

Tatiya Jhāna Pañha Sutta

The Discourse on the Question of the Third Dhyana

Also called (Sukhena) Tatiya Jhāna Sutta = On the Third Dhyana (with Happiness)

[How to progress in the third dhyana]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 40.3/4:264 f)

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1 Introduction

The first nine suttas of **the Moggallāna Saṃyutta** (S 40.1-9) deals with the nine stages of Moggallāna's meditation leading to his arhathood, thus:

(1) Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha Sutta	S 40.1/4:262 f	SD 24.11
Also called (Savitakka) Paṭhama Jhāna Sutta		
(2) Dutiya Jhāna Pañha Sutta	S 40.2/4:263 f	SD 24.12a
Also called (Avitakka) Dutiya Jhāna Sutta		
(3) Tatiya Jhāna Pañha Sutta	S 40.3/4:264 f	SD 24.13
Also called (Sukhena) Tatiya Jhāna Sutta		
(4) Catuttha Jhāna Pañha Sutta	S 40.4/4:265 f	SD 24.14
Also called (Upekkhaka) Catuttha Jhāna Sutta		
(5) Ākāśānañc'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.5/4:266	SD 24.15
(6) Viññāṇāñc'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.6/4:266 f	SD 24.16
(7) Ākiñcaññ'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.7/4:267 f	SD 24.17
(8) N'eva,saññā,nâsaññ'āyatana Pañha Sutta	S 40.8/4:268	SD 24.18
(9) Animitta Ceto,samādhi Pañha Sutta	S 40.9/4:268 f	SD 24.19

2 What happens in the 3rd dhyana?

After mastering the second dhyana, we should be thoroughly familiar with it before going further. As we enter and exit from the second dhyana, we will notice two “defects” have to be overcome if we are to progress. The two defects are, namely:

- (1) the defect of proximate corruption, that is, the nearness of applied and sustained thoughts, which disrupts the stillness and concentration of the second dhyana, returning it to the first dhyana;
- (2) the inherent defect, that is, the presence of zest (*pīti*), a relatively gross factor that weakens the other dhyana-factors, as stated in **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1): “Insofar as it has zest (*pīti*), there is mental excitation (*ubbillāvitatta*), and as such is said to be gross.” (D 1.97/1:37) = SD 25.2.

Noting that the second dhyana is actually impermanent and unsatisfactory (flawed by zest), we then cultivate indifference towards it, and intensify our attention to happiness (*sukha*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), regarding as more peaceful and sublime. As our practice matures, we let go of the second dhyana and attain to the third. It should be noted here that the momentary process of switching dhyana is basically the same: there is some level of applied and sustained thoughts, and zest present at the moment of access, but they disappear on gaining full concentration.

The third dhyana pericope says:

Here, bhikshu, with the fading away of zest, he remains equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experiences happiness with the body. He attains and dwells in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.” [§4]

The third dhyana has two dhyana-factors, namely: happiness (*sukha*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), but it has three additional mental factors (*cetasika*) (not included amongst the dhyana-factors), that is, equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and full awareness (*sampakañña*). This is a peculiarity of the third dhyana.

Let us briefly examine each of these three mental factors in turn. **Equanimity** (*upekkhā*) is a mindful but unaffected on-looking, of which the **Visuddhi,magga** identifies six kinds.¹ In simple terms, we can divide equanimity into two kinds: worldly indifference (or non-chalance) and still-minded on-looking. In the second, we are not affected by the vicissitudes of the world on account of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self.

Here it should be noted that equanimous feeling (*vedan'upekkhā*) and specific neutrality (*tatra,majjhatt'upekkhā*) are distinct mental factors. While *equanimous feeling* (that is, a feeling that is neither painful nor pleasant) belongs to the aggregate of feeling (*vedanā-k,khandha*), *specific neutrality* belongs to the aggregate of mental formations (*sañkhāra-k,khandha*). Specific neutrality is a morally beautiful (*sobhana*) factor present only in wholesome or indeterminate states of consciousness. Equanimous feeling, however, can be present in any kind of consciousness, whether wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate. Since the dhyana experience is wholesome, there is the co-presence of *specific equanimity* and *happiness*.

While we are in dhyana, there is nothing that we can do or really need to do. It is like a missile being propelled into space that moves on its own momentum until the force runs out. However, while in dhyana, there is a subtle sense of **mindfulness** (*sati*) and clear awareness (*sampajañña*). While mindfulness has the characteristic of remembering or recollecting (such as a car's petrol gauge showing how much petrol remains), full awareness is the wisdom that understands the significance of what we are mindful of.

The mindfulness then goes on to act with clear awareness on what to properly do next (which of course can only be done *outside* of the dhyana proper). Often, the meditation teacher would instruct his student, when he is ready, to reflect on the impermanence or unsatisfactoriness of his dhyana experience upon emerging from it.

In the third dhyana, mindfulness and clear awareness are especially vital in preventing the return of zest, which would make us remain in that dhyana and not progress. As such, it is these two factors that keeps *out* zest, and keeps us *in* the third dhyana. This determination is done just before entering into the dhyana proper.

The **happiness** (*sukha*) is one that is free from zest (*nippītika sukha*). **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) illustrates how this happiness pervades the meditator in the third dhyana:

Just as in a pond of the blue lotuses, red and white lotuses, or red lotuses,² 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, pervaded, suffused 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 happiness free from zest, so that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded with this happiness free from zest. (D 2.82/2:75) = SD 8.10

The third dhyana pericope says that the meditator “experiences happiness with the body” (*sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti*), that is, in the manner described in the above simile. However, since at this level, all physical experiences have shut down, it should be understood that “body” here refers to the mental body (*nāma,kāya*), that is, the group of mental factors associated with consciousness. Understandably,

¹ That is: (1) the six-factored equanimity (*cha-ḷ-aṅ'upekkhā*); (2) equanimity as a divine abode (*brahma,-vihār'upekkha*); (3) equanimity as an awakening-factor (*bojjhaṅ'upekkhā*); (4) equanimity of effort [energy] (*viriy'upekkhā*); (5) equanimity regarding formations (*sañkhār'upekkhā*); (6) equanimity as a feeling (*vedan'upekkhā*); (7) equanimity about insight (*vipassan'upekkhā*); (8) equanimity as specific neutrality (*tatra,majjhatt'upekkhā*); (9) equanimity of dhyana (*jhān'upekkhā*); (10) equanimity of purification (*parisuddhi upekkhā*). (Vism 4:156-177/160-164). **1 & 7** are modes of wisdom, that is, detached on-looking. **4 & 6** are, respectively, the mental factors of effort and of feeling. The other 6 are modes of specific neutrality (*tatra,majjhattatā*): see Vimati,vinodani (VimvṬ 1:73 f). See Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 1985: 88-91.

² *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.

such a powerful experience would overflow and linger in a significant manner throughout the meditator's physical body after the dhyana experience.

Finally, it should be noted although **one-pointedness** (*ekaggatā*) is not mentioned in the third dhyana stock passage, it is still present here (as in the preceding dhyanas). For without one-pointedness of mind, there is no mental focus, without which there is no dhyana. In fact, one-pointedness is mentioned *only* in the second dhyana, where it begins to be strongest with the abandonment of applied and sustained thoughts. Thenceforth, its pervading presence is assumed.

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The Discourse on the Question of the Third Dhyana

(S 40.3/4:264 f)

Theory

3 “‘The third dhyana, the third dhyana,’ it is said. What now is the third dhyana?

4 Then, avuso, this occurred to me:

‘Here, bhikkhu, with the fading away of zest, he remains equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experiences happiness with the body. He attains and dwells in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.”³

This is called the third dhyana.

Practice

5 Then, avuso, with the fading away of zest, I remained equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experienced happiness with the body. I attained and dwelled in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.”

While I dwelled therein, avuso, perception and attention accompanied by *zest* assailed me.⁴ [265]

6 Then, avuso, the Blessed One approached me by means of psychic power and said this to me:

‘Moggallāna, Moggallāna! Do not be heedless, brahmin, regarding the third dhyana:

steady your mind in the third dhyana,	<i>tatiye jhāne cittaṃ saṅṭhapehi,</i>
unify your mind in the third dhyana,	<i>tatiye jhāne cittaṃ ekodiṃ karohi,</i>
concentrate your mind in the third dhyana,	<i>tatiye jhāne cittaṃ samādaha.’</i>

Realization

7 Then, avuso, on another occasion, with the fading away of zest, I remained equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experienced happiness with the body. I attained and dwelled in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.”

Spiritual friendship

8 Now, avuso, if one speaking rightly, were to say, ‘He is a disciple who attained to greatness of direct knowledge with the help of the Teacher,’

it is of me that one speaking rightly would say, ‘He is a disciple who attained to greatness of direct knowledge with the help of the Teacher.’”

— evaṃ —

080922; 081103; 090326

³ *Idha bhikkhu pīṭiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti, yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti, “upekkhako satimā sukha, vihāri”ti tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

⁴ *Tassa mayhaṃ āvuso, iminā vihārena viharato pīṭi, sahatā saññā, manasikārā samudācaranti.* He is unable to progress to the 4th dhyana because of the presence of zest (joyful interest).