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Dhyana

An introductory study of the *jhānas* and spiritual liberation
An essay by Piya Tan ©2004

1 Significance of dhyana

1.1 A BRIEF HISTORICAL COMMENT. Dhyana is as old as Buddhism itself, probably older. The Pali form of the term is *jhāna*, but as the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, it has found its way into Chinese as *chan*, into Korean as *seon* (*sōn*), into Japanese as *zen*, and into Vietnamese as *thiền*. The word *dhyāna/jhāna* probably, at least in pre-Buddhist and early Buddhist times, means “meditation,” that is, a sustained mental discipline that keeps the mind focussed.

Dhyana (P *jhāna*; Skt *dhyāna*) is a meditative state of profound single-minded stillness, clarity and profound transpersonal or extrasensory bliss. It is mentioned and explained in the early Buddhist scripture and its Chinese parallel, the Āgamas, and post-canonical Theravāda literature. Discourses such as **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) describe how after the five mental hindrances¹ are overcome, the four dhyanas arise, followed by various superknowledges.²

Martin T Adam, in a paper on Kamalaśīla’s views on meditation in his *Bhāvanākramas*, proposes a useful differentiation between the terms “meditation” (which he uses for *bhāvanā*) and “cultivation” (for *jhāna*). According to Kamalaśīla, says Adam, only “meditation,” as a concept-based exercise, can bring insight wisdom, while “cultivation” brings about non-conceptual dhyana, bereft of thought, as such, incapable of realizing wisdom. While the former is the actual *practice*, the latter is only a meditative state.³

Adam’s paper is rather technical, useful mainly to the specialist and researcher. My interest in quoting his paper is mainly semantic, that is, a meaningful use of words. By way of a historical criticism, the terms *meditation* and *cultivation* are useful in what I wish to express in this section (to which I limit such definitions). In everyday English, when we talk of “meditation,” it usually refers to some sort of *technique* of raising awareness. Such an exercise is dependent on words and concepts, or even rituals in some cases.

“Cultivation,” on the other hand, comprises exercises that prepare the mind for an altered state of consciousness, or at least some level of mental concentration or samadhi. The cultivation exercises may be verbal or conceptual initially, but they are phased out as the mind calms and clears itself. When we properly execute such an exercise, we will be capable of letting go of all sense-experiences (for the duration of the exercise) and blissfully experience the mind all by itself. Such an experience is utterly transverbal and non-conceptual, and ineffably blissful. This is traditionally known as dhyana (P *jhāna*).

Interestingly, in the Buddhism that grew after the Buddha, for various reasons that are worth examining, apparently did not inherit or rejected the *jhāna* tradition, commonly described and promoted by the Buddha himself in the early Buddhist texts. The Buddhist meditation tradition that flowered in China, for example, became a culturally distinct *meditation* system with its gong’an (Jap koan), formalism (like ap-

¹ The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*) are: (1) sensual lust (*kāma-c, chanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca, kukkucca*), (4) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*): see **Mental Hindrances** (SD 32), esp *Nīvaraṇa* = SD 32.1, & **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55 = SD 3.12). Cf **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39.13/1:274); see also **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.13 @ SD 13.2); **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.36 = SD 13.3) on how to deal with the hindrances in one’s meditation; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.68/1:71) = SD 8.10.

² D 2.77-100/1:73-85 = SD 8.10. The 6 superknowledges (*cha-ḷ-abhiñña*) are: (1) psychic powers (*iddhi, vidhā*); (2) clairaudience or the “divine ear” (*dibba, sota*); (3) telepathy or mind-reading (*parassa ceto, pariya, ñāṇa*); (4) retrocognition or the knowledge recollection of past lives (*pubbe, nivāsānussati, ñāṇa*); (5) clairvoyance or the “divine eye” (*dibba, cakkhu*) or knowledge of the passing-away and re-appearance of beings, faring according to their karma (*cutūpapāta yathā, kammūpaga, ñāṇa*); and (6) the knowledge of the destruction of mental influxes (*āsava-k, khaya, -ñāṇa*). The last is the most important, as it is direct knowledge, and refers to arhathood. See **Kevaladḍha S** (D 11) @ SD 1.7 (1).

³ Martin T Adam, “Two concepts of meditation and three kinds of wisdom in Kamalaśīla’s *Bhāvanākramas*: A problem of translation.” *Buddhist Studies Review* 23,1 2006:71-92.

propriate postures, gestures and gait) and rituals (such as using the “fragrant stick” to ritually hit a meditator out of his drowsiness). The Indian *jhāna* and *dhyāna* had become sinicized and institutionalized as *chan*, that continued to blossom as the Korean *seon* (*sōn*), the Japanese *zen*, and the Vietnamese *thiền*.

If we go by a documented history of Chan Buddhism and its descendents, we see it highlighted by attempts to denigrate, even expel, the “Indian” system of “gradual progress,” and to turn to the “sudden awakening” using approved methods of the school or teacher we subscribe to.⁴ Ironically, despite claims by such systems of not going by the sacred books (“a transmission outside the scripture”), their meditation exercises apparently attract mostly intellectuals, for whom they seem more likely to work. This may explain why Zen was one of the earliest forms of Buddhism to find a footing in the intellectual west, and is less popular amongst the more faith-bound and religious orientals.⁵ [3.2]

However, with the current availability of early Buddhist scriptures both in their original texts and reliable translations, most schools and groups of Buddhism today, including Zen, as a rule, see the wisdom in augmenting early Buddhist teachings and meditation methods to their traditional practices.⁶

1.2 THE BUDDHA AND DHYANA. The Buddha himself experiences dhyana, as described in the early texts, during his own quest for awakening. He is recorded in the suttas as constantly exhorting his followers, monastic and lay alike, to cultivate dhyana as a means of awakening to liberation. The Buddha’s best known instructions on the attaining of dhyana are recorded in such discourses as **the Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118).⁷ **The Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65) records the Buddha as comparing the noble eightfold path culminating in right concentration, namely, the four dhyanas, to “an ancient path, an ancient road travelled by the fully self-awakened buddhas of the past” that he has re-discovered (S 12.65/2:105-107).⁸

The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) records how just before his passing away, the Buddha enters the nine “successive attainments” in direct and reverse order, and finally passing utterly away after rising

⁴ See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b, esp (40b.5), “Transmission outside the scriptures.”

⁵ On the possibility of intellectualism (meditator monks vs scholar monks) in early Buddhism, see **Mahā Cunda S** (A 6.46/3:355 f) = SD 4.6.

⁶ **Robert Buswell, Jr**, eg, speaks from his experience, thus: “Sōn monastic life in modern Korea suggests not. Most Korean monks training in the meditating hall have extensive knowledge of Buddhist doctrine, ranging from basic “Hīnayāna” and Mahāyāna sūtras, to theoretical treatises on Sōn praxis and collections of Sōn lore. Most begin their meditation training only *after* they were steeped in the basic teachings of Buddhism... [A]s one monk told me, an infant must learn to crawl before it tries to walk, and so too must monks study before they begin to meditate.” (1992: 217)

⁷ M 118/3:77-88 = SD 7.13. Other discourses that feature dhyanas incl: **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1/1:1-46), **Sāmañña,-phala S** (D 2.77-84/1:73-76), **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.6.8+9/2:156, the 9 attainments); **Bhaya,bherava S** (M 4.23-26/1:21 f), **Dve,dhā Vitakka S** (M 19.14-17/1:117), **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36.35-38/1:247 f), **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43.18-20/1:294 f), **Cūḷa Dhamma Samādān S** (M 45.7/1:309), **Kandaraka S** (M 51.20-23/1:347), **Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 64.10-12/1:436), **Bhaddāli S** (M 65.17/1:441), **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66.26-25/1:455), **Sandaka S** (M 76.43-46/1:521 f), **Mahā Sakul’udāyi S** (M 77.22-28/2:12-17, incl 8 liberations & kasina), **Samaṇa,-maṇḍika S** (M 78.12-13/2:27 f), **Cūḷa Sakul’udāyi S** (M 79.38-40/2:38), **Ghoṭa,mukha S** (M 94.22-25/2:161), **Saṅgāra S** (M 100.35-38/2:212), **Deva,daha S** (M 101.38-41/2:226), **Sunakkhatta S** (M 105.10-17/2:254-256, on the imperturbables), **Gaṇaka Moggallāna S** (M 107.10/3:4), **Gopaka Moggallāna S** (M 108.17/3:11), **Anupada S** (M 111/3:25-29, comprehensive listing), **Cha-b,bisodhana S** (M 112.18/3:36), **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119.18-21/-3:92-95), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122.4-13/3:110-114, on the attainments and mindfulness), **Danta,bhūmi S** (M 125.-25/3:136), **Uddesa Vibhaṅga S** (M 138.12-19/3:226 f), **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139.8/3:233), **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141.31/3:252, def of right concentration); **Pañcāla,caṇḍa S** (S 2.7/1:48*), **Candimasa S** (S 2.11/1:52*), **Nandana S** (S 2.148/1:1:63*), **Parinibbāna S** (S 6.15/1:158, the 8 attainments); **Jhānābhīṇṇā S** (S 16.9/2:210-212), **Kolita S** (S 21.1/2:273, 2nd dhyana), **Sāriputta Saṃy** (S 28.1-9/3:235-238, the 9 attainments), **Raho,gataka S** (S 36.11/-4:216-218), **Pañcak’āṅga S** (S 36.19/4:225-228), **Nirāmisa S** (S 36.31/4:236 f), **Moggallāna Saṃy** (S 40.1-9/4:-263-269, the 9 attainments), **Daṭṭhabba S** (S 48.8/5:196), **Vibhaṅga S 2** (S 48.10/5:198), **Uppatika S** (S 48.40/5:-213-216, 4 dhyanas & cessation), **Jhāna Vimokkha S** (S 52.21/5:305), **Gaṅga Peyyāla** (S 53.1-12/5:307 f), **Dīpōpama S** (S 54.8/5:318 f); **Eka,dhamma Vagga** (A 1.16/1:39), **Bhāvanā Bala S** (A 2.2.3/1:53).

⁸ See further **The Buddha discovers dhyana** (SD 33.1).

from the fourth dhyana.⁹ There are two possible related explanations why the Buddha passes away in the 4th dhyana rather than in any other meditative plane.) The Buddha still has a physical body, and the formless dhyanas do not provide any avenue out of samsara, serving only as highest states of meditative bliss *within* samsara. Hence, we see the pre-eminence of the four form dhyanas for the Buddhists.¹⁰

2 The Buddha discovered dhyana

The suttas, as we noted [1], often speak of four dhyanas (*jhānā*), or more specifically, the four form dhyanas (*rūpa-j, jhāna*).¹¹ These states of bliss and focus are attained through full meditative concentration (*appanā samādhi*), during which there is a complete, though temporary, suspension of the fivefold sense-activity and the five mental hindrances [4]. The first dhyana is historically important because, as recorded in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), the child Siddhattha attained it by watching the breath at the tender age of 7, meditating under the rose-apple tree during the first-ploughing,¹² and this experience would later point the way toward the Bodhisattva’s awakening.

I thought thus, “I recall that (during the first-ploughing) when my father the Sakya was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and dwelt in the first dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, zest and joy born of seclusion. Could that be the path to awakening?”

Then following on that memory,¹³ I realized, “That *is* the path to awakening!” (M 36.31/1:246)

The Buddha-to-be discovered dhyana. This remarkable event is alluded to in two places in the Nikāyas—both called **Pañcala,caṇḍa Sutta**—in a stanza spoken by the devaputra Pañcala,caṇḍa:

In the midst of confines, the sage
Of vast wisdom has found the opening—
The Buddha who has awakened to [discovered] dhyana,
The lone lordly bull, the sage.¹⁴ (A 9.42.1/4:449)

Indeed, Pañcāla,caṇḍa, even in the midst of confines [the household life],
They find the Dharma for attaining nirvana—
Those who have gained mindfulness,

⁹ D 16.6.8+9/2:156 = SD 9. These 9 stages, comprising the 4 dhyanas (*jhāna*), the 4 formless attainments (*samāpatti*) and the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*), are known as “the 9 successive abodes” (*anupubba, vihāra*) (D 3:265, 290 (cf 2:156); A 4:410, 414; S 2:216, 222; U 78; Pm 1.5, 2.30; Miln 176). They are also called “the 9 successive cessations” (*anupubba, nirodha*) (D 33.3.2(6)/3:266, 290; A 9.31/ 4:409, 456; Pm 1.35). **(Anupubba) Vihāra S 2** calls them “the successive attainments” (*anupubba, samāpatti*) (A 9.33/4:410-414). On “the progressive cessation of formations” (*anupubba, saṅkhārānaṃ nirodho*), see **Raho, gata S** (S 36.11/4:217) = SD 33.6.

¹⁰ I have asked a number of leading forest monks, but they humbly admit that they do not know the reason for the attainment-sequence in which the Buddha passes away. For Buddhaghosa’s views, see DA 594 f = Yang-Gu AN (tr), *The Buddha’s Last Days*, 2003:185-187.

¹¹ The 4 formless meditative states (*ārūpa*) are properly called “formless attainments” (*arūpa, samāpatti*), or simply as “attainments” (*samāpatti*). As planes of existence, they are called “formless spheres” (*arūp’āyatana*) or “formless worlds” (*arūpa, loka*).

¹² The first-ploughing, that is, the rite of the first sowing, *vappa, maṅgala* (MA 2:290; J 1:57). On this first dhyana episode (M 36.31 f/1:246 f), cf Chinese version, T1428.781a4-11.

¹³ That is, regarding the mindfulness of the in-and-out-breathing (MA 2:291).

¹⁴ *Sambādhe gatam okāsaṃ, avudā bhūri.medhaso | yo jhānam abujjhi buddho, paṭilīna, nisabho munī ti*. For *abujjhi* here, S (PTS ed) has vl *abuddhi* (with no change in meaning). S:B tr: “The one of broad wisdom has indeed found | The opening in the midst of confinement, | The Buddha who discovered jhāna | The chief bull, aloof (from the herd), the sage.” See S:B 386 n151.

Those rightly well-concentrated (in mind).¹⁵ (S 2.1.7/1:48)

The stanza, recorded in **the Pañcala,caṇḍa Sutta** (S 2.1.7), is first spoken by the devaputra Pañcala,caṇḍa before the Buddha himself, and in **the (Ānanda) Pañcala(caṇḍa) Sutta** (A 9.42), Ānanda is recorded as giving a full explanation of it to the monk Udāyī (A 9.42/4:449-451).¹⁶

3 Definition of *jhāna*

3.1 THE GRAMMAR OF DHYANA. The Sanskrit cognate of *jhāna* is *dhyāna*,¹⁷ and its Pali verb is *jhāyati*, of which there are three meanings: (1) to think, meditate; (2) to search; (3) to burn.¹⁸ **The Samanta-pāsādikā** (the Vinaya Commentary) defines *jhāna* as follows (abridged):

<i>Iminā yogino jhāyanti ti pi jhānaṃ,</i>	By this, yogis [meditators] think/meditate, as such it is dhyana, or
<i>jhāyati upanijjhāyati ti jhānaṃ,</i>	“to think,” that is, “to think closely over (an object)” is dhyana...
<i>Paccanīka,dhamme jhāpeti ti jhānaṃ,</i>	“to burn opposing states” is dhyana.
<i>Paccanīka,dhamme ḍahati, gocaraṃ</i> <i>vā cinteti ti attho,</i>	The meaning is “to burn opposing qualities,” or “to think over something suitable (<i>go,cara</i>).” Hence, “thinking closely over” is its characteristic.

(VA 145 f)

By way of *denotation* (direct meaning), *jhāna* means meditation or contemplation, and also the stages of meditation; as *connotation* (extended meaning), it includes the sense of “burning,” that is, of destroying the mental defilements. Here, we shall focus on the first meaning.

The verb form *jhāyati* and its more common inflections are found throughout the five Nikāyas, sometimes in combination with its noun form, *jhāna*. Let us examine some of these occurrences and analyze the usage of *jhāna* and a few of its key inflections:

<i>jhānaṃ jhāyati</i> (“he meditated” or “he attained dhyana”)	D 19/2:237-239 ×6;
<i>karuṇaṃ jhānaṃ jhāyati</i> (“he meditated on compassion”)	D 19.43/2:239;
<i>jhānaṃ jhāyitum</i> (“for the attaining of dhyana”)	D 19.42/2:239;
<i>jhānaṃ...ajhāyato</i> (“meditation/dhyana”... “without meditation/dhyana”)	Dh 372;

¹⁵ Lines cd: *Ye satim paccalattamsu sammā te susamāhitā ti. Paccalattamsu* (also *paccaladdhamsu*) is past 3 pl of *paṭilabhati*.

¹⁶ For a detailed study, see **The Buddha discovers dhyana** (SD 33.1).

¹⁷ Most good dictionaries like the Oxford English Dictionary and the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary have “dhyana.” Since this is an accepted English word, it should be used in translations. Although some may argue that there could be problem of meaning, it is important to understand that meaning is that ultimately speakers and audience give to them. Dictionaries only record such meanings and usages that were current, but meanings and usages change as the need and trend arise. Although some Buddhist terms may be used untranslated (such as Nibbāna, saṅkhāra, and dhamma), they are contextual and understood only by the specialist. If the ordinary reader is to understand the Buddhist texts, the language should be more reader-friendly.

¹⁸ The Sanskrit cognate of *jhāna* is *dhyāna*, of which there are 3 roots:

√**DHĪ**, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1a), to meditate, contemplate, think upon, brood over (with acc) (D 2:237; S 1:25, 57; A 5:323 f (+ *pa~*, *ni~*, *ava~*); Sn 165, 221, 425, 709, 818 (= Nm 149 *pa~*, *ni~*, *ava~*); Dh 27, 371, 395; J 1:67, 410; Vv 50.12; Pv 4.16.6.

√**DHYĀ**, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1b), to search for, hunt after.

√**KṢA(Y)** & √**KṢĪ**, to burn → Skt *kṣāyati*; P *jhāyati* (2), to burn, to be on fire; fig to be consumed, to waste away, to dry up (D 1:50 = *jāleti* DA 1:151); caus *jhāpeti* (VvA 38 = *jhāyati* 1a: to destroy by means of *jhāna*).

See Gunaratana 1985:7 f.

<i>appānakam jhānam jhāyeyyam</i> (“if (I) were to attain the breathless meditation”)	M 36.20-25/1:243 f, 85/2:93 ×4, 100/2:212;
<i>karuṇam jhāyeyyam</i> (“If (I) were to meditate on compassion” ×5)	D 19/2:237;
<i>jhāyī jhāna, ratā</i> (“meditators delighting in meditation/dhyana”)	D 21.4/2:265; Sn 1009; Ap 3.1.39/1:18, 3.1.165/1:26, 3.1.227/1:30;
<i>jhāna-j, jhāyana, ratāyo</i> (“delighting in meditation”)	Thī 401.

The most famous usage of *jhāyati* as meaning “to meditate” surely must be found in Ānanda’s Thera, -gāthā, reflecting on the deaths of his senior spiritual friends:

<i>Ye purānā atītā te</i>	The old ones have passed away.
<i>navehi na sameti me</i>	I do not get on with the new ones.
<i>svajja ekova jhāyāmi</i>	Today I <u>meditate</u> all alone,
<i>vass’upeto ’va pakkhimā</i>	like a bird gone to its nest. (Tha 1036)

The above occurrences of *jhāna* or its apposite verbs, refer to the practice of *meditation*, which of course does not rule out the attaining of dhyana, depending on the ability of the meditator. However, it is *unlikely* that these usages would refer *only* to dhyana attainment. Take the Bodhisattva’s attempt at the “breathless meditation” (*appānakam jhānam jhāyeyyam*), for example, as recounted in **the Mahā Sacca-ka Sutta** (M 36), **the Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 85) and **the Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100). It is very unlikely that it is a dhyanic experience for at least two reasons: (1) he has to do this deliberately, while a dhyana experience is almost involuntary, arising from the momentum of abandoning the mental hindrances [6.0]; and (2) the Buddha states that he recalls having attained the first dhyana as a 7-year-old boy under the jambu tree after he has given up the self-mortification practices.¹⁹

Furthermore, the context for dhyana attainment is very clear, marked by verb-forms referring to the attainment of samadhi, that is, *samāpajjati*, such as *samāpajjāmi*, *samāpanno*, *upasampajja*, and their various forms, for example:

<i>jhānam samāpajjāmi</i> (“I will attain dhyana”)	A 10.85/5:157 f ×5; S 28.1-4/3:235-237 ×4;
<i>jhānam samāpajji</i> (“he attained dhyana”)	D 16/2:156 ×10; S 6.15/1:158 ×11; cf <i>samādhiṃ samāpajji</i> (“he attained samadhi”) D 6.15/1:215;
<i>jhānam samāpanno</i> (“attaining dhyana”)	S 28.2-3/3:236 ×5, 28.1-4/236 f ×4;
<i>jhānam samapannassa</i> (“of the attaining dhyana”)	M 43/1:294; S 36.11/4:217 ×10;
cf <i>samādhiṃ samāpannassa</i> (“of attaining samadhi”)	A 3.60/1:171 f ×3;
<i>jhānam upasampajja</i> (“having attained dhyana”)	D 1/1:37 f ×4, 3/1:100 ×4, 16/2:73-75 ×4; M 4/1:21 f ×4, 8/40 f ×4; S 16.9/2:211 ×8, 16.9/215 ×4, 16.12/-222, 21.1/2:273 f ×3; 45.8/5:10 ×4; A 2.2.2/1:53 ×4, 3.58/1:163 ×4, 4.38/2:41;
cf <i>samādhiṃ samāpajjitvā</i> (“having attained samadhi”)	U 29.

It should be noted is that dhyana *alone* does not bring awakening. After all, the child Bodhisattva has attained the first dhyana under the jambu tree, but does not gain any spiritual attainment. Although the two teachers—Ālāra Kālāma and Rāma—are able to reach even the formless attainments (meaning that they have mastered the form dhyanas), they have not gain nirvana. The vital point here is that the dhyana must be right concentration (*sammā samādhi*), that is, it has to be cultivated along with the other limbs of

¹⁹ **M 36.31/1:246 = SD 49.4, 85/2:93 = SD 55.2, 100.28-29/2:147 = SD 10.9.**

the noble eightfold path. In short, the practitioner must realize and understand for himself the nature of not-self, and his calm and clear mind arising out of dhyana will facilitate this realization.²⁰

3.2 DHYANA WITH AND WITHOUT *JHĀNA*. **The (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.33) contains the well-known simile of the seeds, that is, karma are like seeds that sprout or do not sprout depending on the conditions (A 3.33.2c).²¹ **The Aṅguttara Commentary** explains the second simile (of the destroyed seeds) by saying that the seeds here represent the wholesome karma and unwholesome karma. The man who burns the seeds is the meditator and the fire is the knowledge of the noble path. The burning of the seeds is like the destruction of the defilements on attaining path-knowledge. The reduction of the seeds to ashes is like when the five aggregates are cut off at the root (as in the arhat who is no longer motivated by craving). When the ashes are winnowed away in the wind or carried away by the stream, it is like when the five aggregates utterly cease (with the arhats' parinirvana), never again to arise in the cycle of life (AA 2:223).

The abstract noun *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna*), as such, originally meant “meditation, mental cultivation” and it is in this sense that the term is transmitted into Chinese (*chán*), Korean (*sōn*, *seon*), Japanese (*zen*) and Vietnamese (*thiền*). Such being the case, a good modern word for the Pali term *jhāna* would be the anglicized Sanskrit “dhyana,” which is also found in better dictionaries. However, historically, we need to keep in mind that traditional Chan and its offsprings, generally rejected the Indian Hīnayāna *dhyāna* system, which means that strictly speaking, they are “*jhāna*-less” systems. As such, it is apt to speak of Chan and its related systems as being “dhyana without dhyana.” [1]

4 Right concentration

The importance of dhyana (*jhāna*) in early Buddhism is attested by the fact that it is placed prominently at the culmination point of the noble eightfold path, and fully defined in such texts as **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22) and **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141) thus:

And what, friends, is **right concentration** (*sammā, samādhi*)?

Here, quite detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states, a monk enters and dwells in the first dhyana, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy, born of seclusion.²²

With the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, the monk enters and dwells in the second dhyana, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy, born of concentration.²³

With the fading away of zest, the monk remains equanimous, mindful and fully aware, and experiences joy with the body. He enters and dwells in the third dhyana, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happy he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’²⁴

²⁰ See **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 30.1) = SD 24.11 Intro (1), esp (1.3). See also Analayo 2003: 75 f.

²¹ A 3.33.2c/1:135 = SD 4.14. For a comparison of the mind to *seeds*, see **Bija S** (S 22.54/3:54 f). For a poetic version of the vegetation simile, see **Selā S** (S 5.9/1:134c = v550). For a comparison of consciousness to a seed, see **Bhava S** (A 3.76/1:223 f) = SD 23.13. For a comparison of karma to seeds, see **(Kamma) Nidāna S** (A 3.33/ 1:134-136) = SD 4.14.

²² *Vivicc’eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi sa, vitakkaṃ sa, vicāraṃ viveka, jaṃ pīti, sukhaṃ paṭhama-j, jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

²³ *Vitakka, vicārānaṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasadānaṃ cetaso ekodi, bhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhi, jaṃ pīti, sukhaṃ dutiya-j, jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṅhi, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (thinking and discursion, *vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur. (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech: see **Kolita S** (S 21.1/2:273 f) = SD 24.12b & **Dutiya Jhāna S** (S 40.2/4:263 f) = SD 24.12a. In **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 26.4/1:161) = SD 1.11, the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate).

With the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain, and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure, attains and dwells in **the fourth dhyana** that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.²⁵

This, friends, is called right concentration.

(D 22.21/2:313 f, M 141.31/3:252; also D 2.75-81/1:73-75, M 27.19-22/1:181 f)

It is clear from the statement—“quite detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states”—in the above definition of right concentration that before dhyana can be attained, one has to overcome the five mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇā*), namely, sensual lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and spiritual doubt.²⁶

The well known stock phrase *ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā, domanassam* (having put away covetousness and displeasure in the world, he dwells exertive, fully aware, mindful...) is found in such suttas as **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22.1c/2:290) and **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10.3/1:56). The word “exertive” or “ardent” (*ātāpī*) connotes effort (*vīriya*) and “fully aware” (*sampajāno*) refers to incipient wisdom (*paññā*). The dvandva “covetousness and displeasure” (*abhijjhā, domanassa*) is a synecdoche (or short form) for the first two mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*), sensual lust and ill will, but in the early suttas, is a short form for the five hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇā*) themselves, whose removal leads to mindfulness (*sati*), mental concentration (*samādhi*) and absorption (*jhāna*).

Occasionally, the phrase, “concentrated with one-pointed mind” (*samāhitā ek’agga, cittā*)—eg **the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Salla Sutta**, (S 47.4/5:145)—shows the presence of concentration. Thus altogether four of **the five spiritual faculties** (*pañc’indriya*) are indicated here. Although faith (*saddhā*) is not mentioned here, it is implicit in the motivation behind the practice in the first place, and it is also implicit in one of the dhyana-factors of the second dhyana, “inner tranquility” (*sampasāda*) (Vbh 258), which has elements of both faith as well as peace [3]. This shows that mindfulness does not work alone, but in harmony with all the five spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*).

5 The four dhyanas

5.1 THE FIRST DHYANA. The stock passage describing **the first dhyana** (*paṭhama-j, jhāna*) is as follows:

Quite detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states, he enters and dwells in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy, born of seclusion.²⁸ (D 2.75b/1:73)

This formula both gives a description of the first dhyana and lists the dhyana-factors (*jhān’āṅga*). The descriptive part says: “quite detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states,” alluding to the overcoming of the five mental hindrances. **The Vibhaṅga** gives a list of five dhyana-factors as follows: initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), zest [joyful interest] (*pīti*), joy (*su-*

²⁴ *Pītiyā ca virāgā ca upekkhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti yan taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti, “upekkhako satimā sukha, viharā ti tatiya-j, jhānam upasampajja viharati.*

²⁵ *Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbe’va somanassa, domanassānam atthaṅgamā adukkham asukham upekkhā, sati, parisuddhiṃ catuttha-j, jhānam upasampajja viharati.* Here, **Vibhaṅga** gives 3 factors of the 4th dhyana—equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’aggatā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and 2 factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 4.183/165). See **Dhyana** = SD 8.4 (5.4).

²⁶ Respectively: *kāma-c, chanda, byāpāda, thīna, middha, uddhacca, kukkuccha, vicikicchā* (A 3:62; Vbh 378). See Gunaratana 1985:28-30.

²⁷ See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.3nn) @ SD 13.3. Gethin discusses this basic formula, 2001:47-53.

²⁸ *Vivicc’eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi sa, vitakkaṃ sa, vicāraṃ viveka, jaṃ pīti, sukhaṃ paṭhama-j, jhānam*

kha) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek'aggatā*) (Vbh 257). All the ancient Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit traditions agree on these five dhyana-factors.²⁹

The dvandva *pīti,sukha* is of special significance to the first and second dhyanas. Technically, *pīti* or zest is delight through seeing the object desired, while *sukha* or joy [happiness] refers to actually enjoying the flavour that has been obtained (VA 145,11-12). Clearly, the difference is that while the former is a relatively excited mental state (*cetaso ubbilāvitā*), the latter is more calm and peaceful.³⁰

The state referred to by the phrase “born of seclusion” (*viveka,ja*) is called “one-pointedness of mind” by the Vibhaṅga. However, it is important to note that the Sutta formula does *not* mention “one-pointedness of the mind” (*cittassa ekaggatā*) or “concentration” (*samādhi*). Buddhaghosa, however, argues that it should be a part of the first dhyana *simply because the Vibhaṅga says so* (Vism 147). The reason that one-pointedness of the mind is not mentioned in the canonical formula is because of the presence of “initial application and sustained application” (*vitakka,vicāra*), a kind of subdued mental chatter and thinking—which prevent any real mental concentration.³¹ Only the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and later works like the Abhidhammattha,saṅgaha, and the Sanskrit works, Abhidharma,samuccaya and Abhidharma,kośa regard “one-pointedness of mind” as a factor of the first dhyana, but there is no evidence whatsoever in the Pali Canon to support this view.³²

5.2 THE SECOND DHYANA. True one-pointedness of mind arises only in the second dhyana, when applied and sustained applications are suppressed. This is clear from the stock formula for **the second dhyana** (*dutiya-j,jhāna*):

With the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he enters and dwells in **the second dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy born of concentration.³³ (D 2.77/1:74 f)

“Oneness of mind” (*cetaso ekodi,bhāvaṃ*) and “born of concentration” (*samādhi,jaṃ*) clearly describes the second dhyana. In place of “born of seclusion” (*viveka,jaṃ*) of the first dhyana, the second dhyana has “born of concentration,” which clearly shows that *viveka,ja* is used for the first dhyana because *samādhi,ja* does not apply there.

This formula, too, gives both a description of the second dhyana, and its four dhyana-factors, which, according to **the Vibhaṅga Sutta** analysis are: inner tranquillity (*sampasāda*),³⁴ zest (*pīti*), joy (*sukha*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek'aggatā*) (Vbh 258, 263). The **Vibhaṅga** Abhidhamma analysis gives three dhyana-factors: zest, joy, one-pointedness of mind (Vbh 263).³⁵ As such, it appears as if we have here *two different kinds of second dhyana*. **The Visuddhi,magga** attempts to clarify this confusion, using the factors of the first dhyana as an example:

²⁹ For a comparative study of dhyanas across the early Buddhist schools, see Rahula 1978:101-109 (ch 10).

³⁰ See Cousins 1973: 122.

³¹ Asaṅga in his **Abhidharma,samuccaya**, says that both initial and sustained applications are “mental chatter” (*mano,jalpa*): while initial application is “mental chatter that seeks” (*paryeṣaka mano,jalpa*), sustained application is “mental chatter that reviews” (*pratyavekṣaka mano,jalpa*) (Abhds 10). Cf **Visuddhi,magga**: The first dhyana is disturbed by initial application and sustained application, like water disturbed by ripples and wavelets (Vism 4.144/156 f). See Rahula 1978:103 f.

³² For a study of the dhyana parables, see **Myth in Buddhism** = SD 36.1(2.1).

³³ *Vitakka,vicāraṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasadānaṃ cetaso ekodi,bhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhi,jaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ dutiya-j,jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati*. See §4 n under 2nd dhyana.

³⁴ *Sampasādana* here has 2 connotations: “faith” in the sense of trust or conviction, and “tranquillity” in the sense of inner peace. See Vbh 168 & Vism 4.144 f/156 f; also Gunaratana 1985:83.

³⁵ How the 4 dhyanas become 5 is explained in **Visuddhi,magga**: “What is second in the fourfold method, by splitting them into two, becomes second and third in the Fivefold Method. The third and fourth here (in the fourfold method) become fourth and fifth there (in the Fivefold Method). The first is the same in both methods” (Vism 4.202-/169). See Rahula 1978:102.

When these five factors (of the first dhyana) have arisen, it is said that dhyana has arisen. Hence these are called its five constituent factors. Therefore, it should not be considered that there is another thing called “dhyana” which made up of them. (Vism 4.107/146)

5.3 THE THIRD DHYANA. The third dhyana (*tatiya-j,jhāna*) is described in this stock formula:

With the fading away of zest, he dwells equanimous, mindful and fully aware, and experiences joy with the body. He enters and dwells in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.”³⁶ (D 2.79/1:75)

The phrase, “with the fading away of zest” (*pītiyā ca virāga*), shows that the zest (joyful interest) of the second dhyana is suppressed here. From the remaining words of the passage, we can deduce the following four dhyana-factors of the third dhyana: equanimity (*upekhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), full awareness (*sampajāna*), and joy (*sukha*). Although there is no word in the formula indicating “one-pointedness of mind,” we can assume its presence by virtue of its being a factor of the second dhyana. Thus **the Vibhaṅga** (like the Abhidharma, samuccaya and Abhidharma, kośa) gives five factors of the third dhyana: equanimity, mindfulness, full awareness, joy, and one-pointedness of mind (Vbh 260).

Now the question arises here whether “equanimity” (*upekkhā*) and “joy” (*sukha*) can co-exist. **The Abhidharma,kośa** explains that “equanimity” (*upekṣa*) here is the “equanimity of formations” (*saṃskārōpekṣā*) and not “equanimity of feeling” (*vedanōpekṣā*) (Abdhk 8.8b/8:148). **The Visuddhi,magga**, however, says that it is “equanimity of dhyana” (*jhān’upekhā*) (Vism 4.169 f/162). In **the (Udāyi) Nibbāna Sutta** (A 9.34), this dialogue (abridged) between the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Udāyi is instructive:

[Sāriputta:] “This nirvana, avuso, is happiness!” (*sukham idaṃ āvuso nibbānaṃ*).

[Udāyi:] “What happiness is there, avuso Sāriputta, where nothing is felt?” (*kim pan’ettha āvuso Sāriputta sukhaṃ, yad ettha n’atthi vedayitaṃ ti*).

[Sāriputta:] “Indeed, avuso, it is truly happiness where nothing is felt!” (*etad eva khv ettha āvuso sukhaṃ, yad ettha n’atthi vedayitaṃ*). (A 9.34/4:414 f)

Sāriputta’s reply has the following significance to our discussion: (1) Feeling as experienced in the unawakened state is not the same as that in the awakened state, or even in the meditative state, which in the latter is much more refined; (2) Spiritual joy is not dependent on the physical senses: true happiness is a direct inner experience of the mind.

5.4 THE FOURTH DHYANA. The stock formula for **the fourth dhyana** (*catuttha-j,jhāna*) is as follows:

With the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain—and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure—*he attains and dwells in the fourth dhyana* that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.³⁷ (D 2.81/1:75)

Here, **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) takes the fourth dhyana as having *four* conditions (*paccaya*), defined by each of the four lines above. **The Vibhaṅga**, however, summarizing these conditions, gives *three* factors of the fourth dhyana—equanimity (*upekhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’-aggatā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and two factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 168).

From the Pali formula itself, it is clear that the meditator in the fourth dhyana experiences neither pain nor pleasure, neither joy nor displeasure [grief]: he is “neutral” in feeling (physical or mental). The expres-

³⁶ *Pītiyā ca virāgā ca upekhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti yan taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti, “upekhako satimā sukha,vihārī ti tatiya-j,jhānaṃ.*

³⁷ *Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbe’va somanassa,domanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkham asukham upekkhā,sati,parisuddhiṃ catuttha-j,jhānaṃ.*

sion *upekkhā,sati,parisuddhi* is a difficult one, and can be interpreted either as a dvandva, as “the purity of equanimity and the purity of mindfulness” (as in the Abhidharma,samuccaya and the Abhidharma,kośa) or as a tatpurusha, as “the mindfulness fully purified by equanimity” (as followed here). If this is the case—taking *upekkhā,sati,parisuddhi* to mean “the mindfulness fully purified by equanimity”³⁸—then the dhyana-factor here is the “purity of mindfulness” and not the purity of equanimity itself.³⁹

5.5 Summary of dhyana-factors. In summary, we can tabulate the respective **dhyana-factors** (*jhān'-aṅga*) of the four dhyanas as follows:

	<u>initial</u> <u>application</u>	<u>sustained</u> <u>application</u>	<u>zest</u>	<u>joy</u>	<u>one-pointedness</u> <u>of mind</u>
1 st dhyana	<i>vitakka</i>	<i>vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	(<i>ek'aggatā</i>) ⁴⁰
2 nd dhyana	...	...	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ek'aggatā</i>
3 rd dhyana	...	...	...	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ek'aggatā</i>
4 th dhyana	...	...	...	...	<i>ek'aggatā</i>

Fig 5.5. The dhyana-factors

Here it is useful to note that these various sets of dhyana-factors mentioned are not the only mental phenomena present in the dhyanas. In the **Anupada Sutta** (M 111), for example, Sāriputta gives the following additional concomitants: contact, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness, desire, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention.⁴¹ The Abhidhamma gives even longer lists of concomitants. **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī**, for example, lists about 60 mental states for the first dhyana. The **Abhidhammattha,saṅgaha**, however, narrows the list down to a set of 33 distinct concomitants (Abhs: BRS 2.2-5/76-88). However, only the five mentioned in the above table are the dhyana-factors of the first dhyana because “when these have arisen, dhyana is said to have arisen” (Vism 4.107/152).⁴²

6 The five dhyana-factors

6.0 The dhyana-factors (*jhān'aṅga*),⁴³ as the term suggests, must appear all together at same time to effect a meditation dhyana. As seen from the above table, there are these five dhyana-factors:⁴⁴

- (1) initial application (*vitakka*),
- (2) sustained application (*vicāra*),
- (3) zest (*pīti*),
- (4) joy [happiness] (*sukha*), and
- (5) one-pointedness (of the mind) (*ekaggatā*).

At this point, it is useful to note Brahmavamso's “summary of the landmarks of all dhyanas”:

- (1) There is no possibility of thought;
- (2) No decision-making process is available;
- (3) There is no perception of time;

³⁸ “*Adukkham-dukkha* means that mental factor that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, neither-pain-nor-pleasure born of mind-contact that is felt, a neither-painful-nor-pleasurable feeling born of mind-contact—as such, it is called neither-pain-nor-pleasure” (*adukkham-asukhan ti yaṃ cetasikaṃ n'eva sātāṃ nāsataṃ ceto,samphassa,jaṃ aduk-kham-asukhaṃ vedayitāṃ ceto,samphassa,jā adukkham-asukhā vedanā, tena vuccati adukkham-asukhan ti*) (Vbh 271).

³⁹ See Rahula 1978:108 f; Gunaratana 1985:99.

⁴⁰ On “one-pointedness” (*ek'aggatā*) in the 1st dhyana, see §§5.1-2, 6.5.

⁴¹ M 111.4-11/3:25-27. *Phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittam chando adhimokkho viriyam sati upekkhā manasikaro.*

⁴² See Gunaratana 1985:69 f.

⁴³ *Jhān'aṅga*, also tr as absorption-factors or constituents of absorption.

⁴⁴ On how these 5 dhyana factors relate to the 4 dhyanas, see Brahmavamso, 2003:44-64 (pt 3).

- (4) Consciousness is non-dual, but only of bliss that does not move; and
 (5) The five senses are fully shut off, and only the sixth sense, the mind, is in operation.
 (“The Jhānas,” 2003:43)

As such, if during meditation, we are wondering whether it is dhyana or not, we can be sure that it is not! These features of dhyana can only be recognized after emerging from it, using reviewing mindfulness once the whole mind is on the move again. We shall examine each the dhyana factors against the background of this summary.

6.1 INITIAL APPLICATION (VITAKKA). The Pali term *vitakka* (Skt *vitarka*) means thinking or considering (and is an aspect of right thought, Vbh 257), but in meditation practice, it refers to the start of “bare attention”⁴⁵ of the mind to a single object (such as the breath in breath meditation), that is, non-judgemental awareness. This dhyana-factor is unstable during the counting (*gaṇanā*) and connecting stages (*anubandhanā*), but is fully developed during the contact (*phusanā*) or fixing stage (*thapanā*) of the breath meditation.⁴⁶ In early Buddhism, it is always paired with the second dhyana-factor, sustained application.

Although all dhyanas are states of unmoving bliss, there is, however, some movement discernible in the first dhyana, which Brahmavamso calls “the wobble.” In the first dhyana, the mind instinctively grasps at the bliss, as it is so delicious. However, because the bliss here is fuelled by letting go, the mind automatically lets go again, and the bliss grows again. It is this subtle involuntary movement which gives rise to the “initial application” of the first dhyana.⁴⁷

6.2 SUSTAINED APPLICATION (VICĀRA). The Pali term *vicāra* means examination or investigation, but in meditation terminology, it is the mind’s thorough awareness of the object (such as the breath). This factor first appears in the connecting stage of the breath meditation.

Let us consider the famous commentarial analogy of the wild calf tied to a post.⁴⁸ The calf represents the mind, the post is the breath, and the rope is mindfulness. The calf’s being tied to the post is initial application; its dashing about at the rope is sustained application.

Another well-known analogy is that of the striking of a bell or a gong—the striking action represents initial application and the reverberating sound is sustained application (Vism 4.89/142). They both go together. A further analogy is that of a man polishing a metal pot (Vism 4.91/142). The man holds the pot in his right hand and polishes it with his left. The holding of the pot is analogous of initial application and the polishing is sustained application.

In computer jargon, initial application is like clicking on an icon on the computer monitor, and sustained application is one’s attention to what appears on the screen. Another modern example is that of the driver’s braking while driving a motor car—the braking is analogous of initial application and the momentum that pushes the car on is sustained application. The two factors, therefore, function closely together.

Earlier on [6.1], we saw how the mind instinctively grasps at the bliss, and then automatically lets go again—by way of initial application—and the bliss grows again. Another way of looking at this “wobble” is the back and forth movement between involuntary grasping towards the bliss and automatic letting-go of: this is in fact the process of the dhyana factors of initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*). According to Brahmavamso, *vitakka* is the involuntary grasping of the bliss, while *vicāra* is the automatic movement back into the bliss.

While in non-meditation contexts, *vitakka* and *vicāra* may refer to “initial application” and “sustained application” respectively,

⁴⁵ This expression is borrowed from Nyanaponika, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: a handbook of mental training based on the Buddha’s way of mindfulness*. London: Rider 1962. Repr NY: Samuel Weiser 1971.

⁴⁶ These are the first 4 stages taught in **Visuddhi,magga** (Vism 8.189-197/278-280; cf VA 2:418).

⁴⁷ On *vitakka,vicāra*, see also **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.12(8.5).

⁴⁸ DA 3:762 f = MA 1:247 = PmA 2:488 f = VA 2:405 f = Vism 268 f; cf MA 2:82, 4:198. This analogy is discussed in detail in “The training of the bull” (SD 8.2).

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 sub-verbal and so don't qualify as thought. (Brahmavamso, 2003:43)

6.3 ZEST (PĪTI). In meditation language, *pīti* is joy “dissociated from sensual desire” or “joyful interest.” It is an exhilarating sense of relief that one has overcome sensual desire with such positive thoughts as “I’ve attained what was to be done!” It is an energizing joyful interest in the pleasant meditative state that arises. As such, zest is the result of “letting go” or renunciation of negative mental states. **The Visuddhi-magga** speaks of five kinds of zest (Vism 4.94-99/143 f):⁴⁹

1. “Minor zest” (*khuddaka.pīti*) which often causes horripilation (hair-raising or “goose pimples”).
2. “Momentary zest” (*khaṇika.pīti*) because it lasts only a brief moment like lightning flashes at different times.
3. “Flooding zest” (*okkantika.pīti*) because it showers and flows repeatedly throughout the body as like waves breaking on the sea-shore.
4. “Uplifting zest” (*ubbega* or *ubbeṅga.pīti*), makes one feel so light that one might actually levitate into the air!
5. “Pervading zest” (*pharaṇa.pīti*), because it floods one’s being like a torrent that fills a mountain cave.

This classification may be problematic in reference to such sutta statements about dhyana, as this one found in **the Sāmañña-phala Sutta** (D 2): “There is no part of his entire body unpervaded by zest and joy born of seclusion” [8]. Apparently, only the fifth type of zest applies fully to a dhyana state, while the earlier four types are only weak, momentary, or preliminary experiences of zest.

Many non-Buddhists, too, experience these forms of zest or “rapture” in their own prayers and rites. All these are only by-products of the first dhyana—mind-made, temporary and ultimately unsatisfactory, and cannot be owned by anyone. For Buddhist practitioner, such intense joy is not the aim of religion or meditation, but only a side-effect, albeit a pleasant one, of the spiritual quest. A Buddhist practitioner strives even beyond such joys for the higher joy of spiritual liberation!

6.4 JOY (SUKHA). Joy or happiness (*sukha*) arises because the mind is free from the mental hindrances⁵⁰ and is filled with zest. While zest is the joyful satisfaction at getting a desirable object (like winning a contest, or getting a windfall), joy [happiness] (*sukha*) is the actual experiencing of that joy (Vism 145) but the latter is usually short-lived.

Like initial application and sustained application, zest and joy, too, go together. However, there are two important points to note between the two. While zest must co-exist with joy, only joy (*sukha*) can occur by itself in meditation. Zest is a mental formation (*saṅkhāra*), while joy is a feeling (*vedanā*). Zest, being karmically potential, is the *cause* of joy.

6.5 ONE-POINTEDNESS OF THE MIND (CITTASSA EKAGGATĀ). One-pointedness of the mind⁵¹ occurs when the mind fully focusses on only one mental object (such as the breath). It follows after one has gained the fixing (*thapanā*) of the mind on the counter-image.⁵² The mind does not waver or flutter, but is

⁴⁹ On the stages of zest, see *Bhāvanā* = SD 15.12(9.3).

⁵⁰ “Mental hindrances” (*nīvaraṇā*). The 5 mental hindrances are: sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*); ill will (*vyāpāda*); sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*); restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca, kukkucca*); and spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*). See *Nīvaraṇa Saṅgārava S* (S 46.55) = SD 3.12, & **Listening beyond the ear** = SD 2.2(5).

⁵¹ Two spellings are found in the Canon (these are the only occurrences): the split cpd *cittassa ekaggatā* (D 2:217; M 1:301, 3:71; S 5:21; Pm ×48) or *cittass’ekaggatā* (A 4:40; Pm 1:97×6; Dhs ×87; Vbh ×41) and *citt’ekaggatā* (M 1:294 f, 3:25, 26×2, 27×3, 28; Pm ×6). The terms are noticeably rare in the suttas, but more common in the Abhidhamma texts.

⁵² **Counter-image** (*paṭibhāga nimitta*). The term *nimitta* (mental image or reflex) (see SD 19.17) is the image of one’s mind while one is deeply engrossed in meditation, appearing so vividly as if one were seeing it with one’s eyes. The Commentaries speak of three levels of mental images: (1) the preparatory image (*parikamma nimitta*) or

fixed and still. One-pointedness of the mind, sometimes called the “fixedness,” focussing, or resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*) of the mind, is mental concentration (*samādhi*) in the true sense of the word. It is important to note that true one-pointedness of the mind only occurs in the second dhyana onwards. [5.1]

7 What happens when we attain dhyana?

What happens when we attain dhyana, that is, when the first dhyana arises? First, we need to understand the nature of the dhyana-factors. The dhyana-factors do not act singly but work together. They are merely constituents that make up meditation dhyana like a rope with five strands or the ingredients of “five-spice powder” (popular local ingredient in cooking). When the mind experiences the first dhyana, all the five factors are present. They are all firm in themselves, but are interdependent like five poles firmly sunk together into the ground are made firmer by securing the top ends together.

When the counter-image appears, both initial application and sustained application are no longer present. They are transformed into mental concentration on the breath “at one point.” They have not really disappeared but have progressively become more subtle right up to the stage of fixing on the counter-image of the breath (usually in the form of a steady and clear bright light)—the mind has gained attainment or full concentration. Thus, when all the five dhyana-factors are present, the meditator experiences dhyana.

Although the dhyana-factors arise simultaneously, each of them has a special function. **Initial application**, that is, the mind’s initial anchoring on a single object, has a contrary character to sloth and torpor. Sensual desire, and restlessness and worry, too, cannot arise when the mind is *concentrated*. The same is true of **sustained application**: it is especially incompatible with spiritual doubt. For as long as sustained application is present, the mind dwells watchful of the meditation object.

Zest and joy are incompatible with ill will, and restlessness and remorse respectively. When people are zestful and happy, they do not harbour these negative thoughts. Though **the one-pointedness of the mind** is the special enemy of sensual desire, it effectively dispels all the hindrances. These incompatibilities (*paṭipakkhā*) can be summarized in this table.⁵³

Initial application	is incompatible with	sloth and torpor;
Sustained application	is incompatible with	spiritual doubt;
Zest and joy	are incompatible with	ill will, restlessness & remorse respectively;
One-pointedness of the mind	is incompatible with	sensual desire.

That is to say, the dhyana factors are incompatible with the mental hindrances: they cannot co-exist. Conversely, when the hindrances are overcome, dhyana arises.

The overcoming of these five hindrances by dhyana is merely a temporary suspension, called “overcoming by suppression” (*vikkhambhana, pahāna*). However, they disappear forever on one’s entering the supramundane path, thus.⁵⁴

the meditation object perceived at the start of one’s meditation. (2) When this image has reached some degree of focus, albeit still unsteady and unclear, it is called the acquired image (*uggaha nimitta*). (3) On greater mental focus, an entirely clear and immovable image arises, and becomes the counter-image (*paṭibhāga nimitta*). As soon as this image arises, the meditator has attained access (or neighbourhood) concentration (*upacāra samādhi*). It is also by means of the counter-image that one gains full concentration (*appanā samādhi*). In the **Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha**, the meditation methods in terms of these three images, are called cultivation (*bhāvanā*), ie as *parikamma bhāvanā* (preparatory cultivation), *upavacāra bhāvanā* (access cultivation) and *appanā bhāvanā* (full cultivation) respectively. (Vism 3/84-117, 4.27-31/125 f; Abhs:BRS 9.16-18/340-342; Abhs:SR 203). See **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1(9.3); BDict: *bhāvana*; also Nyanatiloka, *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, Tokyo, 1920: IV “Mental culture”:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanatiloka/wheel394.html>.

⁵³ **Visuddhi, magga** actually uses the term “incompatible” (*paṭipakkha*) and lists “concentration” first: *samādhi kāma-c, chandassa paṭipakkho, pīti vyāpādassa, vitakko thīna, middhassa, sukha uddhacca, kukkuccassa, vicāro vicikicchāyā ti [] peṭake vuttā* (Vism 114).

⁵⁴ See A 1.2, 6.21; S 46.51.

Spiritual doubt is uprooted on attaining stream-winning;
 [Once-return only destroys part of the three unwholesome roots: greed, hate, delusion.]
 Sensual desire, ill will and remorse are uprooted on attaining non-return;
 Sloth and torpor, and restlessness are uprooted on attaining arhathood.

8 Similes of the four dhyanas

8.1 The first-dhyana simile. The Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2), recounting a spiritually intense dialogue between the Buddha and the young king and parricide, Ajāta,sattu, gives a set of graphic and progressive similes for the four dhyanas (D 2:74-76). The simile for the first dhyana is given thus:⁵⁵

THE 1ST DHYANA: THE SKILLED BATHMAN. Maharajah, just as if a skilled bathman or bathman's apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without—would not drip;

even so, the monk permeates—this very body with the zest and joy born of solitude. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by zest and joy born of solitude. (D 2.76/1:74)

The two main items in the simile are water and dry bath powder (which represents respectively the mind and its meditation object). The two are kneaded together (clearing away the hindrances) in a brass basin (meditation) until they become a ball of bath powder (mental concentration). In short, this is an analogy of how the meditating mind becomes unified on a simple level.

8.2 The second-dhyana simile. The simile for the second dhyana, too, employs water in an extended and natural way:

THE 2ND DHYANA: THE CLOSED LAKE.⁵⁶ Maharajah, just as a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having *no* inflow from the east, *no* inflow from the west, *no* inflow from the north, or *no* inflow from the south, **and with the skies *not* bringing heavy rain over and again.**⁵⁷ Yet the cool spring welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, flood and fill it with cool waters—there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters.

Even so, the monk permeates this very body with the zest and joy born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by zest and joy born of concentration.

(D 2.78/1:75)

The theme of this simile is clearly that of seclusion with the ceasing of applied and sustained applications, that is, the shutting down of the brain's language centre.

The phrase in bold—“**and with the skies *not* bringing abundant rain over and again**” (*devo ca na kālena kālam sammā dhāram anupaveccheyya*)⁵⁸—needs comment. Here I have followed the majority of the traditional manuscripts, which have the *na* reading. Only the PTS and Siamese (which probably follows the Khmer text) readings omit *na*. That the negative particle *na* makes good sense here is clear. The four directions and the zenith represent *the five senses*. There is no inflow at any of the four channels and no rainfall from above. The figures here allude to the five physical senses: there is no more input from them. By the

⁵⁵ For the sake of brevity, only the parables are listed here: the “fact” passage (which precedes each parable) is nevertheless *essentially* repeated after each parable. Also omitted is the refrain, “This, too, maharajah, is a fruit of recluseship, visible here and now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime.”

⁵⁶ This is a lake without any tributaries. Technically known as *endorheic* lakes, they are bodies of water that do not flow into the sea. This class of water bodies, located in closed or endorheic watersheds where the topography prevents their drainage to the oceans, form a balance of surface inflows, evaporation and seepage, are often called terminal lakes or sink lakes.

⁵⁷ Be Ce, M 39/1:277,4 = M:Be *devo ca na kālena kālam sammā dhāram anupaveccheyya*, M:Ce *devo ca kālena kālam sammā dhāram nānupaveccheyya*. Ee Se omit *na*: *devo ca kālena kālam sammā dhāram anupaveccheyya*. See D 1:74 n6.

⁵⁸ M 39 (Ce) similarly has *devo ca kālena kālam sammā dhāram nānupaveccheyya*.

second dhyana, all the five senses (as we know them) cease to function; only the mind is beginning to be fully experienced.

With the complete shutting down of the physical senses, we become purely *mental* beings. The physical body has, as it were, ceased to exist, at least for the duration of the dhyana. We are sustained by our mental energies (the spring from the depths) and enjoying only profound bliss. This is the most artistic of experiences we can ever imagine, where calm and clarity are our constant and real sources of inspiration. We are fully thought-free, thoroughly blissful, like the lake pervaded by the cool water. So real and blissful is such beauty that we can only look on, as it were, in “noble silence,” by which this state is also known.

8.3 The third-dhyana simile. The third dhyana continues with the water imagery, adding in the lotus, the most sacred flower in Buddhism:

THE 3RD DHYANA: THE LOTUS POND. Maharajah, just as in a pond of the blue lotuses, red and white lotuses, or red lotuses,⁵⁹ born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, flooded and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water;

even so, the monk permeates this very body with the joy free from zest, so that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded with this joy free from zest. (D 2.82/1:75)

The lotus roots grow in the mud below the waters but it blooms in the bright sunshine, and the lotus flower has seeds even while growing and in bloom. The meditator is like a lotus: no matter what defilements he has, they can be removed through mental cultivation since he is able to uproot their causes. That is to say, the problems are treated not only symptomatically but radically, removed at their roots.

With the joy of meditation, the meditator breaks old negative habits and cultivates new wholesome ones. The lotuses here are submerged totally in water (the mind), since at this level, there is only the mental experience of transcendental joy with the shutdown of the five physical senses (beginning in the second dhyana).

8.4 The fourth-dhyana simile. The simile for the fourth dhyana is the shortest but the most dramatic:

THE 4TH DHYANA: THE WHITE-SHROUDED MAN. Maharajah, just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth does not extend;

even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright mind. There is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by pure, bright mind. (D 2.82/1:75 f)

The simile uses a totally different image than the previous similes: a man sitting enveloped head to foot in a clean white cloth that glows with its own light, as it were. At this point, we are truly in touch with our real self, our individuality: we really know our mind or ourself. We are in direct contact with the radiant mind (*pabhassara, citta*)—we *are* the radiant mind—completely free from mental impurities and in profound spiritual peace. It is in this connection that the Buddha declares:

Monks, this mind is radiant, and it is freed from adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].

The instructed [wise] noble disciple understands things as they really are.

⁵⁹ *uppala* (Skt *utpala*), *paduma* (*padma*) and *puṇḍarīka* respectively. This simile also found in **Kāya, gatā, sati S** (M 119.20/3:93 f) = SD 12.21. See **Āyācana S** (S 6.1) where the simile of lotuses in a pond is applied to beings of different spiritual dispositions (S 6.1/1:138) = SD 12.2.

Therefore there is mental development for the instructed noble disciple, I say!⁶⁰
(A 1.6.2/1:10; also 1.5.10/1:10)

9 Using dhyana as basis for wisdom

Dhyana is very useful even on a very mundane level: that of the unawakened meditator. There are some passages in **the Majjhima** that show how dhyana can lead to liberating insight. The method comprises two stages: first, one gets into dhyana; then, one emerges and reflects on the three characteristics—that the state is impermanent, suffering and not-self—or something similar. Of the two stages, **the Aṭṭhaka,nagara Sutta** (M 52) says:

Here, houselord, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in the first dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of seclusion.

He considers this and understands it thus: “This first dhyana is conditioned and willfully formed.⁶¹ Whatever is conditioned and willfully formed is impermanent, subject to ending.”

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the influxes.⁶² If he does not reach the destruction of influxes because of the desire for the Dharma, the delight in the Dharma,⁶³ then with the destruction of the five lower fetters,⁶⁴ he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the Pure Abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world. (M 52.4/1:351)

The Mahā Māluṅkyā Sutta (M 64), using almost the same words as the Aṭṭhaka,nagara Sutta, shows a slightly different manner of self-liberation (in this case, leading to non-return):

And what, Ānanda, is the path, the way to the abandoning of the five lower fetters?

Here, with the seclusion from the acquisitions,⁶⁵ with the abandoning of unwholesome states, with the complete tranquillization of bodily inertia,⁶⁶ *quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in the first dhyana, that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of seclusion.*

⁶⁰ *Pabhassaram idam bhikkhave cittam tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttam. Tam sutavā ariya,sāvako yathā,bhūtam pajānati. Tasmā sutavato ariya,sāvakassa citta,bhāvanā atthi ti vadāmi ti.*

⁶¹ *Abhisankhataṃ abhisañcetaṃ.* These two terms are stock indicating a conditioned state in which volition (*cetanā*) is the most important conditioning factor.

⁶² “With mental influxes,” *s’āsava = sa + āsava*, The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (i.e. either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as “taints” (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’-āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

⁶³ “The desire...the delight for the Dharma,” *dhamma,rāgena dhamma,nandiyā*. Comy says that these two terms signify strong desire (*chanda,rāga*) towards calm and insight (*samatha,vipassanā*). If one were to let go of this desire, one becomes an arhat; otherwise, one becomes a non-returner reborn in the Pure Abodes (MA 3:13).

⁶⁴ **The 10 fetters** are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyā-pāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*).

⁶⁵ “The seclusion from acquisitions” (*upadhi,viveka*). Comy glosses *upadhi* here as the five cords of sense-pleasures (MA 3:145). See M:ÑB 1268 n654.

⁶⁶ “Bodily inertia,” (*kāya,duṭṭhulla*). Comys gloss it as “bodily idleness” (*kāyālasīya*) (MA 3:145, 4:202) or “bodily unwieldiness due to food” (*bhataṃ nissāya kāyassa akammaññatā*) (VbhA 479). See M 3:151, 159.

Whatever exists by way of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, he sees those states as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as void, as not self.⁶⁷ He turns his mind away from those states⁶⁸ and directs it to the deathless element [nirvana] thus:

“This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions [attachments], the destruction of craving, dispassion [letting go of craving], cessation (of suffering), nirvana.”⁶⁹

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the influxes. If he does not reach the destruction of influxes because of the desire for the Dharma, the delight in the Dharma, then with the destruction of the five lower fetters, he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the Pure Abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world.

This is the path, the way to the abandoning of the five lower fetters.

(M 64.9/1:435 f; italicized texts are same as those of the Aṭṭhaka, nagara Sutta)

Such passages show how to cultivate “insight preceded by calm” (*samatha, pubbaṅgamā vipassanā*). Having first attained a dhyana, the meditator emerges from it and reflects on that state as having been created by conditions, especially volition. Then he notes its impermanence, and then reflects on the dhyana with insight into the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self.

10 Types of practitioners

Using the various teachings of the Suttas, the Commentaries introduce the idea of three kinds of practitioners and their respective vehicles, namely,⁷⁰

- (1) the calm [tranquillity] practitioner (*samatha, yānika*), “one whose vehicle is calmness”,
- (2) the insight practitioner (*vipassanā, yānika*), “one whose vehicle is insight”, and
- (3) the dry-insight practitioner (*sukkha, vipassaka*), “one who practises only insight.”

This commentarial threefold system is based on such canonical texts as the three (**Samatha, vipassanā**) **Samādhi Suttas** (A 9.92-94). **The Samādhi Sutta 1** (A 9.92), the shortest of the three texts, describes the three kinds of practitioners (without naming them) thus:⁷¹

Monks, there are these four persons to be found in the world. What are the four?

- (a) Here, monks, a certain person is *one who gains inner mental calm* but does not gain the higher wisdom of insight into things.

⁶⁷ Like the prec **Aṭṭhaka, nagara S** passage, this one shows the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*) on the basis of calm (*samatha*), using dhyana on which the insight-practice is based as the object of insight. The terms “impermanent” (*aniccato*) and “disintegrating” (*palokato*) here show the characteristic of impermanence; 3 terms—“alien” (*parato*), “void” (*suññato*), and “not self” (*anattato*)—show the characteristic of not-self; the remaining 6 terms—*dukkhato, rogato, gaṇḍato, sallato, aghato, ābādhato*—show the characteristic of suffering (MA 3:146).

⁶⁸ Comy: “He turns his mind away from those states” (*so tehi dhammehi cittaṃ paṭivāpeti*) from the 5 aggregates included in the dhyana, which he has seen to be marked with the 3 characteristics” (MA 3:146).

⁶⁹ The “deathless element” (*nibbāna, dhātu*) is nirvana. First, “he directs his mind to it” with the insight consciousness, having heard it praised and described as being “peaceful, sublime,” etc. Then, with the supramundane path, “he directs his mind to it” by making it an object and penetrating it as the peaceful, the sublime, etc. (MA 3:146)

⁷⁰ Eg DA 3:754; MA 1:239; AA 3:142; KhpA 182; SnA 1:277, 2:547; NmA 2:313; NcA 102; PmA 3:696; VbhA 215.

⁷¹ *Cattāro ’me bhikkhave puggalā santo saṁvijjamānā lokasmiṃ. Katame cattāro? Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo lābhī hoti ajjhataṃ ceto, samathassa na lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya. Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya na lābhī ajjhataṃ ceto, samathassa. Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo na c’eva lābhī hoti ajjhataṃ ceto, samathassa na lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya.*

Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo c’eva lābhī hoti ajjhataṃ ceto, samathassa lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya. Ime kho bhikkhave cattāro puggalā santo saṁvijjamānā lokasmin’ ti.

(b) Here, monks, a certain person is *one who gains the higher wisdom of insight into things* but does not gain inner mental calm.

(c) Here, monks, a certain person is one who *neither* gains inner mental calm nor does he gain the higher wisdom of insight into things.

(d) Here, monks, a certain person is one who *both* gains inner mental calm and gains the higher wisdom of insight into things.

These, monks, are the four persons to be found in the world. (A 9.92/2:92)

In (**Samatha, vipassanā**) **Samādhi Suttas 2-3** (A 9.93-94), the Buddha encourages the first practitioner—the one who gains inner mental calm but does not gain the higher wisdom of insight into things—that is, the calm practitioner (*samatha, yānika*)—to strive for “the higher wisdom of insight into things” (*adhi-paññā, dhamma, vipassanā*). The second practitioner—the one who gains the higher wisdom of insight into things but does not gain inner mental calm—is exhorted to strive for mental calm.

The Aṅguttara Commentary explains “mental calm” (*ceto, samatha*) as the attainment concentration, or full concentration, of mind (*appanā, citta, samādhi*)⁷² and “higher wisdom of insight into things” as the insight knowledge that discerns formations (*saṅkhāra, pariggaha, vipassanā, ñāṇa*), that is, insight into the five aggregates (AA 2:325).

The fact that individuals are capable of one attainment in the absence of the other provides a starting point for a differentiation of vehicles adapted to their differing capacities. In the end, however, all meditators have to enter upon the development of insight in order to reach the liberating path. (Gunaratana 1985:148)

The Yuganaddha Sutta (A 4.170) makes a very clear reference to the four vehicles for mental cultivation leading to arhathood, as follows:

(1) Insight preceded by calm.⁷³ When the path arises in him, he pursues it, so that the mental fetters⁷⁴ are abandoned and the latent tendencies⁷⁵ are destroyed.

(2) Calm preceded by insight.⁷⁶ When the path arises in him, he pursues it, so that the mental fetters are abandoned and the latent tendencies are destroyed.

⁷² Cf A 1:93.

⁷³ *Samatha, pubb'āṅgamāṃ vipassanāṃ*. This refers to the calmness practitioner (*samatha, yānika*), ie one who first cultivates access concentration (*upacāra, samādhi*), the dhyanas or the formless attainments, and then takes up insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. “**Access concentration**” is the concentration gained just before attaining dhyana. See MA 1:112.

⁷⁴ Mental fetters, see §7 n above.

⁷⁵ **Latent tendencies** (*anusayā*), alt trs “underlying tendencies,” “latent dispositions.” There are 7 of them: (1) sensual desire (*kāma-rāga*); (2) aversion (*paṭigha*); (3) wrong view (*dīṭṭhi*); (4) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*); (5) conceit (*māna*); (6) desire for existence (*bhava, rāga*); (7) ignorance (*avijjā*). They are also listed in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.3(12)-/3:254, 282), **Cha, chakka S** (M 148.28/3:285), **Anusaya S** (A 7.11 & 12/4:8 f) and **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). They are deeply embedded in one’s mind through past habitual acts and can only be uprooted on attaining the Path. Wrong view and spiritual doubt are eliminated at stream-winning; sensual desire and aversion, at non-return; conceit, attachment to existence and ignorance, only at arhathood. See Abhs 7.9: “The latent dispositions (*anusayā*) are defilements which ‘lie along with’ (*anusenti*) the mental process to which they belong, rising to the surface as obsessions whenever they meet with suitable conditions. The term ‘latent dispositions’ highlights the fact that the defilements are liable to arise so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane paths. Though all defilements are, in a sense, *anusayas*, the seven mentioned here are the most prominent.” (Abhs:B 268). See also Abhs:SR 172. The first 3 latent tendencies are mentioned in **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6/4:207-210) = SD 5.5. See **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18) = SD 16.3 (5).

⁷⁶ *Vipassanā, pubb'āṅgamāṃ samathāṃ*. Here the practitioner first enters access concentration (*upacāra, samādhi*) or full concentration (*appanā, samādhi*), and then takes up insight by regarding those states as impermanent, etc (MA

(3) Calm and insight coupled together.⁷⁷ When the path arises in him, he pursues it, so that the mental fetters are abandoned and the latent tendencies are destroyed.

(4) A monk's mind is seized by agitation caused by higher states of mind;⁷⁸ but there comes a time when his mind becomes internally steadied, composed, unified and concentrated. Then the path arises in him, and while he does so, the fetters are abandoned and the latent tendencies are destroyed. (A 4.170/2:156 f) = SD 41.5

11 The insight meditator

Concentration is necessary for seeing things as they really are. However, in the case of the insight meditator (*vipassanā,yānika*), there is neither access concentration nor dhyana—what concentration then can the insight meditator use? The answer is found in a type of concentration that is different from access concentration or dhyana but pertains to calm vehicle, that is, the “**momentary concentration**” (*khaṇika samādhi*). Despite its name, momentary concentration does not refer to a single moment of concentration nestling in the midst of a distracted mind.

Rather, it denotes a dynamic concentration which flows from object to object in the ever-changing flux of phenomena, retaining a constant degree of intensity and collectedness sufficient to purify the mind of the hindrances. Momentary concentration arises in the *samathayānika* yogin simultaneously with his post-*jhānic* attainment of insight, but for the *vipassanāyānika* it develops naturally and spontaneously in the course of his insight practice without his having to fix the mind upon a single exclusive object. (Gunaratana 1985:152)

The Pali Commentaries often attest to the importance of momentary concentration in the insight vehicle. The Visuddhi,magga, in its discussion of the breath meditation, for example, says:

At the actual time of insight, momentary unification of the mind arises through the penetration of the characteristics (of impermanence, and so on). (Vism 8.232/289)

The Paramattha,mañjūsā (Visuddhi,magga Commentary) defines “momentary unification of mind” (*khaṇika citt'ek'aggatā*) as concentration lasting only for a moment:

For that, too, when it occurs interruptedly on its object in a single mode and is not overcome by opposition, fixes the mind immovably, as if in absorption. (VismṬ 278 = VismṬ:Be 1:342; see Vism:Ñ 311 n63)

1:108 f). “This refers to one who by his nature first attains to insight and then, based on insight, produces concentration” (AA 3:143), ie the insight practitioner (*vipassanā,yānika*). See MA 1:112.

⁷⁷ *Samatha,vipassanā,yuganaddhanī*. Here, one enters the first dhyana and emerging from it, one applies insight to that experience, ie one sees the 5 aggregates within the dhyana (form, feeling, perceptions, formations, consciousness) as impermanent, subject to suffering and not self. Then one enters the 2nd dhyana, emerges and applies insight to it. One applies the twofold reflection to the other dhyanas as well in the same manner until the path of stream-entry, or higher, is realized.

⁷⁸ *Dhamm'uddhacca,viggahitaṃ mānasam hoti*. Comy says that the “agitation” (*uddhacca*) here refers to a reaction of the 10 “impurities of insight” (*vipassanā'nupakkilesa*) when they are wrongly taken as indicating path-attainment (AA 3:143). That is, he is distracted by any of these 10 impurities: evil conduct of body, speech and mind; sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill will, violent thoughts; thoughts about relatives, home country and reputation; thoughts about higher mental states (*dhamma,vitakka*) (Pāmsu,dhovaka S, A 3.100a.4.1/1:254) = SD 19.11. The Visuddhi,magga uses *dhamma,vitakka* (“thoughts about higher states”) to refer to the same 10 impurities (Vism 20.105-128/ 633-638). Bodhi: “It is plausible, however, that the ‘agitation caused by higher states of mind’ is mental distress brought on by eagerness to instantaneous enlightenment experience” (A:ÑB 294 n69). See the story of Bāhiya Dārucīriya in (Arahatta) Bāhiya S (U 1.10/6-9) = SD 33.7 & also the story of Anuruddha in (Anuruddha) Upakkilesa S (M 128/3:152-162) = SD 5.18.

This momentary concentration is essential for insight practice, “for there is no insight without momentary concentration”⁷⁹ (VismMh̄:Be 1:11; see Vism:Ñ 3 n4).

Momentary concentration is a fluid mental focus consisting in the continuity of mind that is uninterruptedly noticing the sequence of objects as though fixed in absorption, keeping out the mental hindrances and cultivating mental purification. “For this reason momentary concentration can be understood as implicitly included in access concentration in the standard definition of purification of mind as consisting in access and absorption” (Gunaratana 1985:154).

12 Conclusion

Dhyana is clearly an important part of spiritual training in early Buddhism, as evident from its comprising right concentration at the end of the noble eightfold path [1, 4]. Of the two principal approaches to Buddhist meditation—calm meditation (*samatha, bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā, bhāvanā*)—dhyana belongs to the category of calm meditation, but it is also a helpful tool in the cultivation of insight.

In terms of practice, the dhyanas have to be cultivated progressively beginning with the first dhyana, progressing into the second and so on. As **Brahmavamso** puts it, “each Jhāna is within the other . . .” or

To put it another way, in the simile of the four-roomed house, the rooms are concentric. Thus one does not come out from the First Jhāna to go next to the Second Jhāna. Instead, one goes deeper into the First Jhāna to go into the Second Jhāna, deeper into the Second Jhāna to get to the Third Jhāna, and deeper into the Third Jhāna to enter the Fourth Jhāna. The next level of Jhāna always lies within the present Jhāna. (2003:59)

The ascent through the dhyanas consists in the successive elimination of the coarser dhyana-factors. Once we have mastered the four dhyanas (the form absorptions), we may continue, if we wish, to refine our concentration towards attaining the four formless attainments, and so mastering the eight attainments (*aṭṭha, samāpatti*).

However, the dhyanas in themselves do not destroy the mental hindrances, the mental impurities and the latent tendencies [7-8]. The defilements are only temporarily suppressed (*vikkhambhana pahāna*) in the course of dhyana experience—this is because they are merely the mundane dhyanas. Only the supramundane dhyanas of the paths and fruits are truly liberating. The practitioners of both vehicles—the calm practitioner and the insight practitioner—experience this. The paths and fruits always occur at a level of dhyana and are thus considered as forms of dhyana. This is the dhyana of **the right concentration** factor of the noble eightfold path [4].

*No dhyana, however, is necessary for the attainment of stream-winning or once-return.*⁸⁰ The formula for right concentration apparently only implies that they must eventually attain dhyana in the course of developing the path culminating in arhathood. As non-returners have already eliminated desire and ill will, they should have no problem in entering dhyana.

Is dhyana necessary for the attainment of nirvana? It should be understood that mundane dhyana is helpful but not necessary here. Supramundane dhyana is essential for liberation, and it results from insight either alone or in combination with mundane dhyana. Although there is the possibility of the “dry-insight” arhats who reach their goal by pure insight, the early saints beginning with the Buddha himself regards the ability to attain the four dhyanas as a valuable asset of an arhat, especially by way of mastering the eight deliverances⁸¹ and the six super-knowledges.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Na hi khaṇika, samādhim vinā vipassanā sambhavati* (VismMh̄:Be 1:11).

⁸⁰ See **The layman and dhyana** = SD 8.5.

⁸¹ *Aṭṭha vimokkha* (D 15.35/2:70 f, 16.3.33/2:111 f, 34.2.1(10)/3:288; A 8.66/4:306 f). See **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.35/2:70 f) = SD 5.13.

⁸² *Cha-ḷ-abhiññā*. See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.87-98/2:87-98) = SD 8.10.

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