

## Catuttha Jhāna Pañha Sutta

### The Discourse on the Question of the Fourth Dhyana

Also called (Upekkhaka) Catuttha Jhāna Sutta = On the Fourth Dhyana (with Equanimity)

[How to progress in the fourth dhyana]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 40.4/4:265 f)

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### 1 Dhyana and death

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

In the fourth dhyana, all bodily formations (*kāya,saṅkhāra*) ceases, which means that there is no more feeling of pleasure or pain (we transcend physical feelings), and no more happiness or sorrow (we transcend mental feelings). All bodily process, including the in-and-out breathing, ceases in the fourth dhyana. By current medical definition (because there is no instrument sophisticated enough to measure such consciousness), the meditator in the fourth dhyana, is “dead” to the world!

**The Kāma,bhū Sutta 2** (S 41.6) explanation of the difference between death and the cessation of perception and feeling will help us have some idea of the difference between death and dhyana:

Householder, in the case of one who is dead, the bodily formation has ceased and settled, the verbal formation had ceased and settled, the mental formation has ceased and settled. His vitality is extinguished, his physical heat has dissipated, and his faculties are fully broken up.

In the case of a monk who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling, the bodily formation has ceased and settled, the verbal formation had ceased and settled, the mental formation has ceased and settled. But his vitality is *not* extinguished, his physical heat has *not* dissipated, and his faculties are still [serene] (*vipassannāni*). (S 41.6/4:294) = SD 48.7

It should be noted that verbal formation (*vacī,saṅkhāra*) (ie, thinking and pondering, *vitakka,vicāra*) ceases in the second dhyana. Bodily formation (*kāya,saṅkhāra*) (the breath) ceases in the fourth dhyana. And mental formation (*citta,saṅkhāra*) (perception and feeling) ceases during the attainment of cessation.

### 2 Happiness

Like initial application and sustained application (in the first dhyana), zest and happiness, too, go together.<sup>1</sup> However, there are two important points to note between the latter two. While zest must co-exist

<sup>1</sup> See **Dutiya Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.12a) = SD 24.2 Intro (2).

with happiness, only happiness (*sukha*) can occur by itself in meditation. Zest is a mental formation (*sankhāra*), while happiness is a feeling (*vedanā*). Zest, being karmically potential, is the *cause* of happiness.

Happiness (*sukha*) arises because the mind is free from the mental hindrances<sup>2</sup> and is filled with zest. While zest is the joyful satisfaction (in a worldly sense) at getting a desirable object (like winning a contest, or getting a windfall), happiness (*sukha*) is the actual experiencing of that joy (Vism 145). Although happiness can exist by itself in dhyana, it is usually short-lived.

The fourth dhyana consists of only one dhyana-factor, that is, one-pointedness of mind. The Abhidhamma and Commentaries, however, treat the fourth dhyana as having *two* dhyana-factors, namely, *one-pointedness and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling*.<sup>3</sup> The four formless-dhyana spheres, as such, properly speaking, still belong to the fourth dhyana, as they possess these same two dhyana-factors.

### 3 Psychic powers

A meditator who is accomplished in the four dhyanas is capable of cultivating various psychic powers, as mentioned in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) (abridged selections):<sup>4</sup>

(1) PSYCHIC POWERS. With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects,<sup>5</sup> pliant, malleable, steady and utterly unshakable, he directs and inclines it to the manifold psychic powers.<sup>6</sup>

1. Having been one he becomes many; having been many he becomes one.
2. He appears, and vanishes.
3. He goes unhindered through walls, through ramparts, and through mountains as if through space.
4. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water.
5. He walks on water without sinking as if it were earth.
6. Sitting cross-legged, he flies through the air like a winged bird.
7. With his hand he touches and strokes even the sun and the moon, so mighty and powerful.
8. He has power over his body up to as far as the Brahmā world.

(2) THE DIVINE EAR (CLAIRAUDIENCE). With his mind thus *concentrated*, he hears, by means of the divine-ear element,<sup>7</sup> purified and surpassing the human, both kinds of sounds: divine and human, whether near or far.

(3) MIND-READING. With his mind thus concentrated, he directs and inclines it to the knowledge of mind-reading. He knows the minds of other beings, other individuals, having encompassed them with his own mind.<sup>8</sup>

(4) THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE RECOLLECTION OF PAST LIVES.<sup>9</sup> (This is the recalling of our own past lives, confirming the doctrine of rebirth.)

<sup>2</sup> “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, kukkuccha*); and perpetual doubt (*vicikicchā*). See **Nīvaraṇa Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55) = SD 3.12 & **Listening Beyond the Ear** = SD 2.2(5).

<sup>3</sup> See Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 1985: 108 f; see also **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.1) = SD Intro (5).

<sup>4</sup> For details, see **Miracles** = SD 27.5a (5).

<sup>5</sup> *upakkilesa*: to be distinguished from *kilesa*, “defilement.” Perhaps the 10 “imperfections of insight” listed in Vism 20.105 ff are meant here, but potential hindrances at a certain stage of insight meditation. (Walshe)

<sup>6</sup> *Iddhi, vidhā*. Cf **Kevalāḍḍha S** (D 11) where the Buddha disapproves of exhibiting such powers (D 11.4-5/1:213 f) = SD 1.7.

<sup>7</sup> “Divine-ear element,” *dibba, sota, dhātu*, clairaudience.

<sup>8</sup> The following section (italicized) is a list of mental states is apparently taken from **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22.12/-2:299 = M 10.34/1:59), where it fits more appropriately. (Walshe, D:W 546 n131). On another def of mind-reading (4 kinds), see **Sampasādaniya S** (D 28.6/3:103 f) = SD 14.14.

<sup>9</sup> This knowledge and the foll three (ie 4-6) constitutes “the three knowledges” (*te, vijja*) of the Buddha and the arhats (D 3:220, 275; A 5:211), and is a shorthand for “the 6 knowledges” (*cha-l-ābhīñña*) listed here and elsewhere.

(5) THE KNOWLEDGE OF DEATH AND REBIRTH (THE DIVINE EYE).<sup>10</sup> (This is the recalling of the past lives of others, of how they fared according to their karma, confirming the doctrine of karma.)

(6) THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE DESTRUCTION OF MENTAL INFLUXES. With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady and utterly unshakable, the monk directs and inclines it to the knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes.<sup>11</sup> (This leads to arhathood.) (D 2.89/1:78 f) = SD 8.10

Of the monks who have psychic powers, **Moggallāna** is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost.<sup>12</sup> According to the Commentaries,<sup>13</sup> Moggallāna's supreme mastery of psychic power was because no one else (other than the Buddha) is able to attain the fourth dhyana so rapidly. Without entering into any special state, he is able to see pretas and other invisible non-human beings.<sup>14</sup> He would visit various worlds (both this divine and the subhuman) and return to inform the Buddha about their inhabitants,<sup>15</sup> which the Buddha then uses to illustrate his teachings. The *Vimāna, vatthu* contains a collection of stories of such visits.<sup>16</sup>

Although Moggallāna's pre eminence is in psychic powers, his wisdom is second only to Sāriputta's, and for which the Buddha praises him.<sup>17</sup> Other than the Buddha, only Sāriputta and Moggallāna have the capability for answering any Dharma question. (DhA 3:227). **The Avassuta Sutta** (S 35.243) records how, Moggallāna, upon the Buddha's request delivers a Dharma teaching (on defilements), and at the end of it, the Buddha warmly praises him for his wisdom.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4 "The neutral liberation of mind"<sup>19</sup>

In the pericope for "observing the mind" (*cittānupassanā*), there is the description of "the mind is that has become great" (*mahaggatam cittam*) (attained in one of the right dhyanas). This practice has to do with the "liberation of the mind that has become great" (*mahaggatā ceto, vimutti*), which designates the ability to pervade a certain area with our meditation object, be this the area around the root of a tree, the area of a whole village, or even the area of the whole earth (M 3:146). The fact that "liberation of the mind that has become great" is distinguished from "boundless liberation of the mind" suggests that its meditative pervasion would involve some other meditation object, which according to the commentarial explanation is the development of dhyana based on a *kaṣiṇa* object. (MA 4:200)

<sup>10</sup> This knowledge and the foll three (ie 4-6) constitutes "the three knowledges" (*te, vijja*) of the Buddha and the arhats (D 3:220, 275; A 5:211), and is a shorthand for "the 6 knowledges" (*cha-l-ābhiññā*) listed here and elsewhere.

<sup>11</sup> *Āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*. The term *āsava*, "mental influxes, or mental fluxes" (lit "inflow, outflow") comes from *ā-savati* "flows towards" (ie 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 (*kāma'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence or becoming (*bhav'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj'āsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as "floods" (*oghā*) and "yokes" (*yogā*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] 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 under *āsava*.

<sup>12</sup> *Iddhimantānam*, A 1.14.1/1:23.

<sup>13</sup> eg ThaA 3:179; ApA 250; Vism 4.133/154, 12.106-118/398-401.

<sup>14</sup> Eg, S 19.1-21/2:254-262 (ch 8 **Lakkhaṇa Saṃyutta**); DhA 5.12/2:63-67, 5.13/2:69-73, 10.6/3:59-64, 20.6/-3:409-416, 22.2/4:478 f; cf Avadāna 1:246 ff.

<sup>15</sup> See also Mvst 1:4 ff, on his visit to the hells.

<sup>16</sup> Vv 1.4/1, 2.4/2, 3.4/3, 61.4/89, passim (see Tha:Ee 140 (89), (91) Index); see also DhA 16.9/3:289-294, 17.4-/3:313-316.

<sup>17</sup> See foll n.

<sup>18</sup> S 35.243/4:182-188.

<sup>19</sup> This section is based on Bhikkhu Analayo, *Craving and Liberation*, 2008: 169 f (MS).

Yet another type of liberation of the mind is the “neither-painful-nor-pleasant liberation of the mind” (*adukkham-asukhā ceto, vimutti*), which stands for the mental freedom attained with the fourth absorption, *jhāna* (M 1:296). In this case the “liberating” feature is no longer related to any spatial pervasion, but to the fact that through attaining the fourth dhyana, the mind has become “liberated” by attaining immovability (*aniñjita*, M 1:455). The mind has thereby become totally aloof from the pleasure-pain dichotomy, whose transcendence is the very precondition for entry into fourth dhyana attainment (*sukhassa ca pahānā, dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubb’eva somanassa, domanassānaṃ atthagamā*, eg D 1:75).

Based on the mental strength of the fourth dhyana, the formless attainments can be developed, which correspond to four types of deliverances (*vimokkha*), in the eightfold standard listing (eg A 4:306). Out of these four, the attainment of the sphere of nothingness is also reckoned as a type of liberation of the mind on its own, the “liberation of mind through nothingness” (*akiñcaññā ceto, vimutti*, M 1:297). According to the standard description in the discourses, to attain this type of mental liberation requires giving attention to nothingness, *n’atthi kiñci* (eg MN I 41).

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## The Discourse on the Question of the Fourth Dhyana

(S 40.4/4:265 f)

### Theory

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

4 Then, avuso, this occurred to me:

‘Here, bhikshu, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of happiness and displeasure—he attains and dwells in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.<sup>20</sup>

This is called the fourth dhyana.

### Practice

5 Then, avuso, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of happiness and displeasure—I attained and dwelled in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

While I dwelled therein, avuso, perception and attention accompanied by *happiness* assailed me.<sup>21</sup>

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 fourth dhyana:

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

### Realization

7 Then, avuso, on another occasion, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of happiness and displeasure—I attained and dwelled in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

### 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 —

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<sup>20</sup> *Idha bhikkhu sukhasa ca pahānā dukkhasa ca pahānā pubb’eva somanassa, domanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkham-asukhaṃ upekkhā, sati, pārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

<sup>21</sup> *Tassa mayham, āvuso, iminā vihārena viharato sukha, sahatatā saññā, manasikārā samudācaranti.* He is unable to progress to the next level (the sphere of infinite space) because of the presence of happiness.