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Samadhi

The significance of mental stillness in early Buddhism
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1 Samadhi

1.1 WE ARE EXHORTED TO MEDITATE. Meditation is a central practice of Buddhism,¹ and the Buddha constantly encourages his followers to meditate:

Bhikshus, whatever a teacher should do out of compassion for the good of disciples, for the sake of their welfare, it has been done to you by me.

These, bhikshus, are the foot of trees;² these are empty places.³ Meditate,⁴ bhikshus! Be not heedless! Regret not later!

This is our instruction to you.”⁵ (S 35.146/4:132 f), SD 4.12

This admonition refers to the practice of mindfulness leading to samadhi, or the cultivation of dhyana. As evident from such texts as **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta**,⁶ **the Cūḷa Hatthi,paḍōpama Sutta**⁷ and **the Mahā Assa,pura Sutta**,⁸ the four dhyanas form an important part of the complete spiritual training of the Buddha’s followers, especially for those going on to attain non-return or arhathood.

The reason for this is clear. Dhyana entails a profound state of mental concentration or samadhi (ts *samādhi*), which in turn forms the basis for insight wisdom (a vital ingredient for non-return and arhathood). As such, the Buddha exhorts his followers in these texts, all named **Samādhi Sutta**, thus:⁹

Cultivate mental concentration, monks. A monk who has mental concentration understands things as they really are.¹⁰ (S 22.5/3:13 f; 35.99/4:80; 56.1/5:414; cf A 5.27/3:24)

The (Khandha) Samādhi Sutta (S 22.5) explains the phrase “understands things as they really are” (*yathā,bhūtaṃ pajānāti*) as referring to the stock passage regarding the 5 aggregates, “Such is form...feeling ...perception...formations...consciousness; such is its passing away.”¹¹

1.2 WHAT IS SAMADHI? Samadhi literally means “the (mental) state of being firmly fixed” (*sam + ā + √DHĀ*, to put), that is, the fixing of the mind on a single object. It is related to the verb *samādahati*, “to

¹ If this is the first time you are reading this, it is good to read *Bhāvanā* (SD 15.1) first, as it deals with meditation in general, while this essay deals specifically with samadhi.

² “Those are the foot of trees,” *etāni rukkhā,mūlāni*. “Foot” here is usually single, like “bottom.”

³ Sometimes rendered as “empty place”.

⁴ “Meditate!” *jhāyatha*, lit “cultivate *jhāna*” (M 1:45, 118; S 4:133, 4:359, 361, 362, 368, 373; A 3:87, 89, 4:139, 392). Syn *bhāvētha* (2nd pl), “cultivate!”

⁵ This is stock: **Sallekha S** (M 44.18/1:45); **Dvedhā,vitakka S** (M 19.27/1:118); (**Nava Purāṇa**) **Kamma S** (S 4:133), SD 4.12; **Kāya S** (S 43.1/4:359), SD 12.21.1, & all suttas in the same **Asaṅkhata Saṃyutta** (S 43.2-44/-4:360-373); **Yodh’ājīva S 1** (A 5.73.7/3:87), **Yodh’ājīva S 2** (A 5.74.7/89), **Vinaya,dhara S** (A 7.70.4/4:139), **Devatā S** (A 9.19.4/4:392); cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507).

⁶ D 2.67-98/1:71-86.

⁷ M 27.17-26/1:181-184.

⁸ M 389.12-29/1:274-280.

⁹ S 22.5, 35.99, 56.1.

¹⁰ *Samādhim bhikkhave bhāvētha. Samāhito bhikkhave bhikkhu yathā,bhūtaṃ pajānāti*. See DhsA 162.

¹¹ See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.14/2:301 f), **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.38/1:61), (**Khandha**) **Samādhi S** (S 22.5/-3:13f), (**Salāyatana**) **Samādhi S** (S 35.99/4:80). See also **Dasa,bala S 1** (S 12.21/2:27 f), **Dasa,bala S 2** (S 12.23/-2:29-32), **Sīha S** (S 22.78/3:84-86), **Khemaka S** (S 22.89/ 3:126-132) and **Nāva S** (S 22.101/3:152-155). The origin and passing away of the aggregates are explained in **Paṭisallāna S** (S 22.6/3:15) by way of diachronic conditionality, and in **Upādāna Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56/3:58-61 @ SD 3.7) & **Satta-ṭ,ṭhāna S** (S 22.57/3:61-65) by way of synchronic conditionality. See S:B 743 n58. [“Diachronic” here “across time,” ie over many, usu 3, lives; “synchronic means within one life-time itself.]

put together” (S 1:169), as in *jotim samādahati*, “he kindles a fire (that is, puts together wood for a fire)” (V 4:115), or “to collect, compose” as in *cittam samādahati*, “he composes his mind, he concentrates” (M 1:116); and the past participle is *samāhita*, “composed, concentrated.”

In the **Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44), the nun Dhamma, dinnā explains, “One-pointedness of mind (*cittass’ekaggatā*),¹² avuso Visākha, this is called concentration.”¹³ In the stock passage, defining the second dhyana, it is often said to arise from samadhi (*samādhi*, D 2:186).

In the 3 trainings (*ti sikkhā*) or threefold division (or “aggregate,” *khandha*) of the eightfold path (moral virtue, concentration and wisdom), it is a collective name for the second training (*samādhi*, *sikkhā*), that is, the last three path-factors (*samādhi khandha*), that is, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.¹⁴

By itself, samadhi is the last factor of the eightfold path, and often defined as *the attainment of the four dhyanas*.¹⁵ It is one of the five spiritual faculties (*indriya*) and five spiritual powers (*bala*),¹⁶ and one of the seven awakening factors (*bojjhaṅga*).¹⁷ From all this, it is clear that samadhi refers to the one-pointedness of the mind, especially that conducive to dhyana.¹⁸ This is the meaning of *samādhi* that we are most familiar with, but it also has a more general sense, which is just as important, which we shall now examine.¹⁹

1.3 FUNCTIONS OF SAMADHI. The word *samādhi* often appears in the suttas in a rather broad sense, from being fully focused in mind, sitting in meditation, to mindful activity, such as walking meditation

¹² See the 5 dhyana-factors (*jhān’āṅga*), see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (6), esp (6.5).

¹³ M 44.12/1:301 @ SD 40a.9; also at Dhs 15; DhsA 118. Identified with *avikkhepa* (non-agitation) at Dhs 57, and with *samatha* at Dhs 54.

¹⁴ See **Sīla Samādhi Paññā**, SD 21.6

¹⁵ Eg, “He attains and remains in the first dhyana...the second dhyana...the third dhyana...the fourth dhyana...this is called right concentration”: see **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.21/2:313), SD 13.2; **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117/3:71-78), SD 6.10; **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117/3:71-78), SD 6.10; **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141.31/3:252), SD 11.-11. For details on the noble eightfold path, see Gethin 2001:190-226 (ch 6) for an insightful study.

¹⁶ They are faith (*saddhā*), effort (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). In the practitioner, they are called “faculties” (*indriya*), as they need to be cultivated; only in the arhat, they become “powers” (*bala*), as they are steady and permanent. See **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f), SD 10.4. They are explained in Comy to Mūla,pariyāya S (M 3) (MA 1:82-84).

¹⁷ **The 7 awakening-factors** (*satta bojjhaṅga*): (1) mindfulness (*sati*), (2) dharma-discernment (*dhamma, vicaya*), (3) effort (*virīya*), (4) zest (*pīti*), (5) tranquillity (*passaddhi*), (6) concentration (*samādhi*), and (7) equanimity (*upekkhā*). Of the 7 factors, “dharma-discernment” [investigation of stated] (*dhamma, vicaya*), ie, insight into material and mental states as they really are, is a designation for wisdom (*paññā*), and is the key factor here. “Tranquillity” (*passaddhi*) means the stillness both of consciousness (*citta, passaddhi*) and of the mental body (*kāya, passaddhi*) (Abhs 2.5, 7.29 = Abhs: BRS 85-88, 281). Equanimity (*upekkhā*) here means equipoise or mental neutrality (*tatra, majjhataṭā*), one of the universal beautiful (*sobhana*) cetasikas, and not worldly neutral feeling. See **Bodhi, pakkhiya, dhamma**, SD 10.1(8); **Kāya S** (S 46.2/5:64-67); **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3/5:67-70), SD 10.15; **(Ajjhatta) Aṅga S** (S 46.49/5:101), **(Bahiddhā) Aṅga S** (S 46.50/5:102), **Āhāra S** (S 46.51/5:102-107), SD 7.15. For detailed discussion, see R Gethin, *The Path to Awakening*, 2001:146-189 (ch 5).

¹⁸ For 3 kinds of samadhi, viz the empty (*suññata samādhi*), the undirected (*appaṇihita samādhi*), and the signless (*animitta samādhi*): **Suññata Samādhi S** (S 43.4/4:360, 17 = D 33.1.10(51)/3:219, 22 (*rāga, nimittādinam abhāvā appaṇihito*, DA); V 3:92, 37 f (= *rāga, dosa, moha, pañidhīnam abhāvato appaṇihito*, VA 2:493, 26 ≠ MA 2:367, 9 ≠ DhsA 222, 23 ≠ DA 3:1004, 15) = V 4:25, 32 f; Pm 2:35, 1, qu DhsA 223, 5 ≠ Vism 658, 9; DhA 2:172, 12; Pm 2:36, 12, 41, 12, 59, 10, 65, 15; Abhs 44.6. s explains: One who, at the stage of advanced insight, regards things as *not-self*, acquires the emptiness samadhi on attaining the path and fruit (because he has seen things as being empty of self); one who regards things as *impermanent*, acquires the signless samadhi (because he has seen through the sign of permanence); one who regards things as *suffering*, acquires the undirected samadhi (because he has no attraction to things that are unsatisfactory) (DA 3:1003 f). See **Suññata Samādhi S** (S 43.4/4:360), SD 55.8, & the 3 “doors to liberation” (*vimokkha, mukha*, Pm 2:48; Vism 21.66-73/657-659).

¹⁹ On tr of samādhi, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (6.5.2).

(as in the **Caṅkamaṇa Sutta**, A 5.29).²⁰ However, it is obvious that although we can gain concentration from walking meditation, it is not easy to gain deep states of focus from such an active posture.

The **Samādhi Bhāvanā Sutta** (A 4.41) refers to contemplating on the rising and passing of feelings, cognition, and thoughts, and to contemplating on the true nature of the five aggregates as forms of samādhi.²¹ Even the four focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) is sometimes regarded as samādhi, as stated in the **Saṅkhutta Dhamma Sutta** (A 8.63).²² Such a broad usage of the term *samādhi* is also recorded in the **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), which speaks of four different ways of cultivating samādhi and their benefits [3.2].²³ As such, the **Pāpaṇika Sutta 1** (A 19) declares samādhi to be a condition for the attaining of wholesome states (*kusala dhamma*).²⁴

2 Right samadhi

2.1 TWO KINDS OF MENTAL CULTIVATION. Samadhi (ts *samādhi*), as used in the early Buddhist suttas, has two important senses, that is,

- (1) any kind of mindfulness practice that keeps the mind “interactively” focused, even in a weak way [3.1], or
- (2) right samadhi, that is, a mind “engaged” fully with itself in dhyana [3.2].

Samadhi arises when the mind is free from mental hindrances, and there are two ways of cultivating the mind in this direction, that is, directed cultivation and undirected cultivation.²⁵

2.1.1 “Directed” cultivation. The first sense of samadhi, a kind of “interactive” focus, is often defined in the suttas as constituting the “concentration aggregate” (*samādhi khandha*),²⁶ or “training in concentration” (*samādhi sikkhā*),²⁷ or as the last limb of the noble eightfold path, that is, right concentration.²⁸

This practical sense of samadhi is fully defined in discourses such as these:

- **Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2), as “accomplishment in concentration (*samādhi,sampadā*),²⁹
- **Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3), as “conduct or practice” (*carāṇa*),³⁰

²⁰ The Sutta lists the foll 5 benefits of walking meditation: (1) it strengthens one for a journey; (2) it strengthens one for striving; (3) it keeps one healthy; (4) it gives one a good digestion after a meal; and (5) concentration from walking meditation lasts long (A 5.29/3:29 f), SD 76.3.

²¹ A 4.41/2:45 @ SD 24.1.

²² A 8.63/4:300 @ SD 46.6. **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44) calls them *nimitta* (M 44.12/1:301), usu tr as “sign,” but it has been suggested that, due to its context here, it should be rendered “basis” (ie “basis of concentration”) (M:NB 398 & n464)

²³ **Analayo** remarks, “These occurrences demonstrate that, as used in the discourses, the term ‘concentration’ (*samādhi*) is not restricted to the development of calm (*samatha*) only, but can also refer to the realm of insight meditation (*vipassanā*).” (2003:72 f)

²⁴ A 3.19/1:115.

²⁵ See **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.4).

²⁶ **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.64-82/1:70-76, *samādhi,sampadā* or “accomplishment in concentration), **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 1:100), **Subha S** (D 10.2.1-19/1:207 f);

²⁷ On the 3 trainings (*ti,sikkhā*), see **Ti Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/1:235), SD 24.10c & **Sīla Samādhi Paññā**, SD 21.6. See foll n.

²⁸ The noble eightfold path: (1) right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*), (2) right intention [thought] (*sammā saṅkappa*), (3) right action (*sammā kammantā*), (4) right speech (*sammā vācā*), (5) right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*), (6) right effort (*sammā vāyāma*), (7) right mindfulness (*sammā sati*), and (8) right concentration [samadhi] (*sammā samādhi*) (D 2:312; M 1:61, 3:251; Vbh 235). Collectively, (1-3) constitutes the moral virtue aggregate (*sīla khandha*) or training in moral virtue (*sīla sikkhā*), (4-6) mental concentration aggregate (*samādhi khandha*) or training in samadhi (*samādhi sikkhā*), and (1-2) the wisdom aggregate (*paññā khandha*) or training in wisdom (*paññā sikkhā*). See **Sīla Samādhi Paññā**, SD 21.6.

²⁹ D 2.64-82/1:70-76 @ SD 8.10.

³⁰ D 3.2.2/1:100 @ SD 21.3. Also called “accomplishment in conduct” (*carāṇa sampadā*). The resultant super-knowledges (*abhiññā*) are known as “knowledge” (*vijjā*) or “accomplishment in knowledge” (*vijjā sampadā*). As the Buddha is accomplished in both, he is said to be “accomplished in knowledge and conduct” (*vijjā,carāṇa sampanna*): see eg **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7 (3.3).

- **Subha Sutta** (D 10), as “the samadhi aggregate” (*samādhi khandha*),³¹
- **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), as “the samadhi aggregate” of the 4 “aggregates” (*khandha*),³²
- **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117), as “right concentration” (*sammā samādhi*),³³
- **Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141), as “right concentration” (*sammā samādhi*),³⁴
- **(Magga) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 45.8), as “right concentration” (*sammā samādhi*),³⁵
- **Hita Sutta 1** (A 3.12), as one of the 5 “accomplishments” (*sampadā*).³⁶

Discourses that use the “three-training” (*ti, sikkhā*) model—such as the Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2), the Ambaṭṭha Sutta (D 3), the Subha Sutta (D 10), and Hita Sutta 1 (A 3.12)—invariably treat “training in concentration” (*samādhi sikkhā*) as the second training.³⁷ As such, the training in samadhi or “concentration” here comprises or refers to the following meditation exercises:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| (1) Guarding the sense-doors, | <i>indriyesu gutta, dvāra</i> |
| (2) Mindfulness and clear comprehension, | <i>sati sampajañña</i> |
| (3) Contentment, | <i>saṅtuṭṭhi</i> |
| (4) Overcoming the mental hindrances, ³⁸ and | <i>nīvaraṇa pahāna</i> |
| (5) The cultivation of four dhyanas. | <i>jhāna bhāvanā</i> |

Here, we see body-based meditation or “contemplation of the body” (*kāyānupassanā*)—guarding the sense-doors, mindfulness and clear comprehension, and contentment—being applied as supporting practices to overcome the mental hindrances. “Contemplation of the body,” as is well known, constitutes the first of the four focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), which gives the following list of body-based meditation exercises for the development of samadhi, as listed in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), thus:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| (1) The mindfulness of the breath, | <i>ānāpāna, sati</i> ³⁹ |
| (2) The four postures, | <i>iriyā, patha</i> ⁴⁰ |
| (3) Clear comprehension, | <i>sampajañña</i> ⁴¹ |
| (4) Perception of the foul (the 31 body-parts), | <i>asubha, saññā</i> ⁴² |

³¹ D 10,2.1-19/1:207 f @ SD 40a.13.

³² D 33/1.11(25)/3:229. The 4 “aggregates” are those of moral virtue (*sīla khandha*), of mental concentration (*samādhi khandha*), of wisdom (*paññā khandha*), and of freedom (*vimutti khandha*).

³³ M 117/3:71-78 @ SD 6.10.

³⁴ M 141,31/3:252 @ SD 6.10.

³⁵ S 45.8/5:10 @ SD 14.5.

³⁶ A 5.17/3.12. The 5 “accomplishments” (*sampadā*) are those of moral virtue (*sīla sampadā*), of mental concentration (*samādhi sampadā*), of wisdom (*paññā sampadā*), of freedom (*vimutti sampadā*), and of the knowledge and vision of freedom (*vimutti, ñāṇa, dassana sampadā*).

³⁷ The first 3 suttas have been listed above.

³⁸ The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*) are: (1) sensual lust (*kāma-c, chanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*), (4) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*): see **Mental hindrances** (SD 32) & **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); **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.36) on how to deal with the hindrances during meditation; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2, 68/1:71), SD 8.10 (def of dhyana with imageries).

³⁹ Here (and at D 22, 20) breath meditation is a 4-step exercise; as 16-step exercise in **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118/-3:78-88); as a perception (*saññā*) at **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60, 12-13/5:111 f); and as a “concentration of breath mindfulness” (*ānāpāna, sati, samādhi*) in **Ānāpāna Saṃyutta** (eg S 5:317). See also **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62), SD 3.11 esp (2).

⁴⁰ For an expanded version of this exercise, see **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122.11/3:122 f), SD 11.4. Except for highlighting the 4 postures, this exercise is actually found in the “Full awareness” section which follows and which, in **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2), is called “mindfulness and full awareness” (*sati sampajañña*) (D 2.65).

⁴¹ Here, “full awareness” may be taken as being inclusive of mindfulness (*sati*). See Pug 86; Vism 4.172.

⁴² In the Suttas, this practice is called *asubha, saññā* (perception of foulness). The term *asubha, nimitta* (the sign of foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f). On details of practice, see **Kāya, gatā, sati S** (M 119), SD 12.21 (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

- (5) The analysis of the 4 elements, *dhātu vavatthāna*⁴³
 (6) The 9 charnel-ground meditations. *sīvathika*⁴⁴ (M 10,4-31/1:56-59), SD 13.3

The first thing we must note here is *the flexibility* of the various meditation exercises as taught by the Buddha. Secondly, there is *a wide choice* of meditation methods for the overcoming of the mental hindrances. Thirdly, these are usually “*directed*” meditations, in the sense that we turn to them when we are distracted from our main meditation or when we fall from concentration. And fourthly, these methods, when properly executed, lead on to samadhi, dhyana, and even insight wisdom.⁴⁵

2.1.2 How to direct the mind to samadhi. The purpose of directed cultivation (*pañidhāya bhāvanā*) is clearly that of overcoming the 5 mental hindrances. One of the most common and effective ways of freeing the mind from the hindrances is to make it *happy*, or simply to *be happy*. The method recommended by the Buddha here is that of turning the mind to an “inspiring sign” (*pasādanīya nimitta*),⁴⁶ as explained in **the Bhikkhuñī Vāsaka Sutta** (S 47.10), thus:

Here, Ānanda, a monk dwells exertive, clearly comprehending, mindful, observing...**the 4 satipatthanas**,⁴⁷ ...putting away covetousness and displeasure in the world.

While he is observing the body in the body,...

...observing feelings in the feelings,...

...observing the mind in the mind,...

...observing dhammas in the dhammas, there arises in him, based on the body, either a fever in the body or sluggishness in the mind, or the mind is distracted outwardly.⁴⁸

That monk, Ānanda, should then direct his mind towards some inspiring sign.⁴⁹ When he directs his mind towards an inspiring sign, gladness arises.

When he is gladdened, zest arises.

When the mind is zestful, the body becomes tranquil.

When the body is tranquil, he feels joy [happiness].

The mind of the joyful [happy] becomes concentrated.

He reflects thus: “The purpose for the sake of which I have directed my mind has been achieved. Let me now withdraw it.”⁵⁰

⁴³ Vism 348 says that the 4 primary elements are explained at length in **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28.6-27/1:185-191 @ SD 6.16), **Mahā Rāhul’ovada S** (M 62.8-17/1:421-426 @ SD 3.11) and **Dhātu, vibhaṅga S** (M 140.13-18/3:240-242 @ SD 4.17). The 4 elements are explained in some detail in **Mūla, pariyāya S** (M 1). The 6 elements (4 primary elements + space + consciousness) are mentioned in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.1 (16)/3: 248), **Bahu, dhātuka S** (M 115.5/3:62), and **Tiṭṭh’āyatana S** (A 3.61.6/1:175 f @ SD 6.8 n here); see also Dhs 638. On how the 4 primary elements cannot exist in themselves, see Boisvert 1995:36 f. Practical meditation instructions on the elements can be found in Vimm:ESK 1961:197-205, Vism 351, Pa Auk 1996:17; Fryba 1987:123. For the first 5 elements in later Buddhism, see Lama Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, London, 1959:183 ff. See **Khandha I Rūpa**, SD 17.2.

⁴⁴ See V 3:36; D 2:295 f; A 3:268, 323; J 1:146; Pv 3.5.2.

⁴⁵ On directed cultivation leading to insight, see **The Buddha discovers dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.4.2).

⁴⁶ Also called “inspiring meditations.” **The 6 inspiring meditation**, or 6 bases of recollection (*cha anussati-ṭ, thāna*), are the recollections on (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) moral virtue, (5) charity, and (6) the devas. (A 6.26/3:314 f), SD 15.6. See also **Mental cultivation**, SD 5, & **Nimitta**, SD 19.7 (4.6.3(2)). On cultivation of lovingkindness, see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8), SD 38.3.

⁴⁷ Here “satipatthana” is the anglicized form of *sati paṭṭhāna*. When anglicizing such Pali terms, all diacritics should be omitted. In other words, the new word should appear English, but the reading (the sound) of it should be as native as possible, or should at least be intelligible to the audience.

⁴⁸ “There arises in him...distracted outwardly,” *tassa kāye kāyānupassino viharato kay’ārammaṇo vā uppajjati kāyasmim̐ pariḷāho cetaso vā līnattam̐ bahiddhā vā cittam̐ vikkhipati*.

⁴⁹ *Ten’ānanda bhikkhunā kismiñ cid eva pasādaniye nimitte cittam̐ pañidahitabbañ*. Comy: A fever of defilement (*kilesa, pariḷāha*) arises, having made the body its basis (*ārammaṇa*). When this happens, we should not allow ourselves to be excited by the it but should then direct our minds to some inspiring sign, ie, we should direct the meditating mind (*kammaṭṭhāna, citta*) to some object that inspires faith, such as the Buddha, etc (SA 3:205).

So he withdraws the mind and he neither applies nor sustains thought.⁵¹

He understands: “Without initial application and sustained application, internally mindful, I am joyful [happy].”⁵²

In this way, Ānanda, there is **directed cultivation** (*paṇidhāya bhāvanā*).

(S 47.10,7/5:154-156), SD 24.2⁵³

During our meditation, when we are distracted or unable to keep our focus on the meditation object, we should direct our attention to a meditation that inspires and energizes us, such as recollecting the qualities of one of the 3 jewels, or visualizing a joyful time we had keeping the precepts or making offerings to some virtuous or needy persons, or envisioning the wonderful qualities of devas (the moral virtues they accumulated that brought them to their state), or cultivating lovingkindness. As soon as we gain a joyful stillness, stay with it for a while, and then gently return to the main practice.

2.1.3 “Undirected” cultivation

2.1.3.1 “Undirected” cultivation (*apaṇidhāya bhāvanā*) usually refers to our meditation when the sign (*nimitta*) begins to appear. From this moment onward, there is *nothing to do* except to let samadhi arise. This is the only way that it can sublimate or turn into dhyana.⁵⁴ It is somewhat like boiling water: first, we make sure that the kettle is clean and empty, and then we fill it up just enough with water. Then we put the kettle on a stove, turn on the fire, and leave it there to boil. There is nothing we can do to make the water boil faster, except making sure the fire is not disturbed by any gust or does not go out. In time, the water will boil, as if of its own accord.

When the mind is totally free from bodily and mental distractions, it reaches full concentration. With just a gentle attention or subtle thought (this is “initial application” or *vitakka*), we keep the mind on the beautiful stillness, and just let it be there (this is “sustained application” or *vicāra*). These are our last thoughts, as it were, because zest and bliss (*pīti, sukha*) will pervade our mind that is fully focused in the present moment of the joyful stillness. This is the first dhyana.

2.1.3.2 Even after we have attained this profoundly blissful state of the first dhyana, advises **the Pabateyya Gāvī Sutta** (A 9.35), we must master it well before going on to the next stage.⁵⁵ For this reason, experienced meditation teachers often advise the beginner, on attaining dhyana, to keep it up for a sustained period, and not to spend too much time discerning them.⁵⁶

In this connection, there are the fivefold mastery (*pañca vāsī*) that we must fulfill, namely:

- (1) We must be able to let the mind attain dhyana.
- (2) We must be able to attain dhyana fast enough and whenever we wish to do so.
- (3) We must be able to stay in dhyana for as long as we have determined to.
- (4) We must easily emerge from dhyana at the appointed time.
- (5) We must discern the dhyana-factors⁵⁷ after emerging.

⁵⁰ That is, redirect it to the original meditation object. (SA 3:206)

⁵¹ Comy explains that ‘without thinking and pondering’ (*na ca vitakketi na ca vicāreti*) means that he is ‘without defiled thinking, without defiled pondering’ (*kilesa, vitakkam na vitakketi kilesa, vicāram na vicāreti*) (SA 3:206). However, as Bodhi has noted, the absence of thinking (*vitakka*) and pondering (*vicāra*) seems to indicate that he has reached the second dhyana (S:B 1922 n147).

⁵² Comy explains this to mean that he is “without defiled initial application, without defiled sustained application” (SA 3:206). However, the forsaking of initial application and sustained application here implies that one has reached the 2nd dhyanas: see **Danta, bhūmi S** (M 126), where the 4 satipatthanas lead to the 1st dhyanas, and the satipatthana is to be practised without initial application or sustained application, leading as such to the 2nd dhyanas (M 126.25/3:136).

⁵³ On directed cultivation, further see SD 24.2 (1.2). On satipatthana with dhyana, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), SD 13.1 (4.3b).

⁵⁴ On the practice how to let dhyana arise at this point, see **Nimitta**, SD 19.7 (4).

⁵⁵ A 9.35/4:418-422 @ SD 24.3.

⁵⁶ See eg Pa Auk Sayadaw 1999:18, 2003:55.

⁵⁷ On dhyana-factors (*jhān’anga*), see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (6).

(Pm 1.459/1:99f; Vism 4.131/154, 23.27/704)

2.1.3.3 If we fail to master these skills, we would be mentally stuck, losing what we have attained, and unable to proceed. As such, we should prepare well for this inner journey, and know fully well what *not* to do so that we let the mind naturally blossom into dhyana.⁵⁸ This excerpt from **the Pabbateyya Gāvī Sutta** gives us a good idea regarding how dhyana “effortlessly,” as it were:

[The first dhyana] Even so, bhikshus, here, a certain monk,⁵⁹ wise, experienced, pasture-wise [knowing the right conditions], skillful, being quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, reaches and dwells in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.⁶⁰

*He enjoys,⁶¹ cultivates, continuously works on the sign, focuses on it, so that it is well focused.*⁶²

[The second dhyana] Then it occurs to him, “What now, if, with the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, I attain and dwell in **the second dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration?”⁶³

Without distracting himself, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he attains and dwells in the second dhyana, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.⁶⁴

*He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign, focuses on it, so that it is well focused.*⁶⁵

[The third dhyana] Then it occurs to him, “What now, if, with the fading away of zest, [420] I remain equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experience happiness with the body, I attain and dwell in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness?’”

⁵⁸ See “How to attain dhyana,” *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (8.7).

⁵⁹ That is, a meditator.

⁶⁰ *Evam eva kho bhikkhave idh’ekacco bhikkhu paṇḍito vyatto khettaññū kusalo vivicc’eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ paṭhamam jhānam upasampajja viharitum.* Elsewhere, eg *Sāmañña,phala S* (D 2.75b/1:73), this line follows: “He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body [the mental body, Vism 4.175/169] with the zest and happiness born of solitude,” see SD 8.10. On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5.

⁶¹ *Āsevati*, which has a broad sense of “associating,” thus “to visit, frequent; practise; follow (eg *maggam*); repeat, develop; cultivate; enjoy; often used with *bhaveti* and *bahulī, karoti* (CPD). I render *asevati* here as “he enjoys” as it vitally involves *joy* for the meditation to succeed. On the importance of joy in meditation, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (14)3.

⁶² *So tam nimittam āsevati bhāveti bahulī, karoti svādhiṭṭhitam adhiṭṭhāti.*

⁶³ The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṅhī, 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. In *Ariya, pariyesanā S* (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate).

⁶⁴ Elsewhere, eg *Sāmañña, phala S* (D 2.77/1:74 f), this line follows: “He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the zest and happiness born of concentration,” see SD 8.10.

⁶⁵ *Tassa evam hoti ‘yan nūnāham vitakka, vicāraṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasādanam cetaso ekodi, bhāvam avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhiyam pīti, sukhaṃ dutiyam jhānam upasampajja vihareyyan ti, so dutiyam jhānam anabhīhimsamāno vitakka, vicārānam vūpasamā...pe...dutyam jhānam upasampajja viharati. So tam nimittam āsevati bhāveti bahulī, karoti svādhiṭṭhitam adhiṭṭhāti.*

Without distracting himself, he, with the fading away of zest, remain equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experience happiness with the body, attains and dwells in the third dhyana, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’⁶⁶

He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign, focuses on it, so that it is well focused.

[The fourth dhyana] Then it occurs to him, “What now, if, with the letting go of pleasure and of pain—and with the earlier ending of happiness and suffering—I attain and dwell in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity?”

Without distracting himself, he, with the letting go of pleasure and of pain, attains and dwells in the fourth dhyana, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.⁶⁷

He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign, focuses on it, so that it is well focused.
(A 9.35,2.2/4:419), SD 24.3

2.1.3.4 TRANSLATION OF *SAMĀDHI*. For all these reasons—related to directed meditation and undirected meditation—some scholars have argued that the terms “mental concentration” or “concentration” do not fully translate the word *samādhi*. At best, *concentration* may reflect the result of the early stages of directed meditation. However, in either method, when properly done, the mind reaches such a depth of single-mindedness that it is undistracted, so as to become profoundly calm and clear: it is a profound stillness. Hence, “mental stillness: is a good translation of *samādhi* as envisioned here.

The mind does not need to focus on anything any more. It is, as it were, its own focus, being happy in itself, free from the body, free from the mind, and free from thinking. We have transcended knowing, as we know it in daily life. It is like falling deeply in love and finding the object of our love, and we are fully consumed and consummated with that love, but of a transcendental nature.

There is, effectively, only feeling, a direct experience of true reality, at least for the duration of the samadhi. Indeed, the word samadhi has such a specialized meaning that it has been adopted into the English lexicon. We might as well use this word. However, words are how we use them and how we define them. So even if we still prefer the familiar old term, “mental concentration,” we can still use it, mindful of the profundity of *samādhi*.⁶⁸

2. 2 DHYANA AS BASIS FOR ARHATHOOD. As already mentioned [1.2], “right samadhi” (*sammā samādhi*), the last factor of the noble eightfold path, is often defined as the attainment of the four dhyanas.⁶⁹ This clearly shows that *right* samadhi is a prerequisite for awakening, that is, it requires the attainment of the four dhyanas, at least in theory. This is clear from such discourses as **the Sekha Sutta** (M 53) that all four dhyanas are needed for the realization of the three knowledges (*te,vijjā*),⁷⁰ that is, for the attainment of arhathood.

⁶⁶ Elsewhere, eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,79/1:75), this line follows: “He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the happiness free from zest,” see SD 8.10.

⁶⁷ Elsewhere, eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,81/1:75), this line follows: “He sits, pervading the body with a pure, bright mind, so that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by a pure, bright mind,” see SD 8.10. On the “pure, bright mind,” see **Accharā Vagga** (A 1.6.1 f): “Bhikshus, this mind is radiant (*pabhassara*), but it is defiled by defilements from outside. The uninstructed ordinary person does not understand this as it really is. As such, for him there is no personal development” (A 1.6.1 f/1:10). On reaching the 4th dhyana, the practitioner becomes directly aware of the truly and naturally pure nature of the mind. See also A:ÑB 1999 §4.

⁶⁸ See also SD 8.4 (6.5.2).

⁶⁹ Eg, “He attains and remains in the first dhyana...the second dhyana...the third dhyana...the fourth dhyana...this is called right concentration”: see **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,21/2:313), SD 13.2; **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117/3:71-78), SD 6.10; **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117/3:71-78), SD 6.10; **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141,31/3:252), SD 11.11. For details on the noble eightfold path, see Gethin 2001:190-226 (ch 6) for an insightful study.

⁷⁰ **M 53**,19/1:357 @ SD 12.14. The 3 knowledges (*te,vijjā*) are: (1) retrocognition (*pubbe,nivāsānussati,ñāṇa*, ie, the recollection of past lives; (2) the divine eye (*dibba,cakkhu*) or clairvoyance; & (3) the knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*), that ends rebirth (Cv 7.1.4/V 2:183 (Bhaddiya); **D 33**,1.10(58)/3:-

However, a number of discourses—such as **the Aṭṭhaka,nagara Sutta** (M 52 = A 11.17), **the Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (M 64), **the Jhāna Sutta** (A 9.36)⁷¹—state that full awakening may arise even with the attainment of *only the first dhyana*. **The Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 8.7), in fact, says that of the 500 arhats, only 60 of them have the three knowledges (*te,vijjā*), another 60 the superknowledge (*abhiññā*), and a further 60 the formless attainments (that is, freed both ways), while the rest are wisdom-freed.⁷²

In other words, less than 70% of the arhats (the wisdom-freed) have only had a single dhyana experience, that is, attained one of the first three dhyanas.⁷³ **The Commentaries** say that the wisdom-freed arhat may be one of five kinds: either a bare insight practitioner (*sukkhavipassaka*),⁷⁴ or one who has attained to arhathood after arising from one of the (four) dhyanas.⁷⁵

2.3 AWAKENING WITHOUT DHYANA? According to **Analayo**, a number of discourses—such as **the Jana,vasabha Sutta** (D 18) and **the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 117)—interestingly, do *not* mention dhyana at all in their description of awakening.⁷⁶ After quoting the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta (as “not mentioning dhyana”), Analayo, notes that “[j]udging from other discourses, to speak of ‘unification of mind’ need not necessarily imply absorption [*jhāna*] attainment, since eg A 2:14 [**Caṅkamaṇa Sutta**: 2.3] relates unification of the mind to walking and standing, or at A 3:174 [**Sammatta Niyāma Sutta 1**, A 5.-151] unification of the mind occurs while listening to the Dhamma” (2003:74 n29).

Let me address these four suttas quoted by Analayo as examples of texts that do “not mention dhyana.” Firstly, as already noted, **the Jana,vasabha Sutta** (D 18) does mention “one-pointedness of the mind that is produced by these seven factors called the noble right concentration with its supports and requi-

220, 34,1.4(10)/3:275; M 4,27-33/1:22, 27.23-25/1:182 f, 36,38-44/1:2478-249, 39,19-21/1:278-280, 51,24-26/1:-347 f, 65,18-21/1:441 f, 76,47-50/1:522, 79,41-44/2:38 f, 101,42-45/2:226 f; S 6.5/1:146* (v582), 8.7/1:192* (v736), 8.9/1:194* (v749); A 3.59,2-4/1:166 f; Sn 656; cf (on the 3rd knowledge, *āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*) M 9,70/1:55, 112,20/3:36. These 3 are superknowledges (*superknowledges*), but only the 3rd is a “direct knowledge” (*aññā*), as it leads to arhathood. The 3-knowledge arhat (*te,vijja arahata*) is one who, with *samatha* as basis, have attained 4 or more dhyanas. The *te,vijjā* here is the antithesis of the brahminical *ti-,veda* (A 1:163; Sn 594; SnA 463). See PED, sv vijjā.

⁷¹ M 52,4/1:350 = A 11.17,3/5:343, M 64,9/1:435; A 9.36,2/4:422 f, respectively.

⁷² S 8.7/1:191 @ SD 80.1. **Freedom of mind and freedom through wisdom**, respectively, *ceto,vimutti* (freedom of mind, ie, freedom by concentration, ie through destruction of the mental hindrances), and *paññā,vimutti* (freedom through insight) (A 1:60). One who is freed by wisdom (*paññā,vimutta*) “may not have reached the 8 deliverances (*vimokkha = jhāna*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70.16/1:478): see (**Arahatta**) **Susīma S** (S 12.70/2:123-127), SD 16.8. All arhats are perfectly freed in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain **the 8 deliverances** (*aṭṭha vimokkha*), which include the 4 formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called *freed both ways*, ie, freed from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood: see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.33/2:111 f), SD 9; **Kiṭṭa,giri S** (70), SD 11.1 (5.2(2)); **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122), SD 11.4 (3.3). For full list of the 8 liberations, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15,35/2:70 f), SD 5.17.35; also D 3:262, 228; **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306; also M 120.37/3:103, SD 3.4.37. See also **Aṭṭha Vimokkha** (SD 62.5) & Analayo 2009:141-156.

⁷³ See esp (**Arahatta**) **Susīma S** (S 12.70,23-57/2:123-127), SD 16.8; also **Kiṭṭa,giri S** (M 70), SD 11.1 5.2 (2).

⁷⁴ The “bare insight practitioner,” however, is not mentioned in the Nikāyas, and as such is generally not recognized by the Sutta-based teachers, but is a popular notion with the contemporary “Vipassana” system. See eg the full teachers. **Mahasi Sayadaw**, *Satipatthana Vipassana*, 3rd ed, 2005:283 f. Burmese teacher, **Ledi Sayadaw**, *The Manuals of Buddhism*, under *Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī*, ch 8: the 8 *maggāṅga*, where *sukkhavipassaka sotāpanna* is mentioned: <http://www.ubakhin.com/ledi/manual6h.htm>; Thai Abhidhamma teacher, **Sujin Boriharnwanaket**, speaks of “two kinds of *ariya-savaka*, namely, the *sukkhavipassaka* and the *cetovimutti*”: see “Summary of Paramatthadhamma part VIII,” under “The 3 *pariññā*”: <http://www.dhammadownload.com/paramat8.html> (dated April 14 2000:16).

⁷⁵ MA 3:188; PugA 191. This is a commentarial term and concept, not found in the suttas.

⁷⁶ Respectively, D 18,27/2:217, M 117/3:71-78; but in both cases, “right concentration” (= the 4 dhyanas) are mentioned. Similarly, Analayo’s other citations (2003:73)—D 3:252, M 3:7, S 5:21, and A 4:40—all *do* clearly mention dhyana.

sites.”⁷⁷ The sutta then goes on to progressively link up the ten “rightness” (*sammattā*) factors, beginning with right view and ending with right knowledge, from which arises right liberation. This is clearly a description of the supramundane path leading to arhathood,⁷⁸ a pattern which is also found in the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta.⁷⁹ We cannot, from silence alone, argue that no dhyana is implied here, especially where right samadhi is clearly mentioned.

Secondly, and similarly, on a close examination of **the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta**, we cannot, from silence alone, say that dhyana is “not” implied—unless there is no mention of right samadhi at all. The sutta defines **right samadhi** as the oneness or unification of the mind (*cittass’ekaggatā*) interdependent with the other seven path-factors.⁸⁰ Right samadhi, as a path-factor, is always defined at the four dhyana: as such, dhyana is integral to its definition. It must therefore be reiterated that we cannot, from silence alone, argue that no dhyana is implied here, especially where right samadhi is clearly mentioned.

Thirdly, Analayo, as mentioned, quotes **the Caṅkamaṇa Sutta** (A 5.29) as saying that samadhi can arise during walking meditation,⁸¹ where it suggests that “‘unification of mind’ need not necessarily imply absorption [*jhāna*] attainment, since [the sutta] relates unification of the mind to walking and standing” (2003:74 n29). I think the issue here is not whether it refers to dhyana or not, but rather that some level of deep focus is present in the walking and the standing meditations.

This profoundly mindful single-minded meditative walking and standing is well illustrated in the events of the first seven weeks after the Great Awakening. It is said that during the first week, the Buddha sits in meditation; the second week, he *stands* in meditation, visualizing the Bodhi tree; the third week, he *walks* meditatively on the elevated Jewelled Walk; the fourth week, he meditates in the jeweled house; the fifth to the seventh weeks, he sits under three different trees each week.⁸²

Fourthly, Analayo quotes **the Sammatta Niyāma Sutta 1** (A 5.151) as stating that “unification of the mind occurs while listening to the Dhamma” (2003:74 n29). Again here, the sutta is not addressing the nature of dhyana, but merely listing the proper ways of listening to the Dharma so that we are “able to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.”⁸³ The lesser streamwinners⁸⁴ are said to be on the course of “rightness” (*sammattā*), which here refers to the eightfold path of the saints. These two individuals, however, are spiritual attainers who are not yet aryas, as suggested by **the Sammatta Niyāma Suttas 1-3** (A 5.151-153). In short, the Sammatta Niyāma Sutta (all three of them), are not addressing dhyana, but streamwinning.⁸⁵

Having said all that, we now have a better idea of the difference between *samādhi* and *jhāna*. **Samadhi** can have a broad sense of mental focus that encompasses a range of mental focus from active mindfulness, such as in walking and standing meditations, to the profound still and bliss of dhyana. **Dhyana**, however, has a specific sense of a fully focused mind, free from all mental hindrances, that is, from all

⁷⁷ *Yā kho, bho, imehi satta-h-aṅgehi cittassa ekaggatā parikkhatā, ayaṃ vuccati, bho, ariyo sammā, samādhi sa, upaniso iti pi sa, parikkhāro iti pi.*

⁷⁸ D 18,27/2:217 @ SD 62.3.

⁷⁹ M 117,34/3:75 f @ SD 6.10.

⁸⁰ “Bhikkhus, I will teach you the noble right concentration (*ariya sammā, samādhi*) with its supports and requisites” (*ariyaṃ vo, bhikkhave, sammā, samādhiṃ desessāmi sa, upanisaṃ sa, parikkhāraṃ*, M 117.2/3:71), SD 6.10. Requisites,” *sa, parikkhāra*, alt tr “with its equipments” (Gethin 2001:216). Comy says that “noble” (*ariya*) here means “supramundane” (*lok’uttara*), ie, the concentration pertaining to the supramundane path. The phrase “supports and requisites” refers to the other 7 path-factors (M 117.3/3:71; MA 4:130 f).

⁸¹ A 5.29/3:29 f @ SD 76.3.

⁸² See **Dhamma & Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1 (5), & **The first seven weeks** (SD 63.1).

⁸³ *Bhaddo niyāmaṃ okkamituṃ kusalesu dhammesu sammattaṃ* (A 5.151,3/3:174 f), SD 4.2. On *sammatta, niyāma*, see (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7 (1.6).

⁸⁴ *Cūḷa, sotāpanna*, a post-canonical term referring to one who is on the verge to becoming a streamwinner, as suggested by the 10 suttas of the Okkanta Saṃyutta (S 25): see (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7 & **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3(6)

⁸⁵ **Sammatta Niyāma 1-3** (S 5.151-3/3:174-176), SD 4.2-4. On attaining streamwinning without dhyana, see **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5(2).

bodily activity, and is profoundly still and blissful. We will later discuss to what extent, dhyana also excludes mental activity.⁸⁶

In this connection, it is useful to be familiar with **the (Samādhy-aṅga) Pañc’āṅgika Sutta** (A 5.28), which teaches the “cultivation of the five-limbed noble right samadhi” (*ariya pañc’āṅgika sammā,samā-dhi bhāvanā*). This is clearly a teaching on dhyana: the first four limbs are the four dhyanas, and the fifth is the proper attention to the review-sign (*paccavekkhaṇā nimitta*).⁸⁷ That the attending to the review-sign is listed fifth and last shows that it is a practice to be done *after* having attained a dhyana, that is, any of the 4 dhyanas. Due to the vital significance of this teaching, we will discuss it separately in some detail.⁸⁸

2.4 AWAKENING WITHOUT DHYANA. In a number of discourses, such as **the (Sekha) Uddesa Sutta** (A 3.85) and **the Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta** (A 9.12) [2.5], strongly suggests the possibility of attaining the path without any dhyana. This is especially true for the streamwinner and the once-returned, who do not need perfect concentration, that is, they do not need dhyana (*jhāna*), nor even need to “meditate” (as the term is popularly taken today) to attain to their respective realizations.⁸⁹

The (Sekha) Uddesa Sutta (A 3.85) is a definitive discourse on *how the three trainings*⁹⁰ are related to the attaining of sainthood,⁹¹ and it also clearly defines the streamwinner and the once-returned.⁹² Both the kinds of saints are said to be endowed with moral virtue, and they both have totally destroys the “3 fetters.”⁹³ **The once-returned**, however, has also significantly diminished lust, hate and delusion. There is no mention of dhyana here.⁹⁴

According to **the Mahā Saḷāyatanika Sutta** (M 149), when we know and see the 6 senses, their external objects, the sense-consciousnesses, the sense-contacts and their respective feelings as they really are, then “this noble eightfold comes to fulfillment by cultivation.”⁹⁵ We would be able to keep to a balanced practice of calm and insight via the noble eightfold path, so that he gains direct knowledge and liberation.⁹⁶ Notice that there is no mention of dhyana here.⁹⁷

A briefer statement of this is made in **the Kāmada Sutta** (S 2.6), the Buddha declares that the trainees (*sekha*), that is, the saints of the path, short of the arhats, who “delight in calming the mind” (*citta,-vūpasame ratā*) and “delight in calming the faculties” (*indriyūpasame ratā*). In doing so, “the path of the noble ones is even” (*ariyānaṃ samo maggo*). Again here there is no mention of dhyana, but a general reference to spiritual training.⁹⁸

2.5 HOW DHYANA SPEEDS UP AWAKENING. From the title of **the Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta** (A 9.12)—the discourse on those “with residues” (*sa,upādi*)⁹⁹—it is clear that it deals with those who still have the

⁸⁶ See **Buddha discovers dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2.1).

⁸⁷ A 5.28/3:27 @ SD 33.13. Curiously, Analayo thinks that this sutta “lists what is probably a form of ‘insight’ meditation as an alternative method to develop right concentration” (2003:73 n27).

⁸⁸ See **The Buddha discovers dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.4.4).

⁸⁹ More on this point, see **Entering the stream** (SD 3.3).

⁹⁰ On **the 3 trainings**, see *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6 & **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/1:235), SD 24.10c.

⁹¹ A 3.85/1:231 f, also called **(Mattaso,kāri) Sikkhā S**. See SD 21.6 for a discussion.

⁹² A 3.85/1:231 f @ SD 3.3(2).

⁹³ The (first) 3 fetters: see §2(4)n.

⁹⁴ See further **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

⁹⁵ *Evam assāyaṃ ariyo aṭṭh’āṅgiko maggo bhāvanā,pāripūriṃ gacchati.*

⁹⁶ M 149,10/3:289), SD 41.9.

⁹⁷ I have difficulty understanding what Analayo means by saying here that “a penetrative understanding of the six senses constitutes right concentration” (2003:73 n27).

⁹⁸ S 2.6/1:48.

⁹⁹ “With residues of the aggregates of clinging,” *sa,upādi,sesa*, ie “with remains of material support to which one grasps (for rebirth),” viz, the aggregates (*khandha*): form, feeling, perception, mental formation, consciousness. In the Suttas, the word is mostly used in such expressions as “one of the 2 fruits may be expected: either perfect wisdom or, if the groups are still remaining (*sati upādi,sese*), non-return” (D 22). Also in “Here the Tathāgata has passed into the nirvana-element in which no more groups are remaining (*anupādi,sesa*)” (A 4.118/2:120)—BDict: upādi.

five aggregates of clinging.¹⁰⁰ The term is applied to nine types of saints, namely, 5 types of non-returners, the once-returner, and 3 types of streamwinners. The once-returner is defined in the same words as a streamwinner, except that the once-returner has significantly diminished lust, hate and delusion, too [2.4].

What should interest us here is the Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta's teachings on streamwinners (*sotāpanna*). Here are the relevant passages from the Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta's definition of the 3 kinds of streamwinners:

8 Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, *but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom*.¹⁰¹ With the total destruction of the 3 fetters,¹⁰² he is a **single-seeder** (*eka,bhī*),¹⁰³ having taken only one more human birth, makes an end of suffering.¹⁰⁴

9 Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, *but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom*. With the total destruction of the 3 fetters, he is a **clan-to-clan-goer** (*kolaṅ,kola*),¹⁰⁵ having re-arisen and wandered amongst two or three families, makes an end of suffering.

10 Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, *but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom*.¹⁰⁶ With the total destruction of the 3 fetters, he is a **7-at-most** (*satta-k,khattu parama*),¹⁰⁷ having re-arisen and wandered amongst gods and humans for seven lives at the most, makes an end of suffering.¹⁰⁸ (A 9.12,8-10/4:380 f), SD 3.3(3)

The non-returner (like the arhat) is said to be “fully accomplished in samadhi” (*samādhismiṃ paripūra,kārī*): in other words, he is able to attain dhyana. The streamwinner (like the once-returner), on the other hand, is described as being endowed with moral virtue, but “gains only limited concentration” (*samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī*). This means that the meditation (such as breath meditation and cultivating lovingkindness) done by the would-be streamwinner is simple or basic, yet helpful, even if dhyana is not attained.

The Udāna Commentary is helpful here in giving a summary of what has been discussed so far, thus:

Or, one reaches the far shore (*pāragū*) by way of realizing the fruit of streamwinning through *moral virtue*. For, he is said to be one “fully accomplished in moral virtue” (*sīlesu paripūra,kārī*). Here, the once-returner, too, is understood in the same manner as the streamwinner. One reaches the far shore by way of realizing of the fruit of non-return through *samadhi*. For, he is said to be

¹⁰⁰ A 9.12/4:378-382 @ SD 3.3(3). On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17, esp **Dve Khandha S** (S 22.48 @ SD 17.1a).

¹⁰¹ *Idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūra,kārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī* [PTS wr *samādhismiṃ na paripūra,kārī*], *paññāya mattaso,kārī*.

¹⁰² They are the first 3 of the 10 fetters (*saṃyojana*), viz: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), and (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*). **The 10 fetters** are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*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 5:13, Vbh 377). See further **Udakūpama S** (A 7.15), SD 28.6 (1.2) esp 1.2(10)..

¹⁰³ *Eka,bhī*.

¹⁰⁴ *Puna ca paraṃ sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūra,kārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā eka,bhī hoti ekañ-ñeva mānusakam bhavam nibbattevā dukkhass'antam karoti.*

¹⁰⁵ *Kolaṅ,kola*.

¹⁰⁶ *Idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūra,kārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī.*

¹⁰⁷ *Satta-k,khattu,parama*.

¹⁰⁸ *Puna ca paraṃ sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūra,kārī hoti samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā satta-k,khattu,paramo hoti, satta-k,khattu,paramam deve ca mānuse ca sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhass'antam karoti.*

one “fully accomplished in samadhi” (*samādhismiṃ paripūra, kārī*). One reaches the far shore by way of realizing arhathood in a manner different from these three. (UA 70)¹⁰⁹

The Commentary adds that the arhat cultivates unshakable qualities leading to the far shore (nirvana) through attaining the knowledge and vision of freedom by wisdom and of freedom of mind (that is, by way of deep meditation or dhyana).¹¹⁰

3 The benefits of samadhi

3.1 EVEN A WEAK SAMADHI IS BENEFICIAL. According to **the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha**, a 10th-11th century Abhidhamma compendium, concentration, even if it is often very weak, is one of the seven mental factors (*cetasika*) inseparably associated with all consciousness.¹¹¹ In this wider sense, it is associated with all karmically wholesome (*kusala*) consciousness. Wrong concentration (*micchā samādhi*) is concentration associated with all karmically unwholesome (*akusala*) consciousness. Wherever this term *samādhi* appear in the early texts without any qualification (undifferentiated as “right” or “wrong”), right concentration is meant.

The Commentaries further distinguishes 3 levels of intensity of mental concentration, that is,

- (1) “Preparatory concentration” (*parikamma samādhi*) existing at the beginning of the mental exercise.
- (2) “Access [Neighbourhood] concentration” (*upacāra samādhi*), that is, concentration “approaching” but not yet attaining the first dhyana, which in certain mental exercises is marked by the appearance of the so-called “counter-image” (*paṭibhāga nimitta*).
- (3) “Attainment [Full] concentration” (*appanā samādhi*), that is, the concentration which characterizes the dhyanas.¹¹²

In this connection, meditation teachers often speak of another set of three kinds of samadhi, namely, momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), access (or neighbourhood) concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), and full concentration (*appanā samādhi*).¹¹³ According to the Commentator, Dhammapāla, momentary concentration is simply access concentration interspersed with sense-consciousness, with the counter-part-sign and dhyana-factors as object.¹¹⁴

3.2 THE 4 BENEFITS OF SAMADHI. Samadhi, when properly developed, flowers in dhyana, when the mind, transcending its bodily limits, fully experiences itself, attended by profound bliss. According to **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), the cultivation of concentration (*samādhi bhāvanā*) may bring about these four blessings:

- (1) present happiness (*diṭṭha, dhamma sukha*) through the 4 dhyanas;

¹⁰⁹ *Atha vā sotāpatti, phalādhigamena sīlasmiṃ pāragū. So hi “sīlesu paripūra, kārī ti vutto, sotāpanna-g, gahaṇe-n’eva c’ettha sakadāgāmi’pi gahito hoti. Anāgāmi, phalādhigamena samādhismiṃ pāragū. So hi “samādhismiṃ paripūra, kārī ti vutto. Arahatta, phalādhigamena itaresu tīsu pāragū.* (UA 70). UA:M 1994:106 is off the mark here.

¹¹⁰ The one mind-freed (*ceto, vimutta*) has destroyed all the mental hindrances, and as such could attain dhyana at will. The wisdom-freed (*paññā, vimutta*) “may not have reached the eight liberations (*vimokkha = jhāna*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70.16/1:478): see above (2.1) n on “wisdom-freed.”

¹¹¹ These 7 mental factors are known as “universals” (*sabba, citta, sādharmaṇa*), viz, contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*, ie concentration, *samādhi*), mental vitality (*jīvit’indriya*), and attention (*manasikāra*) (Abhs 2.2 = Abhs:BRS 78-81); BDict, svv *nāma, cetanā*.

¹¹² 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”: free download from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanatiloka/wheel394.html>.

¹¹³ All 3 are mentioned in DhsA 117; Vism 144; only *upacāra samādhi* and *appanā samādhi* are mentioned at Vism 85, 371 (ie besides DhsA 117; Vism 144). **Abhidhamm’attha Saṅgaha** speaks of *parikamma bhāvanā, upacāra bhāvanā* and *appanā bhāvanā* (Abhs:BRS 9.5/331; Abhs:SR 203; Abhs:WG 328), showing their relationships with the 3 kinds of samadhi here. See **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (9.4) & Fig 9.6.

¹¹⁴ See L S Cousins 1996:47.

- (2) knowledge and vision (*ñāṇa, dassana*), that is, the 3 stages of the path (short of arhathood);¹¹⁵
- (3) mindfulness and clear awareness (*sati sampajañña*) through the full knowing of the arising, persisting and passing of feelings, perceptions and thoughts;
- (4) destruction of all influxes (*āsava-k, khaya*) through understanding the arising and passing away of the five aggregates of clinging (*pañc'upādāna-k, khandha*). (D 33,1.11(5)/3:222 f)

The 4 “ways of cultivating samadhi” (*samādhi bhāvanā*) are defined in **the Samādhi Bhāvanā Sutta** (A 4.41).¹¹⁶

3.3 CONCLUSION. According to the Abhidhamma, concentration connected with the 4 noble path-moments (*magga*) and 4 fruition-moments (*phala*)—that is, those of the 8 kind of saints—is called supra-mundane (*lokuttara*), that is, having nirvana as object. Any other concentration (whether of worldlings or the saints), even that of the sublimest dhyanas, is merely mundane (*lokiya*).¹¹⁷

We are made up of body and mind. The body comprises the 5 physical sense-doors through which sense-data regularly enter our minds and occupy it. There is such a flood of sense-data that we can easily drench or drown in them, if not be washed away by them. We also need to attend our various bodily needs and processes.

Even when we think we are in control of ourselves, we are covered up by our senses, so that we are like the emperor in his *old* clothes. The senses habitually delight in old and familiar pleasurable sense-data, rejecting what is seen as unpleasurable, and ignoring what appears to be neither.¹¹⁸ As such, to see our true selves, we need to give up the dresses and disguises of sight, sound, smell taste and touch, and put on the comfortable robe of mindfulness.¹¹⁹

To properly prepare for meditation, we need to prepare our bodies first. It helps to be clean, and dress simply and comfortably. A healthy light meal once or twice a day with a nourishing drink in between is sufficient. In other words, it is wise to travel light in this journey into inner space. It is very important to learn to sit properly and comfortably right from the start, so that we are stable yet alert in posture.

In due course, we need not think about the bodily posture any more. Once we are able to let go of our physical body, and just let it be, the mind is fully revealed: our inward journey has begun.

Very often, our meditation teachers would instruct us to be so focused on our breath until it becomes, as it were, the door into our inner space and stillness. But there are many other methods we can use, such as the cultivation of lovingkindness.¹²⁰

The spiritual friendship of our meditation teacher is vital in having someone wise and compassionate to guide us in this great spiritual adventure. Our most wonderful teacher and spiritual friend is, of course, the Buddha. For, he is the one who has re-discovered dhyana, just as the past Buddhas have done. We will now look deeper into this wonderful discovery. [SD 33.1b]

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¹¹⁵ Ie streamwinning, once-return and non-return (Vism 22). Comy, however, explains this as the divine eye (*dibba, cakkhu*) arising through perception of light (*āloka sañña*).

¹¹⁶ A 4.41/2:45 @ SD 24.1.

¹¹⁷ On *lokiya* and *lok'uttara*, see S:B 1490-92.

¹¹⁸ See *Nimitta & Anuvyañjana*, SD 19.14.

¹¹⁹ See Brahmavamso 2006:116 f.

¹²⁰ For a full list of meditation methods, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (Fig 8.1).

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