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 and only chapter, is actually a “subchapter” (vagga), the Jhāna Vagga, so that it is its alternate title. 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 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 emerge from samadhi, that is, coming out of the meditation at the proper time.

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 Vuṭṭhāna Sutta. The Samādhi Mūlaka Vuṭṭhāna Sutta (S 34.3), as the title suggests, gives this list of 4 kinds of meditators, in regard to samadhi, in a broad sense of mental concentration, especially the emerging from dhyana, thus:

(1) skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi, but not skilled in emerging from samadhi.
(2) skilled in emerging from samadhi, but unskilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi.
(3) neither skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi, nor skilled in emerging from samadhi.
(4) both skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi and also skilled in emerging from samadhi.
The last is the best, the “cream” (maṇḍa) [§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.

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Samādhi Mūlaka Vuṭṭhāna Sutta
The Discourse on Samadhi-rooted Emerging
S 34.3

1-3 Originating in Sāvatthī.
Bhikshus, there are these 4 kinds of meditators.
What are the four?
4 (1) Here, bhikshus, some meditators are skilled about samadhi [mental concentration] in regard to samadhi, but not skilled in emerging from samadhi.\(^{11}\)
5 (2) But, here, bhikshus, some meditators are skilled in emerging from samadhi,\(^{12}\) but not skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi.\(^{13}\)
6 (3) But, here, bhikshus, some meditators are neither skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi, nor skilled in emerging from samadhi.\(^{14}\)
7 (4) But, here, bhikshus, some meditators are both skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi and also skilled in emerging from samadhi.\(^{15}\)
8 Here, bhikshus, this meditator who is both skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi and also skilled in emerging from samadhi—of these 4 kinds of meditators, he is the foremost, the best, the leader, the highest, and most excellent.\(^{16}\)
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 foremost\(^{17}\)—
10 even so, bhikshus, this meditator who is both skilled about samadhi in regard to samadhi and also skilled in emerging from 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 4 kinds of meditators.

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\(^{9}\) For details, see SD 41.12 (1.3.5).
\(^{10}\) S 34.1/3:263 f, SD 41.12.
\(^{11}\) Idha bhikkhave ekacco jhāyī samādhismiṁ samādhi, kusalo hoti, na samādhismiṁ vuṭṭhāna, kusalo.
\(^{12}\) See SD 41.14 (2.3).
\(^{13}\) Idha pana bhikkhave ekacco jhāyī samādhismiṁ ṭhiti, kusalo hoti, na samādhismiṁ samādhi, kusalo.
\(^{14}\) Idha pana bhikkhave ekacco jhāyī n’eva samādhismiṁ samādhi, kusalo hoti, na ca samādhismiṁ ṭhiti, kusalo.
\(^{15}\) Idha pana bhikkhave ekacco jhāyī samādhismiṁ samādhi, kusalo ca hoti, samādhismiṁ ṭhiti, kusalo ca.
\(^{16}\) Ayam imesaṁ catunnaṁ jhāyānaṁ aggo ca setṭho ca mokkho [Ke Se pāmokkho] ca uttamo ca pavarocca.
\(^{17}\) Seyyathā’pi bhikkhave gavā khaṇāṁ khāraṁ ādaṁ ḍhādi dādaṁ ṭhāṇa, nītaṁ nava, nītaṁ sappi sappiṁ sappi, maṇḍo tatra aggam akkhāyati. See Samādhi Samāpatti S, SD 41.12 (1.3.5).