there are two ways of interpreting the jhāna factor citass' ekaggatā in relation to the practice of jhāna. The mind can become *one-pointed*—still and unmoving, intensely sustaining fixed concentration on a single object such that the experiences of change are lost. In another way of understanding ekaggatā, which we have called *unification of mind*, a broader awareness around the object is maintained. The mind itself becomes collected and unmoving, but not the objects of awareness, as mindfulness becomes lucid, effortless, and unbroken. In one case awareness of the flow of experience stops, while in the other case the mind itself stops, even while the ever-changing flow of experience continues.

The differences between these two views of ekaggatā are relevant to understanding the different ways in which vitakka and vicāra are understood to function in the first jhāna. If translated as “one-pointedness,” meaning concentration fixed on a single point, including it as a factor of the first jhāna presents some problems since, it seems, one-pointedness is incompatible with vitakka-vicāra.

If we assume that *ekaggatā* means total, unmoving, one-pointed focus on a single object, exclusive of all else, then *vitakka* and *vicāra* must have a very circumscribed meaning, as nothing more perhaps than an instability in one's single focus. During any moments of true one-pointedness the mind is completely focused and “locked” on a single object, so it seems that no other mental activity could arise, including vitakka-vicāra in any of its usual senses, whether thinking and pondering, or connecting and sustaining the mind on an object. If a defining factor of the first jhāna is discursive thought, some sort of volitional activity, or other mental activity such as applying and sustaining the attention on a meditation subject, then by definition, it cannot be singly fixed in one-pointed concentration.

The mind cannot be simultaneously fixed in one-pointed concentration and engaged in some sort of activity.

Perhaps the list of five jhāna factors was a later addition to the Sutta Piṭaka, shifting the definition of *jhāna* away from the original meaning and adding a degree of inconsistency. Since the five-factor list is in the suttas, though, we must either accept this as an inconsistency or find an interpretation of the meanings of *vitakka-vicāra* and *ekaggatā* in which they can coexist.

Proponents of the Visuddhimagga approach to jhāna say that, in fact, vitakka and vicāra have functions other than those evident to us in normal sensory consciousness and that they perform these functions in the jhāna. Thus, vitakka and vicāra can be present in one-pointed concentration while one is engaged in activity, such as connecting and sustaining. In this understanding, a contradiction appears only if we limit vitakka and vicāra to active discursive functions.

The sutta simile for the first jhāna indicates a certain amount of purposeful movement within the context of the jhāna, engaged in spreading the sense of rapture and pleasure throughout the body. This would seem to indicate that vitakka and vicāra are more than a mere instability or directing and sustaining the attention on an object, and instead that a certain amount of mental activity is a useful and essential part of the first jhāna. In this case, the second interpretation of “one-pointedness” as unification of mind may correspond better to the canonical descriptions of jhāna. If interpreted in this way, we can have a unified mind present along with the mental activity of vitakka-vicāra.

Are Samādhi and Insight Two Distinct Paths of Practice or One?

Interpretations vary regarding whether the cultivation of samādhi is an endeavor separate from the development of insight or whether samādhi and insight are two aspects of the same practice. Some say tranquility and insight are two distinct practices, and that you must first develop jhāna and later switch to separate insight practices. Others disregard jhāna

entirely and begin directly with insight practice, allowing concentration to strengthen naturally to the degree necessary through the application of mindfulness. Still others teach meditation in which concentration and insight are both emphasized and strengthened together. People have found evidence in the suttas to support all of these approaches.

The Visuddhimagga unambiguously separates meditation practice into two distinct types or paths of development, tranquility and insight. The path of tranquility focuses exclusively on the attainment of jhāna, defined as one-pointed concentration. The path of insight can be pursued either after attaining jhāna or directly, as the path of "dry" insight, in which case samādhi develops in conjunction with the contemplations leading to insight but does not reach the level of jhāna. The path of insight must be a separate endeavor from that of concentration in Visuddhimagga jhāna because sense contact is lost as the mind absorbs into fixed concentration, and insight cannot develop until emerging from jhāna and reflecting back on what has happened, considering the defects in the state and the desirability of not clinging to it. As the Visuddhimagga understands it, the mind can take only one fixed object, and this precludes the investigation of multiple, changing objects characteristic of vipassanā.

Though many of the suttas teach that liberating understanding arises through insight practice, supported by some degree of concentration, the suttas also place much emphasis on samādhi's important role in the development of insight:

Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated understands things as they really are. And what does he understand as it really is? He understands as it really is: "This is suffering." He understands as it really is: "This is the origin of suffering." He understands as it really is: "This is the cessation of suffering." He understands as it really is: "This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering."³

If read without imposing any interpretation on them, the suttas seem to be saying that insight can occur within a jhāna. In the Anupada Sutta, Śāriputra is able to discern and analyze all the various qualities associated with each jhāna:

And the states in the first jhāna: the thought, the examination, the rapture, the pleasure, and the unification of mind; the sense contact, the feeling, the perception, the volition, the mind, the intention, the determination, the energy, the mindfulness, the equanimity, and the attention, each of these states were continuously determined by him; those states were known to him as they arose, as they were present, and as they disappeared. He understood: "Truly, these states, not having existed, come into existence; having existed, they disappear." Regarding those states, he remained unattached, unrepelled, free, detached . . . in the second jhāna . . . in the third jhāna . . . and the states in the fourth jhāna . . . each of these states were continuously determined by him; those states were known to him as they arose, as they were present, and as they disappeared.⁴

In this way, it seems, Śāriputra was able to recognize, investigate, and develop insight into each of the jhānas and the first three āruppas while still in the particular meditative state. Only upon reaching the final āruppa, the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, and the state of cessation, could the attendant qualities be known only upon emerging from the state and reflecting back on what had just occurred.

Similarly, in another sutta, "The destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first jhāna . . . a monk enters and dwells in the first jhāna . . . whatever states are included there comprised by form, feeling, perception, volitional formations or consciousness (the five aggregates): he views those states as impermanent, as suffering . . . as empty, as non-self."⁵

There are suttas that could be interpreted to suggest that meditation should be practiced sequentially, developing samādhi until jhāna has been achieved and then switching to insight as a separate practice, just as presented in the Visuddhimagga. On the night of his enlightenment the Buddha practiced jhāna meditation before attaining numerous supernormal powers and then directing his mind toward insight into the Four Noble Truths to gain his final great breakthrough into full realization and ultimate liberation:

I entered upon and abided in the first jhāna . . . in the second jhāna . . . in the third jhāna . . . in the fourth jhāna . . . When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection,

malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability . . . I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew as it actually is: "This is suffering" . . . "This is the origin of suffering" . . . "This is the cessation of suffering" . . . "This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering" . . . "These are the taints" . . . "This is the origin of the taints" . . . "This is the cessation of the taints" . . . "This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints" . . . thus my mind was liberated.⁶

This is sometimes cited as evidence in the suttas that, although jhāna is a necessary prerequisite for insight, insight meditation is something distinct from, and practiced after, jhāna meditation.

A further example that could be interpreted as a sequential style of development is found in a stock passage recurring numerous times throughout the suttas, where a standard gradual path of practice proceeds progressively through the threefold division of the eightfold path: morality, concentration, and wisdom.⁷ Beginning with morality, the seeker enters the homeless life and proceeds to live by the monastic rules of restraint and guarding the sense doors. He then finds a suitable place to begin formal sitting meditation practice, keeping mindfulness established and abandoning the hindrances. The disappearance of the hindrances leads to gladness, which leads to delight, leading in turn to tranquilizing the body, to joy, and finally to concentration. At this point, with the strengthening of concentration, the meditator develops the four jhānas. Only after mastering jhāna does he turn his attention to insight practices as he "inclines his mind towards knowing and seeing."

This is considered the complete model for graduated spiritual development, and is used to support the notion of two distinct types of meditative development as presented in the Visuddhimagga, where you must first develop jhāna and then switch to a separate style of insight practice. But this is not a generic instruction that one should first attain jhāna and then begin insight practice. Upon realization of the jhānas the mind is directed toward knowing and seeing, first that "the body is material, made up from the four great elements, born of mother and father, fed on rice and gruel, impermanent, liable to be injured and abraded, broken and destroyed, and this is my consciousness which is bound to it and dependent on it." He then creates a

fully formed mind-made body and develops the iddhis, supernormal powers, and the abhiññās (see chapter 2). Finally, the meditator applies his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions, culminating with insight into the Four Noble Truths and final enlightenment.

Neither the above passage from the night of the Buddha's enlightenment nor the standard graduated path of spiritual cultivation say that the meditator comes out of jhāna into a lower level of samādhi to practice insight as a distinct form of meditation, but only that insight practice begins after the attainment of jhāna and the iddhis (it also does not say that one has to go through the iddhis before gaining insight into the Four Noble Truths). We could interpret these formulations either to indicate that insight meditation is begun as a separate practice after leaving jhāna or that it is begun based upon and while still in jhāna, all depending on how jhāna is interpreted and defined. In the Visuddhimagga you cannot do insight practice while in jhāna, so we could construe this passage as meaning that this progressive path unfolds first through jhāna, and then leaves jhāna and shifts to insight meditation as a distinct practice. In the suttas, since insight can be interpreted to occur at any level of samādhi, including, as we have seen above, jhāna, insight is a progression and natural outcome of jhāna.

In the Sammādiṭṭhi (Right View) Sutta, Sāriputta delivers a discourse on sixteen dharma subjects and ways of understanding them, through which a person is endowed with right view and, thus, arrives at the true Dharma.⁸ When any one of these truths has been realized, the Dharma practitioner attains final knowledge and deliverance by eradicating sensual desire, aversion, and ignorance, the root causes of suffering.

The first way a person possesses right view is through the understanding of what is wholesome and unwholesome conduct, and the root causes of each. The remainder of the sutta deals with fifteen additional dharma themes: nutriment; the Four Noble Truths, aging and death, birth, being, clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense bases, mentality and materiality, consciousness, formations, ignorance, and the taints. Starting with aging and death, this list follows the steps of dependent origination in reverse order. The understandings associated with right view are insights into the cause, cessation, and way leading to the cessation of each of these fifteen dharma subjects. In each case, a person with right view understands

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PART TWO

INTERVIEWS WITH
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JK: Not absolutely, not at the level of *jhāna* I've practiced. It is not that there are never any thoughts, but for the most part it becomes really silent. It is like going from the windswept, weather-filled atmosphere, getting to the surface of the ocean, and then dropping down below the level of the water, like a scuba diver, into a completely silent and different dimension. While there are some reflections that might go by, it is a completely different state of consciousness.

One of the Spirit Rock/Insight Meditation Society teachers tells this wonderful story about when he was a young student in practice and first being taught *jhānas*. He worked with Joseph and Sharon in U Pandita's system, which included resolution practice. After his concentration had gotten strong, he was given a resolution for a *jhāna* factor like *pīti*. But he didn't know the Pāli and he had the meaning of the word confused in his mind. Then the most magical thing happened. He thought he was making a resolution for one kind of experience, and yet when he said, "*pīti*," his body became filled with joy and rapture. He didn't know this Pāli word given by his teacher, he thought it meant something else, but the real thing arose.

Whatever you call it, there is something in the psyche, in the greater consciousness, that knows these states and this terrain. And when the mind is deeply concentrated and open, and resolutions are made, magic happens. And of course, this can lead to the highest magic of all, as the Buddha said, the magic of the wisdom that liberates the heart.

JACK KORNFELD trained as a Buddhist monk in the monasteries of Thailand, India, and Burma. He has taught meditation internationally since 1974 and is one of the key teachers to introduce Buddhist mindfulness practice to the West. He began his training after graduating from Dartmouth College in Asian Studies in 1967. Then he joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to the Public Health Service in northeast Thailand, which is home to several of the world's oldest Buddhist forest monasteries. He met and studied under the Buddhist master Venerable Ajahn Chah, as well as the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma. After returning to the United States, Jack cofounded the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, with fellow meditation teachers Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein, and is a founding teacher of the Spirit Rock Center in Woodacre, California, where he currently lives and teaches.

Interview with Ajaan Thanissaro

Richard Shankman: Why do you think there's so much disagreement and controversy around *samādhi*?

Ajaan Thanissaro: There are two basic considerations. First, the tradition talks about *samādhi* in so many different ways—and particularly if you take the Canon on one side and the commentaries on the other, they are really talking about two very different things. When you read the descriptions of *nimitra* and of *jhāna* in the Canon, they're very different from the *nimitra* and the *jhāna* you find in the commentaries. The *Visuddhimagga* uses a very different paradigm for concentration from what you find in the Canon. That begs the question, why do the commentaries differ so radically? Nobody knows.

Second, there's a much larger issue, which is—given that we're talking about purely mental states—each person's sense of the map inside the mind is going to be different. When I use a term and you use a term, there's no guarantee that we're actually talking about the same thing.

Once, when I was camping in Utah, we went to Powell Point. We had a guidebook and thought we were following the road to Powell Point, but we made a wrong turn somewhere and came out at Henderson Canyon instead. We walked out to the end of the point there and tried to identify the landmarks the guidebook said you could see from the end of Powell Point: the Henry Mountains and so forth. The one problem was that there was a very large cliff off to the east, which wasn't mentioned in the book.

After about fifteen minutes we realized that the cliff was Powell Point; we had made a wrong turn. So the next day we went up to Powell Point, and the hills we had originally thought were the Henry Mountains were something else entirely. The Henry Mountains were much farther east. The problem was that we had been standing at the wrong place, so our sense of the landscape was all skewed. You've got the same issue with people meditating—or even worse. When you talk about meditative experiences, who knows if we're standing on the same point? There are so many different points you can stand on, and so many states that are radically different but fit the same verbal description. What makes it worse is that even if the Powell Point of the mind were right to your east, you wouldn't be able to see it.

RS: There are teachers who say the only way to correctly understand the sutras is as interpreted by the commentaries.

AT: Where do the commentaries get their seal of approval? They're just one scholastic tradition that you can take into consideration, but there's no guarantee that the scholars got it right. The only real authority you have in cases like this is the honesty of the individual practitioner. You have to be honest with yourself as to what results you're getting out of your practice, where there's still suffering, and what further work still needs to be done.

RS: Do you think you can find substantiation in the sutras for the commentarial interpretations?

AT: The main paradigm for concentration practice in the commentaries comes from *kasīṇa* practice. The Canon does contain references to *kasīṇa* practice—experiences of nonduality where everything is a oneness of blue or of awareness or whatever—but in the Canon these practices are marginal. They're in the corners of a few sutras, but they're not the main paradigm.

RS: What would you say right *samādhi* is in the context of the eightfold path?

AT: *Jhāna*. That begs the question, how do you define *jhāna*?

RS: What is it about *jhāna* that makes it right *samādhi*? Why are the *jhānas* called right concentration? What's their use? Why are they there?

AT: Why do you have right mindfulness or right effort? They're parts of the path because they work. In right concentration, the mind needs to be

clearly and strongly focused for two reasons. One is to see what's going on in the mind itself. If the mind is muddled or stirred up, it's like water in a puddle that's been stirred up. You can't see clearly what's there in the water. Second, when the mind is at ease around its object with a sense of equanimity, the mind is more malleable, more receptive to the insights that are needed to abandon its unskillful habits. You're more likely to be aware of—and to admit—what you've been doing that's been causing suffering.

RS: How much emphasis do you place on *samādhi* when you're teaching meditation?

AT: I make it the center of the practice. I don't see any clear distinction between mindfulness practice and concentration practice. When you look at the texts, there's no clear line drawn between them.

There are sutra passages that talk about the concentration that develops by following the four frames of reference (*saripaṭṭhāna*), starting with the body in and of itself. You focus on that, with directed thought and evaluation, then with directed thought and a modicum of evaluation, and then with neither directed thought nor evaluation. These passages are talking about developing *jhāna* around that frame of reference, and then with the other three frames of reference.

RS: I noticed that you interpret *vitakka-vicāra* as directed thought and evaluation.

AT: It's an essential part of getting the mind to settle down, especially if you're trying to get a sense of ease around the object. You need to get a sense of how well you're relating to the object. Are there ways that the relationship could be more comfortable? Once you get a sense of comfort, how do you spread it around the body? This is how you embody the canonical analogies for *jhāna*, which refer to permeating the body with a sense of comfort and ease. A certain amount of evaluation is needed to do this well: Could you spread it more effectively? Are you pushing it too hard so that it's actually making it an unpleasant experience? You've got to learn how to adjust your relationship with the object, and that's why you start out with directed thought and evaluation as part of the first *jhāna*. Once you've got a good relationship going, then in the second *jhāna* there's the state of unification with the object, a sense of oneness, that you carry all the way through the higher *jhānas* up to the infinitude of consciousness. I usually don't like

to use sexual metaphors here, but you can't really unite into oneness until you're on good terms with each other.

RS: There are examples in the sutras of people attaining at least some level of deep insight or awakening apparently without *jhāna* or deep meditation practices.

AT: These are the cases where people gain awakening while listening to teachings. But we don't know what their minds were doing as they sat there listening. Usually the teaching was pointing directly to something going on in their minds, so they started observing their minds, entered concentration, and gained release.

RS: There are teachers who tend to shy you away from *jhāna* as being not necessary at all and even a potential trap.

AT: The Buddha wasn't one of them. There are some people who tend to be psychologically unstable and have to be very careful about how they handle states of concentration, but in general, if you have right view about *jhāna*, it's not dangerous at all.

Now there are some people who say *jhāna* isn't necessary, that it can be a hindrance because you can become attached to the experiences and mistake the *āruppas* for *Nibbāna*. But there are lots of things you can mistake for *Nibbāna*. If you're doing what you think is *vipassanā* and you hit, say, a state of nonperception—you may think that's cessation, the end of suffering. But the danger doesn't lie in the state. It's in how you interpret it. No matter what your technique, if you're the sort of person who tends to overinterpret your attainment, you're going to head in that direction no matter what. Some people tend to be very good at denial, they're good at not seeing their own defilements, and they can use the one-pointed kind of *jhāna* to exacerbate the problem. But they can also do that with any of the *vipassanā* techniques.

RS: How do you work with students when strong experiences come up, such as energies flowing in the body, seeing lights, and so on?

AT: It really depends on the individual. Some people can handle these things pretty maturely and others can't. When you see a light, try to make it disappear. If it does disappear, make it reappear. You want to learn to have control over these experiences before you really get involved with

them, so they don't take control over you. That's the important principle. As for excess energy in the body, have it flow out the hands, out the feet, so that it doesn't get too oppressive.

RS: You're describing two approaches. One is dissipating, letting the energy come out so that it brings the intensity down. And, secondly, not necessarily having to adjust the intensity but developing the ability not to get thrown off center by the experiences.

AT: Right. The best way not to get thrown off is to realize that you can exert some control over it, that when it comes on, you can turn it off, because for most people a sense of lack of control is the scariest part of the concentration practice.

RS: Could it be that someone might be in the first *jhāna* and have liberating insight there, but not identify for themselves that they're in the first *jhāna*?

AT: *Jhāna* doesn't come with signposts saying, "Now Entering the First *Jhāna*. Population: One. Elevation: Eight Miles High." You can enter *jhāna* without knowing it, especially if you're not expecting your meditation method to lead to *jhāna*. You can also overinterpret your attainment if that's what you're looking for. And you can overinterpret your insights. This is why I tell my students that if something interesting happens, you try to master it. Then you put a Post-it note on it. If something else happens, you put a Post-it note on that, too. After you get a better sense of the full terrain of your mind, you can rearrange the notes into a coherent map.

RS: You seem to have a very open-minded view of all the different ways and things that can be defined as *jhāna*, recognizing that there is a range of intensity, but that some forms are useful and some are not. For example, some people would feel that when you block out sensations or experience, it's not actually useful. And some people say if you don't block these out, it's not real *jhāna*.

AT: There are some states of concentration where you can block out all sensory input. You can sit for a couple hours and it feels like a minute. There's just enough awareness to know when to come out when you want to stop. You weren't unconscious, but the mind otherwise had no awareness of what was going on. There are also intense states of concentration,

lots of light, lots of bliss, lots of joy, but no input from outside. The only way you're going to gain any insight from these states is when you come out of them and reflect on where you were and how you got where you are now.

There are also states of *jhāna* where sensory input is not totally cut off, but it doesn't intrude on the mind. With these states there's more of an ability to observe what's going on in the *jhāna* while you're still in it. It's a little like the first *jhāna* piggybacking on the other *jhānas*, because you can evaluate what's going on and you can see where there's stress, what you're doing that's causing the stress, and you can see how you can drop that particular activity.

When you're fully into even this sort of *jhāna*, particularly from the second one up, you're not going to be doing any thinking or evaluating at all, but you can pull back a little bit without destroying that state, because it's not totally dependent on blocking off all outside input. The *jhāna* actually creates physiological changes in the body—changes in the breath, changes in the blood flow—and those remain even as you pull the mind slightly up from its object. You can then apply the Four Noble Truths to your experience of the *jhāna*—comprehending even the most subtle levels of stress and abandoning their cause. This is how you get from one *jhāna* to the next, but there will also come a point where you finally drop the last remaining bit of intention in the *jhāna*. When it's not replaced by any new intention, that's when the mind opens up into the deathless.

RS: The way you're describing it, insight arises while in *jhāna*, rather than the *Visuddhimagga* style, where you have to come out of the *jhāna* in order to reflect back on its inherently unsatisfying qualities.

AT: The Canon contains lots of passages describing people who can analyze a particular state of *jhāna* while they're in it. A couple of these include *Ānguttara* 4:126 and 9:36, along with *Majjhima* 52 and 121. The most explicit example is *Majjhima* 111, which describes how *Sāriputta* analyzed the many mental factors present in *jhāna* while he was experiencing each level. Only when he reached the *arūppas* of nothingness and neither-perception-nor-non-perception did he have to withdraw from those states before reflecting on them.

You can use any of the *jhānas* as a basis for awakening, from the first on up. In each case you analyze the *jhāna* in terms of the five aggregates, which you come to see as stressful, not-self, impermanent, a dart, a cancer, an emptiness, and on down the line. In this way you develop a sense of dispassion and disenchantment for even the ease of *jhāna*. That's how you let go.

For the purpose of getting into *jhāna*, though, the most interesting passages in the Canon about *jhāna* are the analogies: the bath man, the lotuses in the lake, the man covered with white cloth.

RS: They're very beautiful.

AT: And very precise. Kneading the moisture through the bath powder is like working comfort and rapture through the body in the first *jhāna*. In the second, you don't have to work things through anymore; they spread automatically, like the spring water in the lake. In the third *jhāna*, the movement stops as the rapture gives way simply to a fully saturated sense of stillness and pleasure. And then in the fourth, even the coolness of the water subsides, and you're left with the brightness of your awareness. The Buddha chose his analogies well.

RS: It seems clear that you don't separate the path of practice into two paths of samatha and vipassanā.

AT: The Buddha never told people to "do" vipassanā. He said do *jhāna*, and he described vipassanā and samatha not as two separate techniques but as two qualities of mind that you bring to the practice so you can get into *jhāna*. Once you've mastered *jhāna*, the *jhāna* will make your samatha and vipassanā stronger, more precise. There's no clear line between a mindfulness practice, a concentration practice, and an insight practice. Some people go more naturally toward samatha or vipassanā, but you need both.

RS: In the *Saṅgītiya Sutta*, the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, and the *Kāyagātāsati Sutta*, one is instructed to breathe in and out, experiencing the whole body. Some interpret that it is talking about experiencing the whole physical body breathing, while others say it means staying with the whole duration of the breath but the focus can be at one point.

AT: It's the whole body.

RS: Does it matter?

AT: One of the drawbacks of concentration that's too one-pointed is that you're blocking out many areas of your experience, which means that a lot of things can hide away in the areas you're blocking out. If, however, you develop more of a 360-degree awareness of the body, you're more likely to be conscious of the more peripheral events in the mind. Also, if the awareness is a whole-body awareness, it's a lot easier to maintain the state of concentration as you open your eyes and move around. Whether the concentration while moving around would be termed *jhāna*, I really don't know, but there's a continuity of mindfulness. If you have only one point that you're totally focused on, then as soon as you move from that one point, your concentration is destroyed. But if you've got the whole body as your framework and you're constantly mindful of this framework, events can come through and go out, leaving the framework undisturbed.

RS: In the opening paragraphs of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, one of the instructions for beginning practice is a phrase typically translated as "having put aside covetousness and grief of the world." How would you interpret that phrase?

AT: The phrase can also mean "putting aside covetousness and grief with reference to the world." In other words, the practice doesn't begin after you've put aside covetousness for the world. The beginning steps include the process of putting it aside.

As I said earlier, I don't see any clear distinction between mindfulness practice and *jhāna* practice. There are several passages in the Canon where the Buddha talks about developing *satipaṭṭhāna* in a way that sounds like working toward and getting into the first *jhāna*. One is the case of the monk who's like an elephant who's been trapped and tied to a post, going through all the torments of being tamed. In the same way the monk has to use the body in and of itself as his frame of reference. That's the post that he's tied to, and his mind is going to rebel. When it rebels, he's told to think of an inspiring theme, something uplifting to the mind. According to the commentary, this might be the recollection of the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Sangha. Then when the mind calms down, he can stop using directed thought and evaluation with that uplifting theme and go straight into the second *jhāna*. So it would seem that everything up to that point is referring to issues in mastering the first *jhāna*.

RS: In the fourth foundation of mindfulness, one of the categories is knowing when the hindrances are there. And in the third foundation, we are instructed to know a contracted mind, and so on. So, clearly hindrances can arise and be known. It would seem to suggest that while *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is leading toward *jhāna*, putting aside covetousness for the world is not a prerequisite for beginning the practice.

AT: This is related to how you're defining your frame of reference. The grief can be there, but instead of looking at it in reference to the world, you see it just as an event of grief in and of itself. That's a very different state of mind: looking at these mental states as events arising and passing away, as opposed to viewing them in the context of any outside reference. You're changing your frame of reference in the course of doing this practice.

You could relate to the body in terms of how other people look at your body, whether it's strong enough to do the work you've got to do today, whether it's getting too old or whatever. That's looking at the body in terms of the world, whereas in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice you're looking at the body just in and of itself, with no reference to the world at all. There still may be grief and distress, but you're cutting away any reference they may have to the world so that you can maintain your focus on events in and of themselves.

RS: Do you think *jhāna* is attainable only in the context of long intensive retreats as opposed to shorter retreats? Can it be attained in daily practice?

AT: It really varies for the person.

RS: Do you think everyone has potential to attain *jhāna*?

AT: I don't see why not. But there's the question of whether everyone will be interested, or will put in the necessary effort. We all have the potential for following the path, but even the Buddha himself never answered the question of whether everyone is going to follow it.

RS: Since some people are more naturally adept at getting concentrated, and some less, do you teach the same way about working with the breath in both cases or do you tailor your teaching for those who aren't naturally going to get that concentrated?

AT: Ajāan Maha Boowa makes a useful distinction between people who naturally find it very easy to get the mind into concentration, and others

who have to analyze their way in. With this latter group, if they don't really understand what's going on in their minds, they're not able to let go. And for those sorts of people I would encourage analyzing the breath, looking at how they're conceiving the breath, their perceptions of the breath, and how their perceptions shape the process of breathing. That may sound like a lot of mental activity, but it connects them with the breath because it makes them curious about the breath and the breathing process. They're not going to connect with anything unless they understand it and it captures their imagination. But then there are people who are happy just to sit with the breath and be very quiet. So you have to tailor your instructions to the individual.

For those who find it easy to get very concentrated, the danger is that they haven't had to work for it, and so it's not really a skill. They'll have days when, seemingly for no reason at all, they can't do it. If they haven't figured out the ins and outs of their minds, they can feel totally lost on those days. These are also the people who tend not to analyze things very much, and they have to be pushed—sometimes against their will—to ask the questions that will give them more insight into what they're doing.

RS: In the first jhāna are there body sensations?

AT: Oh yes, yes. In fact, there are body sensations in all four rūpa jhānas. As it says in Majjhima 44, the four frames of reference (*saripaṭṭhānas*) are the nimitta, or theme, of right concentration. One of those frames is the body in and of itself. If there weren't body sensations in jhāna, how could the body be a theme of right concentration?

RS: So the breath has not disappeared in jhāna.

AT: The in-and-out breath disappears at the fourth jhāna.

RS: Sounds?

AT: Yes, there can be sounds in the background. But as I said, this point varies with some people.

RS: There is a story in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of the Buddha sitting in meditation while five hundred carts go by and he has no experience of it.

AT: He was in a very pure form of an āruppa—a state of formlessness. There's a story in the Vibhaṅga to the fourth Pārājika rule, where Moggallāna states that he can hear sounds while in the imperturbable

states—which isn't defined in that context, but in other contexts means either the āruppas or the āruppas plus the fourth jhāna. Other monks get upset when he says this, feeling that he's making a false claim—which is why the story falls under that rule—and so they take the matter to the Buddha. He states that Moggallāna's attainment is impure. Now, notice he didn't say that Moggallāna hadn't attained those states, simply that his attainment wasn't as pure as it could have been. And as we all know, Moggallāna was an arahant, so whatever his jhāna attainment, it was good enough for full awakening. And if it was good enough for him . . .

RS: Are there thoughts in the first jhāna?

AT: There's the directed thought and evaluation connected with the breath itself—evaluating how comfortable it is, and how to spread whatever sense of comfort is there—but these thoughts aren't very wordy or discursive.

RS: In relation to jhāna, when the suttas use the term *kāya* ("body"), are they referring to a mental body as opposed to a physical body?

AT: In the Kāyagāsāsi Sutta, the Buddha first talks about focusing on the body in and of itself as a frame of reference, and he's obviously talking about the physical body: the breath, the thirty-two body parts, and so forth. When he then moves into instructions on jhāna, he talks about spreading the rapture, the ease through this very body. If he had meant a different body, he would have said so clearly. If you follow the people who insist that there's no experience of the physical body in jhāna, you have to assume that the Buddha was a very sloppy teacher, talking about body again and again in his jhāna instructions when he actually meant "no physical body." Either that, or you have to assume that he was devious. It's like when a crafty lawyer keeps saying, "The body is too big for my client to have killed it," the jury is going to think one thing: the client is innocent. If they later catch on that he's talking about the body of evidence, they're going to think something else: the lawyer can't be trusted. I doubt that the Buddha was sloppy or devious in his meditation instructions.

RS: Some people talk about skipping jhānas. Do people do that? Do you teach that?

AT: It is possible for people to go straight down to the fourth jhāna, but it may be that they're going very quickly through one, two, and three

first—as in Ajaan Chah's image of a person falling out of a tree. You go past each branch, but too quickly for any one branch to stand out in your awareness. Being able to zero in on a particular *jhāna* like that is a great talent if you can develop it. You can tap into that whenever you need it. But I don't put my students through *jhāna* hoops.

RS: As people progress through the *jhānas*, do the grosser levels drop away on their own or does the meditator have to do something specific to move to the next stage?

AT: It can happen either way. By pulling slightly out of where you are, you can survey what's going on. You can't do this analysis at all unless you pull out a little bit, and it's a very basic, almost preverbal level of surveillance. You see where there's disturbance and where there's not, and if you see that the way you're relating to your object is causing the disturbance, you change that. That's how you can go intentionally to another level. In other cases, all you have to do is focus in, and the extraneous factors simply fall away.

RS: In the West now, there are a variety of *jhāna* systems being taught.

AT: I always found the most useful way of avoiding the *jhāna* wars is that, when you get into a state of concentration, whatever it is, you master it and then you analyze it. Is there any disturbance here? Then you look to see what the mind is doing around its object. If you see any kind of disturbance, in terms either of the state of concentration itself or of the defilements surrounding that state, then, if you're an honest person, you have to admit to yourself, "Okay, there's still more work to be done." And regardless of whether you're in *jhāna* or out of *jhāna*, if you approach every state of concentration this way, in full honesty, then you're going to get through it and eventually arrive at awakening. But honesty is the important part of the equation.

People like to compare their *jhānas*, which is not healthy for their practice: "My *jhāna* is better than your *jhāna*." "I'm in the third *jhāna* now. How about you?" As the Buddha said, this is the sign of a person of no integrity. So it doesn't really matter which *jhāna* you're in. You have to know what to do with whatever state of concentration you've got. If you're using it for the purpose of understanding stress and abandoning the cause of stress, then you're using it for the right purpose.

THANISSARO BHIKKHU (Ajaan Geoff) was ordained in Thailand in 1976, and studied under Ajaan Fuang Jotiko, a master of the Thai forest tradition, until the latter's death in 1986. In 1991, he returned to the U.S. to help found Metra Forest Monastery in northern San Diego County, where he is currently abbot. He has translated many meditation guides from the teachings of the forest tradition, and is the author of several books, including *The Wings to Awakening*, *The Mind Like Fire Unbound*, *The Paradox of Becoming*, *Meditations*, *Meditations*², and *Meditations*³.