Introduction

1 The Jhāna Saṁyutta, the last of the 13 chapters (vagga) of Khandha Vagga (the chapter on the aggregates), is a set of 55 connected discourses on meditation (jhāna). Its first chapter and only chapter, actually a "subchapter" (vagga), the Jhāna Vagga, so that it is its alternate title. This saṁyutta is also the last of the 13 chapters (vagga) of Khandha Vagga (the chapter on the aggregates).

The Jhāna Saṁyutta is a cycle of teachings on meditation, like a wheel (cakka), listing all the possible twinning of 11 skills related to meditation. Each pair is then listed by way of 4 possibilities, that is, one who has only one of the skills, one who has only the other skill, one who has neither, and one who is skilled in both. The last is always declared to be the best, the "cream" (manda) [§9].

The Saṁyutta commentary tells us that the entire Jhāna Saṁyutta deals with mundane dhyāna, that is, only the process of deep meditation without mentioning the results of such a practice (with neither path nor fruition).

2 The Sutta Typology. This sutta and those in the rest of the Jhāna Saṁyutta seems to be artificially put together for the same of Abhidhamma-like completion. This could reflect a time when the suttas were given great prominence as a scriptural canon, perhaps during on the early Buddhist councils before Asoka’s time, that is, between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE.

As sutta students, we should be curious about such developments for a broader perspective of sutta history and significance. Having said that, we can still reflect on such a sutta as an effort in directing our attention to specific qualities we need to cultivate in meditation. In this sutta, we should not only know about meditation, but we should also learn to remain within samadhi, that is, a concentrated and still mind, even dhyāna itself.

As we persevere and progress in our meditation, such suttas become more meaningful to us. They become like a checklist reminding us to ensure that our practice is properly done. The unawakened mind easily becomes bored with repetitiveness, but an awakening mind, or one that love solitude, will notice even the passing daily, seemingly uneventful, as peaceful and meaningful as the measured moments of our own breathing.

3 The Samādhi Mūlaka Abhinīhāra Sutta (S 34.2), as the title suggests, gives this list of 4 kinds of meditators, in of samadhi, in a broad sense of mental concentration, especially the resolution for dhyāna, thus:

(1) skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi, but not skilled in the resolution for samadhi. [§4]
(2) skilled in the resolution for samadhi, but unskilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi. [§5]
(3) neither skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi, nor skilled in the resolution for samadhi. [§6]
(4) both skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi and also skilled in the resolution for samadhi. [§7]

The last is the best, the “cream” (manda) [§9]. This pattern reflects that of the Samādhi Samāpatti Sutta (S 34.1), the first discourse in the Jhāna Saṁyutta itself. This Sutta has been fully translated and annotated elsewhere, and should be referred to for other detailed notes.
The Discourse on Samadhi-rooted Resolution

1-3 Originating in Sāvatthī.
Bhikshus, there are these four kinds of meditators.
What are the four?

4 (1) Here, bhikshus, some meditators are skilled about samadhi [mental concentration] in regards to samadhi, but not skilled in resolution in samadhi.7

5 (2) But, here, bhikshus, some meditators are skilled in resolution in samadhi, but not skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi.8

6 (3) But, here, bhikshus, some meditators are neither skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi, nor skilled in resolution in samadhi.9

7 (4) But, here, bhikshus, some meditators are both skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi and also skilled in resolution in samadhi.10

8 Here, bhikshus, this meditator who is both skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi and also skilled in resolution in samadhi—
of these four kinds of meditators, he is the foremost, the best, the leader, the highest, and most excellent.11

9 Bhikshus, just as from a cow comes milk; from milk, cream; from cream, butter; from butter ghee; and from ghee, the cream of ghee: here the cream of ghee is the foremost12—

10 even so, bhikshus, this meditator who is both skilled about samadhi in regards to samadhi and also skilled in resolution in samadhi—
of these four kinds of meditators, he is the foremost, the best, the leader, the highest, and most excellent.

11 These, bhikshus, are these four kinds of meditators.

— evam —

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7 For details, see SD 41.12 (1.3.5).
8 S 34.1/3:263 f, SD 41.12.
9 Idha bhikkhave eka cco jhāyī samādhismīṁ samādhi, kusalo hoti, na samādhismīṁ abhinīhāra, kusalo.
10 Idha pana bhikkhave eka cco jhāyī samādhismīṁ abhinīhāra, kusalo hoti, na samādhismīṁ samādhi, kusalo.
11 Idha pana bhikkhave eka cco jhāyī neva samādhismīṁ samādhi, kusalo hoti, na ca samādhismīṁ abhinīhāra, kusalo.
12 Idha pana bhikkhave eka cco jhāyī samādhismīṁ samādhi, kusalo ca hoti, samādhismīṁ abhinīhāra kusalo ca.
13 Ayaṁ imesan catunnaṁ jhāyīnaṁ aggo ca setṭho ca mokkho [Ke Se pāmokkho] ca uttamo ca pavarā ca.
14 Seyyathā pi bhikkhave gāva kārānā kārānā dasshi dasshimhā nava, niṭṭhā nava, nīrāmā sappi sappinā sappi, maṇḍo tatra aggam akkhāyati. See Samādhi Samāpatti S, SD 41.12 (1.3.5).