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Dhyana

An introductory study of *jhāna* and spiritual liberation (the 4 form dhyanas)
An essay by Piya Tan ©2004

1 Significance of dhyana

1.1 A BRIEF HISTORICAL COMMENT

1.1.1 Ancient roots and modern senses

1.1.1.1 DHYANA IN BUDDHISM. Dhyana is as old as Buddhism itself, probably older. The Pali form of the term is *jhāna*, but as the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, it has found its way into Chinese as *chan*, into Korean as *seon* (*sōn*), into Japanese as *zen*, and into Vietnamese as *thiền*. The Pali word *jhāna* and its Sanskrit cognate *dhyāna* probably, at least in pre-Buddhist and early Buddhist times, means “meditation,” that is, a sustained mental discipline that keeps the mind focused.

Dhyana (P *jhāna*; Skt *dhyāna*) is a meditative state of profound single-minded stillness, clarity and transpersonal or extrasensory bliss. It is mentioned and explained in the early Buddhist scripture and its Chinese parallel, the Āgamas, and post-canonical Theravāda literature. Discourses such as **the Sāmañña-phala Sutta** (D 2) describe how after the 5 mental hindrances¹ are overcome, the 4 dhyanas arise, followed by various superknowledges.²

1.1.1.2 TRANSLATING THE TERM JHĀNA. **L S Cousins** has given some serious and helpful thoughts on the rendering of *jhāna* into English (1973:115 f), which essentially highlight its key issues. He points to one of the oldest definitions of *jhāna* in English, that by R C Childers in his *A Dictionary of the Pali Language*, under “Jhānam”:

Meditation, contemplation; religious meditation or abstraction of the mind, mystic or abstract meditation, ecstasy, trance ... *Jhāna* is a religious exercise productive of the highest spiritual advantage, leading after death to re-birth in one of the *Brahma* heavens, and forming the principal means of entrance into the four Paths. The four *Jhānas* are four stages of mystic meditation, whereby the believer’s mind is purged from all earthly emotions, and detached as it were from the body, which remains plunged in a profound trance. (Childers 1875: 169)

Since Childers wrote this in 1875, notes Cousins, the majority of translators have employed one of the terms used by him. His brief survey of some Pali Text Society translators gave the following:

¹ 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 **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32 esp (1) & **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), SD 13.2; **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,36), SD 13.3, on how to deal with the hindrances in one’s meditation; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,68/1:71), SD 8.10.

² D 2,77-100/1:73-85 (SD 8.10). The 6 superknowledges (*cha-ī-abhiññā*) are: (1) psychic powers (*iddhi, vidhā*); (2) clairaudience or the “divine ear” (*dibba, sota*); (3) telepathy or mind-reading (*parassa ceto, pariya, ñāṇa*); (4) retrocognition or the knowledge recollection of past lives (*pubbe, nivāsānussati, ñāṇa*); (5) clairvoyance or the “divine eye” (*dibba, cakkhu*) or knowledge of the passing-away and re-appearance of beings, faring according to their karma (*cutūpapāta yathā, kammūpaga, ñāṇa*); and (6) the knowledge of the destruction of mental influxes (*āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*). The last is the most important, as it is direct knowledge, and refers to arhathood. See **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11), SD 1.7 (1).

“ecstasy, ecstatic meditation, musing, contemplative rapture, *jhāna*-rapture, meditation.” The word is left untranslated by T W Rhys Davids and a number of other scholars.

No doubt the most literal rendering is “meditation” but this too easily creates the impression that *jhana* is merely systematic thinking. Technical terms of Christian mysticism, often with theistic implications, such as “contemplation,” “mystic meditation,” also “recollection,” “rapture,” are surely out of place in a Buddhist setting. “Ecstasy” and “trance,” even if correct descriptively, are too general.³ *Jhāna* applies in Pali usage to a very specific type of “trance” and is, as we shall see, only relatively rarely employed with a wider application. Possibly the least misleading translation, if one is needed at all, would be “absorption,” but I would prefer to retain this as the rendering of *appaṇā* [sic] and leave *jhāna* untranslated. (Cousins 1973:115 f)

It is vitally helpful to note the finer points of *jhāna* mentioned by Cousins, so that we have a better idea of its meanings and usages as found in the early Buddhist texts. Yet by now many of us are aware that such semantic difficulties arise mainly from our own cultural background and received wisdom. Again, I must stress, it is wise not to define Buddhist terms and teachings against those of other religions or systems, or worse, to perceive them merely or mostly in the light of extraneous systems and ideas.

Buddhist teachings should be understood on its own terms for them to really and truly benefit us. Moreover, it is the wise user who should define, and more importantly understand such Buddhist terms and ideas. How words are defined in dictionaries and dogmas are secondary; how we choose to understand them and do so in truth so as to benefit from their intentions is primary. In other words, we should define our own terms based on our understanding of scripture and experience of the teaching.⁴

My rule of thumb is to use the anglicized forms of Buddhist terms if they are available in a good English dictionary. Such words include “buddha, dharma, sangha, karma,” and of course “**dhyana**,” which is an anglicization of the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, without the diacritic. This way, we need not concern ourselves with any cultural baggage, as discussed by Cousins above. Even then, we still should constantly remind ourselves of its Buddhist context and intent.⁵

1.1.2 Later development

Martin T Adam, in a paper on Kamalaśīla’s views on meditation in his *Bhāvanākramas*, proposes a useful differentiation between the terms “meditation” (which he uses for *bhāvanā*) and “cultivation” (for *jhāna*). According to Kamalaśīla, says Adam, only “meditation,” as a concept-based exercise, can bring insight wisdom, while “cultivation” brings about non-conceptual dhyana, bereft of thought, as such, incapable of realizing wisdom. While the former is the actual *practice*, the latter is only a meditative *state*.⁶

Adam’s paper is rather technical, useful mainly to the specialist and researcher. My interest in quoting his paper is mainly semantic, that is, a meaningful use of words. By way of a historical criticism, the terms *meditation* and *cultivation* are useful in what I wish to express in this section (to which I limit such definitions). In everyday English, when we talk of “meditation,” it usually refers to some sort of *technique* of raising awareness. Such an exercise is dependent on words and concepts, or even rituals in some cases.

³ Cousins’ n: Contemplation and meditation both refer to specific stages of the *via mystica*. Recollection refers to particular states of prayer, while rapture implies seizure and removal from the body by a divinity. “Enstasy” is sometimes used in contrast to ecstasy but this opposition appears to highlight a rather secondary feature.

⁴ See esp the Humpty Dumpty Principle: SD 17.4 (2.3).

⁵ See **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11, esp (3) & **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4 (4.1+2): Truth and translation.

⁶ Martin T Adam, “Two concepts of meditation and three kinds of wisdom in Kamalaśīla’s *Bhāvanākramas*: A problem of translation.” *Buddhist Studies Review* 23,1 2006:71-92.

“Cultivation,” on the other hand, comprises exercises that prepare the mind for an altered state of consciousness, or at least some level of mental stillness (or mental concentration or samadhi). The cultivation exercises may be verbal or conceptual initially, but they are phased out as the mind calms and clears itself. When we properly execute such an exercise, we will be capable of letting go of all sense-experiences (for the duration of the exercise) and blissfully experience the mind all by itself. Such an experience is utterly transverbal and non-conceptual, and ineffably blissful. This is traditionally known as dhyana (*P jhāna*).

1.1.3 Did later Buddhism lose *jhāna*?

1.1.3.1 Interestingly, in the Buddhism that grew after the Buddha, for various reasons that are worth examining in greater detail, apparently did not inherit or rejected the *jhāna* tradition, commonly described and promoted by the Buddha himself in the early Buddhist texts. The Buddhist meditation tradition that flowered in China, for example, became a culturally distinct *meditation* system with its gong’an (Jap koan), formalism (like appropriate postures, gestures and gait) and rituals (such as using the “fragrant stick” to ritually strike a meditator out of his drowsiness). The Indian *jhāna* (Pali) and *dhyāna* (Sanskrit) had become sinicized and institutionalized as **chán**, that continued to blossom as the Korean *seon* (*sōn*), the Japanese *zen*, and the Vietnamese *thiền*.

1.1.3.2 If we go by a documented history of Chan Buddhism and its descendents, we see it highlighted by attempts to denigrate, even expel, the “Indian” system of “gradual progress,” and to turn to the “sudden awakening” using approved methods of the school or teacher we subscribe to.⁷ Ironically, despite claims by such systems of not going by the sacred books (“a transmission outside the scripture”), their meditation exercises apparently attract mostly intellectuals, for whom they seem more likely to work. This may explain why Zen was one of the earliest forms of Buddhism to find a footing in the intellectual west, and is less popular amongst the more faith-bound and religious orientals.⁸ [3.2]

However, with the current availability of early Buddhist scriptures both in their original texts and reliable translations, most schools and groups of Buddhism today, including Zen, as a rule, see the wisdom in augmenting early Buddhist teachings and meditation methods to their traditional practices.⁹

1.2 THE BUDDHA AND DHYANA

1.2.1 The Buddha himself experiences dhyana, as described in the early texts, during his own quest for awakening. He is recorded in the suttas as constantly exhorting his followers, monastic and lay alike, to cultivate dhyana as a means of awakening to liberation. The Buddha’s best known instructions on the attaining of dhyana are recorded in discourses such as **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2).¹⁰ **The Nagara**

⁷ See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b, esp (40b.5), “Transmission outside the scriptures.”

⁸ On the possibility of intellectualism (meditator monks vs scholar monks) in early Buddhism, see **Mahā Cunda S** (A 6.46/3:355 f), SD 4.6.

⁹ **Robert Buswell, Jr**, eg, speaks from his experience, thus: “Sōn monastic life in modern Korea suggests not. Most Korean monks training in the meditating hall have extensive knowledge of Buddhist doctrine, ranging from basic “Hīnayāna” and Mahāyāna sūtras, to theoretical treatises on Sōn praxis and collections of Sōn lore. Most begin their meditation training only *after* they were steeped in the basic teachings of Buddhism... [A]s one monk told me, an infant must learn to crawl before it tries to walk, and so too must monks study before they begin to meditate.” (1992:217)

¹⁰ D 2,77-84/1:73-76 (SD 8.10). Other discourses that feature dhyanas incl: **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1/1:1-46 passim), **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,6.8+9/2:156, the 9 attainments); **Bhaya,bherava S** (M 4,23-26/1:21 f), **Dve,dhā Vitakka S** (M 19,14-17/1:117), **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,35-38/1:247 f), **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,18-20/1:294 f), **Cūḷa Dhamma**

Sutta (S 12.65) records the Buddha as comparing the noble eightfold path culminating in right stillness [samadhi], namely, the 4 dhyanas, to “an ancient path, an ancient road travelled by the fully self-awakened buddhas of the past” that he has re-discovered (S 12.65/2:105-107).¹¹

1.2.2 The Buddha’s final moments

1.2.2.1 The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) records how just before his passing away, the Buddha enters the 9 “successive abodes” (*anupubba, vihāra*) in direct and reverse order, and finally passing utterly away after rising from the 4th dhyana.¹² There are two possible related explanations why the Buddha passes away in the 4th dhyana rather than in any other meditative plane.

1.2.2.2 Firstly, the Buddha still has a physical body, and secondly, the formless attainments do not provide any avenue out of samsara, serving only as the highest states of meditative bliss *within* samsara. Hence, we see the pre-eminence of the 4 form dhyanas for the Buddhists.¹³

1.2.2.3 A more complicated explanation depends on our understanding of the nature of the Buddha’s body, which lacks the aggregates of clinging. This means that he has no more fuel for rebirth. Hence, in our understanding, his body simply ceases to function, and since it is still form-based, it naturally has to pass away in the form sphere rather than in the formless sphere or in a state of cessation.¹⁴

Samādān S (M 45,7/1:309), **Kandaraka S** (M 51,20-23/1:347), **Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 64,10-12/1:436), **Bhad-dāli S** (M 65,17/1:441), **Laṭukikôpama S** (M 66,26-25/1:455), **Sandaka S** (M 76,43-46/1:521 f), **Mahā Sakul’udāyi S** (M 77,22-28/2:12-17, incl 8 liberations & kasina), **Samaṇa,maṇḍika S** (M 78,12-13/2:27 f), **Cūla Sakul’udāyi S** (M 79,38-40/2:38), **Ghoṭa,mukha S** (M 94,22-25/2:161), **Saṅgāra S** (M 100,35-38/2:212), **Deva,daha S** (M 101,38-41/2:226), **Sunakkhatta S** (M 105,10-17/2:254-256, on the imperturbables), **Gaṇaka Moggallāna S** (M 107,10/3:4), **Gopaka Moggallāna S** (M 108,17/3:11), **Anupada S** (M 111/3:25-29, comprehensive listing), **Cha-b,bisodhana S** (M 112,18/3:36), **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119,18-21/3:92-95), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122,4-13/3:110-114, on the attainments and mindfulness), **Danta,bhūmi S** (M 125,25/3:136), **Uddesa Vibhaṅga S** (M 138,12-19/3:226 f), **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,8/3:233), **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141,31/3:252, def of right concentration); **Pañcāla,caṇḍa S** (S 2.7/1:48*), **Candimasa S** (S 2.11/1:52*), **Nandana S** (S 2.148/1:1:63*), **Parinibbāna S** (S 6.15/1:158, the 8 attainments); **Jhānā-bhiññā S** (S 16.9/2:210-212), **Kolita S** (S 21.1/2:273, 2nd dhyana), **Sāriputta Saṃy** (S 28.1-9/3:235-238, the 9 attainments), **Raho,gataka S** (S 36.11/4:216-218), **Pañcak’āṅga S** (S 36.19/4:225-228), **Nirāmisa S** (S 36.31/4:236 f), **Moggallāna Saṃy** (S 40.1-9/4:263-269, the 9 attainments), **Daṭṭhabba S** (S 48.8/5:196), **Vibhaṅga S 2** (S 48.10/5:198), **Uppatika S** (S 48.40/5:213-216, 4 dhyanas & cessation), **Jhāna Vimokkha S** (S 52.21/5:305), **Gaṅga Peyyāla** (S 53.1-12/5:307 f), **Dīpôpama S** (S 54.8/5:318 f); **Eka,dhamma Vagga** (A 1.16/1:39), **Bhāvanā Bala S** (A 2.2.3/1:53).

¹¹ See further **The Buddha discovered dhyana** (SD 33.1).

¹² D 16,6.8+9/2:156 (SD 9). These 9 stages, comprising the 4 dhyanas (*jhāna*), the 4 formless attainments (*samāpatti*) and the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*), are known as “the 9 successive abodes” (*anupubba,vihāra*) (D 3:265, 290 (cf 2:156); A 4:410, 414; S 2:216, 222; U 78; Pm 1.5, 2.30; Miln 176). They are also called “the 9 successive cessations” (*anupubba,nirodha*) (D 33,3.2(6)/3:266, 290; A 9.31/ 4:409, 456; Pm 1.35).

(Anupubba) Vihāra S 2 calls them “the successive attainments” (*anupubba,samāpatti*) (A 9.33/4:410-414). On “the progressive cessation of formations” (*anupubba,saṅkhārānaṃ nirodho*), see **Raho,gata S** (S 36.11/4:217), SD 33.6. As a spiritual skill, they are known as the wisdom in attaining of the 9 successive abodes (*navānupubba,vihāra,-samāpatti,paññā*), and is attr to Sāriputta: see SD 44.12 (1.8) n.

¹³ None of leading forest monks I have asked about this knew the reason for the attainment-sequence in which the Buddha passes away. For **Buddhaghosa’s views**, see DA 594 f = Yang-Gu AN (tr), *The Buddha’s Last Days*, 2003: 185-187.

¹⁴ For further details, see SD 48.2 (3.6.3).

2 The Buddha “discovered” dhyana

2.1 The suttas, as we noted [1], often speak of 4 dhyanas (*jhānā*), or more specifically, the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa-jjhāna*).¹⁵ These states of bliss and focus are attained through full meditative stillness (*appanā samā-dhi*), during which there is a complete, though temporary, suspension of the fivefold sense-activity and the 5 mental hindrances [4]. The 1st dhyana is historically important because, as recorded in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), the child Siddhattha attained it by watching the breath at the tender age of 7, meditating under a jambul tree during the first-ploughing,¹⁶ and this experience would later point the way toward the Bodhisattva’s awakening.

I thought thus, “I recall that (during the first-ploughing) when my father the Sakya was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a jambul tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and dwelt in the 1st dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, zest and joy born of solitude. Could that be the path to awakening?”

Then following on that memory,¹⁷ I realized, “That is the path to awakening!”

(M 36,31/1:246), SD 49.4

2.2 The Buddha-to-be discovered dhyana, in the sense that he was able to tap its greatest potential, which had been forgotten or lost to the generations up to his time. This remarkable event is alluded to in two places in the Nikāyas—both called **Pañcala,caṇḍa Sutta**—in a stanza spoken by the devaputra Pañcala,caṇḍa:

In the midst of confines, the sage
Of vast wisdom has found the opening—
The Buddha who has awakened to [discovered] dhyana,
The lone lordly bull, the sage.¹⁸ (A 9.42,1/4:449)

Indeed, Pañcāla,caṇḍa, even in the midst of confines [the household life],
They find the Dharma for attaining nirvana—
Those who have gained mindfulness,
Those rightly well-concentrated (in mind).¹⁹ (S 2.1.7/1:48)

The stanza, recorded in **the Pañcala,caṇḍa Sutta** (S 2.1.7), is first spoken by the devaputra Pañcala,caṇḍa before the Buddha himself, and in **the (Ānanda) Pañcala(caṇḍa) Sutta** (A 9.42), Ānanda is recorded as giving a full explanation of it to the monk Udāyī (A 9.42/4:449-451).²⁰

¹⁵ The 4 formless meditative states (*ārūppa*) are properly called “formless attainments” (*arūpa,samāpatti*), or simply as “attainments” (*samāpatti*). As planes of existence, they are called “formless spheres” (*arūp’āyatana*) or “formless worlds” (*arūpa,loka*). On the formless attainments, see **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.1) @ SD 24.11 (5).

¹⁶ The first-ploughing, that is, the rite of the first sowing, *vappa,maṅgala* (MA 2:290; J 1:57). On this 1st dhyana episode (M 36,31 f/1:246 f), cf Chinese version, T1428.781a4-11.

¹⁷ That is, regarding the mindfulness of the in-and-out-breathing (MA 2:291).

¹⁸ *Sambādhe gataṃ okāsaṃ, avudā bhūri.medhaso | yo jhānaṃ abujjhi buddho, paṭilīna,nisabho munī ti*. For *abujjhi* here, S (PTS ed) has *abuddhi* (with no change in meaning). S:B tr: “The one of broad wisdom has indeed found | The opening in the midst of confinement, | The Buddha who discovered jhāna | The chief bull, aloof (from the herd), the sage.” See S:B 386 n151.

¹⁹ Lines cd: *Ye satirā paccalatthaṃsu sammā te susamāhitā ti. Paccalatthaṃsu* (also *paccaladdhaṃsu*) is past 3 pl of *paṭilabhati*.

3 Definition of *jhāna*

3.1 THE GRAMMAR OF DHYANA

3.1.1 Denotation and connotation of *jhāna*

The Sanskrit cognate of *jhāna* is *dhyāna*,²¹ and its Pali verb is *jhāyati*, of which there are 3 meanings: (1) to think, meditate; (2) to search; (3) to burn.²² **The Samanta, pāsādikā** (the Vinaya Commentary) defines *jhāna* as follows (abridged):

<i>Iminā yogīno jhāyanti ti pi jhānaṃ,</i>	By this, yogis [meditators] meditate, as such it is dhyana, or
<i>jhāyati upanijjhāyati ti jhānaṃ,</i>	“to observe,” that is, “to observe (an object) closely” is dhyana...
<i>Paccanīka, dhamme jhāpeti ti jhānaṃ,</i>	“to burn away opposing states” is dhyana.
<i>Paccanīka, dhamme dahati, gocaraṃ</i>	The meaning is “to burn opposing qualities,” or “to mind over something suitable (<i>go, cara</i>).” ²³
<i>vā cinteti ti attho,</i>	Hence, “minding closely over” is its characteristic.
	(VA 145 f)

By way of *denotation* (direct meaning), *jhāna* means meditation or contemplation, and also the stages of meditation; as *connotation* (extended meaning), it includes the sense of “burning,” that is, of destroying the mental defilements. Here, we shall focus on the first meaning.

3.1.2 Meanings of *jhāyati*

3.1.2.1 The verb *jhāyati* and its more common inflections are found throughout the 5 Nikāyas, sometimes in combination with its noun form, *jhāna*. Let us examine some of these occurrences and analyze the usage of *jhāna* and a few of its key inflections:

<i>jhānaṃ jhāyati</i> (“he meditated” or “he attained dhyana”)	D 19/2:237-239 Ī6
<i>karuṇaṃ jhānaṃ jhāyati</i> (“he meditated on compassion”)	D 19,43/2:239

²⁰ For a detailed study, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana** (SD 33.1).

²¹ Most good dictionaries like the Oxford English Dictionary and the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary have “dhyana.” Since this is an accepted English word, it should be used in translations. Although some may argue that there could be problem of meaning, it is important to understand that meaning is that ultimately speakers and audience give to them. Dictionaries only record such meanings and usages that were current, but meanings and usages change as the need and trend arise. Although some Buddhist terms may be used untranslated (such as *nibbāna*, *saṅkhāra*, and *dhamma*), they are contextual and understood only by the specialist. If the ordinary reader is to understand the Buddhist texts, the language should be more reader-friendly.

²² The Sanskrit cognate of *jhāna* is *dhyāna*, of which there are 3 roots:

√**DHĪ**, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1a), to meditate, contemplate, think upon, brood over (with acc) (D 2:237; S 1:25, 57; A 5:323 f (+ *pa~*, *ni~*, *ava~*); Sn 165, 221, 425, 709, 818 (= Nm 149 *pa~*, *ni~*, *ava~*); Dh 27, 371, 395; J 1:67, 410; Vv 50.12; Pv 4.16.6.

√**DHYĀ**, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1b), to search for, hunt after.

√**KSĀ(V)** & √**KṢĪ**, to burn → Skt *kṣāyati*; P *jhāyati* (2), to burn, to be on fire; fig to be consumed, to waste away, to dry up (D 1:50 = *jāleti* DA 1:151); caus *jhāpeti* (VvA 38 = *jhāyati* 1a: to destroy by means of *jhāna*).

See Gunaratana 1985:7 f.

²³ Cf *gavesanā*, SD 43.10 (1.2.3), esp (1.2.3.2).

<i>jhānaṃ jhāyitum</i> (“for the attaining of dhyana”)	D 19,42/2:239
<i>jhānaṃ ... ajhāyato</i> (“meditation/dhyana” ... “without meditation/dhyana”)	Dh 372
<i>appāṇakam jhānaṃ jhāyeyyam</i> (“if (I) were to attain the breath- less meditation”)	M 36,20-25/1:243 f; 85/2:93 ĩ4, 10
<i>karuṇam jhāyeyyam</i> (“If (I) were to meditate on compassion” ĩ5)	D 19/2:237
<i>jhāyī jhāna, ratā</i> (“meditators delighting in meditation/dhyana”)	D 21,4/2:265; Sn 1009; Ap 3.1.39/1:18, 3.1.165/1:26, 3.1.227/1:30
<i>jhāna-j, jhāyana, ratāyo</i> (“delighting in meditation”).	Thī 401

3.1.2.2 The most famous usage of *jhāyati* as meaning “to meditate” surely must be found in Ānanda’s **Thera, gāthā**, reflecting on the deaths of his senior spiritual friends:

<i>Ye purāṇā atītā te</i>	The old ones have passed away.	
<i>navehi na sameti me</i>	I do not get on with the new ones.	
<i>svajja ekova jhāyāmi</i>	Today I <u>meditate</u> all alone,	
<i>vass’upeto’va pakkhimā</i>	like a bird gone to its nest.	(Tha 1036)

3.1.2.3 The same commentarial definition of *jhāyati* is given in the commentaries to **the Sallekha Sutta** (M 8), **the Kāya Sutta** (S 43.1) and **the Dhamma, vihārī Sutta 1** (A 5.73),²⁴ thus:

Jhāyatha (2nd person plural of *jhāyati*) to meditate on meditation-objects, the 38 objects, that is, the characteristics of meditation such as impermanence and the rest, the aggregates, sense-bases and the rest, which are said to cultivate [increase] calm and insight.

*Jhāyathāti ārammaṇūpanijjhānena aṭṭha, tim’s ārammaṇāni, lakkhaṇūpanijjhānena ca anic-
c’ādito khandh’āyatan’ādīni upanijjhāyatha, samathañ ca vipassanañ ca vaḍḍhethāti vuttam
hoti.* (MA 1:195 = SA 3:111 = AA 3:267)

It is clear from this definition that in the commentarial period the word *jhāyati* simply means any kind of meditation, not necessarily the attaining of dhyana. It certainly refers to the attainment of calm and insight, which means not just the attaining of dhyana (or calm, *samatha*). In other words, it is a general word for the practice of meditation.

3.1.3 Jhāna as samadhi

In certain contexts, *jhāna* clearly refers to samadhi (*samādhi*) or mental stillness, as shown in this famous Dhammapada verse advising on the harmonious balance of samatha and vipassana in mental cultivation:

<i>N’atthi jhānaṃ apañjassa</i>	There is no stillness ²⁵ for those lacking wisdom,	
<i>paññā n’atthi ajhāyato</i>	there is no wisdom for those lacking stillness [samadhi].	
<i>yamhi jhānañ ca pañña ca</i>	In whom there is both stillness and wisdom,	
<i>sa ve nibbāna, santike</i>	he indeed is in the presence of nirvana.	(Dh 372)

²⁴ **Sallekha S** (M 8), SD 51.2; **Kāya S** (S 43.1), SD 12.21; **Dhamma, vihārī S 1** (A 5.73), SD 44.4.

²⁵ Stillness or mental concentration. Comy glosses *jhānaṃ as samāhito*, “mentally concentrated” (DhA 4:109,21).

The verb *ajhāyato* is a poetic form which comes from the present participle of *jhāyati*, “he meditates,” or this case, “he is mentally stilled [concentrated]” (*samāhita*).²⁶

3.1.4 Dhyana as the middle way in meditation. The above occurrences of *jhāna* or its apposite verbs, refer to the practice of *meditation*, which of course does not rule out the attaining of dhyana, depending on the ability of the meditator. However, it is *unlikely* that these usages would refer *only* to dhyana attainment.

Take the Bodhisattva’s attempt at the “breathless meditation” (*appānakam jhānam jhāyeyyam*), for example, as recounted in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), **the Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 85) and **the (Deva) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100). It is unlikely to be a “normal” dhyanic experience for at least 2 reasons: (1) he has to do this deliberately, while a true dhyana experience is almost involuntary, arising from the momentum of abandoning the mental hindrances [6.0]; and (2) the Buddha states that he recalls having attained the 1st dhyana as a 7-year-old boy under the jambul tree *after* he has given up the self-mortification practices, and uses this dhyana as the middle way in meditation.²⁷

3.1.5 The context of *jhāna*

Furthermore, the context for dhyana attainment is very clear, marked by verb-forms referring to the attainment of samadhi, that is, *samāpajjati*, such as *samāpajjāmi*, *samāpanno*, *upasampajja*, and their various forms, for example:

<i>jhānam samāpajjāmi</i> ,	“I will attain dhyana”	A 10.85/5:157 fī5; S 28.1-4/3:235-237ī4;
<i>jhānam samāpajji</i> ,	“he attained dhyana”	D 16/2:156ī10; S 6.15/1:158ī11;
		cf <i>samādhim samāpajji</i> (“he attained samadhi”)
		D 6,15/1:215.
<i>jhānam samāpanno</i> ,	“attaining dhyana”	S 28.2-3/3:236ī5, 28.1-4/236 fī4.
<i>jhānam samapannassa</i> ,	“of the attaining dhyana”	M 43/1:294; S 36.11/4:217ī10; cf <i>samādhim samāpannassa</i>, “of attaining samadhi,”
		A 3.60/1:171 fī3;
<i>jhānam upasampajja</i> ,	“having attained dhyana”	D 1/1:37 fī4, 3/1:100ī4, 16/2:73-75ī4; M 4/1:21 fī4, 8/40 fī4; S 16.9/2:211ī8, 2:215ī4, 16.12/- 2:222; 21.1/2:273 fī3; 45.8/5:10ī4; A 2.2.2/- 1:53ī4, 3.58/1:163ī4, 4.38/2:41.

cf *samādhim samāpajjitvā*, “having attained samadhi” (U 29).

It should be noted that dhyana *alone* does not bring awakening. After all, the child Bodhisattva has attained the 1st dhyana under the jambul tree, but does not gain any spiritual attainment.²⁸ Although the two teachers—Āḷāra Kālāma and Rāma—are able to reach even the formless attainments (meaning that they have mastered the form dhyanas), they have not gained nirvana. The vital point here is that the dhyana must be right stillness (*sammā samādhi*), that is, it has to be cultivated along with the other limbs

²⁶ *Ajhāyato* (Skt *a-dhyāyato*) = *na* (“not”) + *jhāyato*, gen sg of pres part of *jhāyati*, “he meditates.” It should be *aj-jhāyato*, but the the -jjh- is shortened to -jh- (the -j- is elided), metri causa; *ajhāyato* also in Dh:Patna 62; *ajayado* in Dh:G 58; but Udāna, varga has *nāsty aprajñasya vai dhyānam | prajñā nādhyāyato’sti ca || yasya dhyānam tathā prajñā | sa vai nirvāṇa, sāntike* (Uv 32.25), changing the word order to accommodate *nādhyāyato*.

²⁷ **M 36,31/1:246, SD 49.4, 85/2:93, SD 55.2, 100,28-29/2:147, SD 10.9.** For a more detailed analysis of the “breathless meditation,” see SD 49.4 (5.2).

²⁸ See SD 52.1 (5.2).

of the noble eightfold path. In short, the practitioner must realize and understand for himself the nature of non-self, and his calm and clear mind arising out of dhyana will facilitate this realization.²⁹

3.2 DHYANA WITH AND WITHOUT JHĀNA

3.2.1 The (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta (A 3.33) contains the well-known simile of the seeds, that is, karma is like seeds that sprout or do not sprout depending on the conditions (A 3.33.2c).³⁰ **The Aṅguttara Commentary** explains the second simile (of the destroyed seeds) by saying that the seeds here represent the wholesome karma and unwholesome karma. The man who burns the seeds is the meditator and the fire is the knowledge of the noble path. The burning of the seeds is like the destruction of the defilements on attaining path-knowledge. The reduction of the seeds to ashes is like when the 5 aggregates are cut off at the root (as in the arhat who is no longer motivated by craving). When the ashes are winnowed away in the wind or carried away by the stream, it is like when the 5 aggregates utterly cease (with the arhats' parinirvana), never again to arise in the cycle of life (AA 2:223).

3.2.2 The abstract noun *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna*), as such, originally meant “meditation, mental cultivation” and it is in this sense that the term is transmitted into Chinese (*chán*), Korean (*sōn, seon*), Japanese (*zen*) and Vietnamese (*thiền*). Such being the case, a good modern word for the Pali term *jhāna* would be the anglicized Sanskrit “dhyana,” which is also found in better dictionaries. However, historically, we need to keep in mind that traditional Chan and its various offshoots, generally rejected the Indian Hīnayāna *dhyāna* system, which means that strictly speaking, they are “*jhāna*-less” systems. As such, it is apt to speak of Chan and its related systems as being “Dhyana without dhyana.”³¹ [1]

4 Right concentration or stillness

4.1 The importance of dhyana (*jhāna*) in early Buddhism is attested by the fact that it is placed prominently at the culmination point of the noble eightfold path, and fully defined in such texts as **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22) and **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141) thus:

And what, friends, is **right concentration [stillness]** (*sammā,samādhi*)?

Here, quite detached from sense-objects [5.1.1.1], detached from unwholesome mental states, a monk enters and dwells in the 1st dhyana, accompanied by *initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy, born of solitude*.³²

With the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, the monk enters and dwells in the 2nd dhyana, free from initial application and sustained application, *accompanied by zest and joy, born of stillness*.³³

²⁹ See **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 30.1), SD 24.11 (1), esp (1.3). See also Analayo 2003: 75 f.

³⁰ A 3.33,2.3/1:135 (SD 4.14). For a comparison of the mind to *seeds*, see **Bija S** (S 22.54/3:54 f). For a poetic version of the vegetation parable, see **Selā S** (S 5.9/1:134c = v550). For a comparison of consciousness to a seed, see **Bhava S** (A 3.76/1:223 f), SD 23.13. For a comparison of karma to seeds, see **(Kamma) Nidāna S** (A 3.33/1:134-136), SD 4.14.

³¹ In Chan & Zen tradition generally, the “enlightenment” of a student was *certified* by the master as it is taken to be a kind of “transmission,” and not the natural result of spiritual cultivation, as in early Buddhism. See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (5.1.3.5) & (5.3).

³² *Vivicc’eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi sa,vitakkaṃ sa,vicāraṃ viveka,jaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ paṭhama-j,jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

³³ *Vitakka,vicārānaṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasadānaṃ cetaso ekodi,bhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhi,-jaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ dutiya-j,jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* In **Kolita S** (S 21.1), the 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble

With the fading away of zest, the monk remains equanimous, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiences joy with the body. He enters and dwells in the 3rd dhyana, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in *equanimity and mindfulness*.’³⁴

With the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain, and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure, he attains and dwells in **the 4th dhyana** that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with *mindfulness fully purified by equanimity*.³⁵

This, friends, is called right stillness.

(D 22,21/2:313 f, M 141,31/3:252; also D 2,75-81/1:73-75, M 27,19-22/1:181 f)

It is clear from the statement—“quite detached from sense-objects, detached from unwholesome mental states”—in the above definition of right concentration (*sammā samādhi*) that before dhyana can be attained, one has to overcome the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇā*), namely, sensual lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and spiritual doubt.³⁶

4.2 The well-known stock phrase *ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā, domanassam* (“having put away covetousness and displeasure in the world, he dwells exertive, clearly comprehending, mindful ...”) ³⁷ is found in such suttas as **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22,1.3/2:290) and **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10,3/1:56). The word “exertive” or “ardent” (*ātāpī*) connotes effort (*vīriya*) and “clearly comprehending” (*sampajāno*) refers to incipient wisdom (*paññā*). The dvandva “covetousness and displeasure” (*abhijjhā, domanassa*) is a synecdoche (or short form) for the first two mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*), sensual lust and ill will, but in the early suttas, is a short form for the 5 hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇā*) themselves, whose removal leads to mindfulness (*sati*), mental stillness (*samādhi*) and dhyana (*jhāna*).³⁸

4.3 Occasionally, the phrase, “concentrated with one-pointed mind” (*samāhitā ek’agga, cittā*)—eg, **the (Satipaṭṭhāna) Salla Sutta** (S 47.4/5:145)—shows the presence of stillness [samadhi]. Thus, altogether four of **the 5 spiritual faculties** (*pañc’indriya*) are indicated here. Although faith (*saddhā*) is not mentioned here, it is implicit in the motivation behind the practice in the first place, and it is also implicit in one of the dhyana-factors of the 2nd dhyana, “inner tranquility” (*sampasāda*) (Vbh 258), which has elements of both faith as well as peace [3]. This shows that mindfulness does not work alone, but in harmony with

silence” (*ariya, tuṅhī, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (*vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (S 21.1.3-4/2:273 f), SD 24.12b; also in **Dutiya Jhāna S** (S 40.2/4:263 f), SD 24.12a. Cf **Kāma, bhū S** (S 41.6), where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech (S 41.6,7/4:293). In **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie, either talk Dharma or meditate) (M 26,4/1:161), SD 1.11.

³⁴ *Pītiyā ca virāgā ca upekkhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti yan taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti, “upekkhako satimā sukha, viharī ti tatiya-j, jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

³⁵ *Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbe’va somanassa, domanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkham asukham upekkhā, sati, parisuddhiṃ catuttha-j, jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* Here, **Vibhaṅga** gives 3 factors of the 4th dhyana—equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’aggaṭā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and 2 factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 4.183/165) [5.2.1+5.4].

³⁶ Respectively: *kāma-c, chanda, byāpāda, thīna, middha, uddhacca, kukkuccha, vicikicchā* (A 3:62; Vbh 378). See Gunaratana 1985:28-30.

³⁷ See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3nn) @ SD 13.3. Gethin discusses this basic formula, 2001:47-53.

³⁸ For a set of useful instructions in letting go of various aspects of sensuality, the aggregates and the world, see **Anātha, piṇḍik’ovāda S** (M 143,5-14/3:259-261), SD 23.9.

all the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*). Working together, they produce a profound joyful mental stillness, also known as right stillness.³⁹

5 The 4 form dhyanas

5.1 THE 1ST DHYANA

5.1.1 The dhyana-factors

5.1.1.1 The stock passage describing **the 1st dhyana** (*paṭhama-j,jhāna*) is as follows:

Quite detached from sense-objects, detached from unwholesome mental states, a monk enters and dwells in the 1st dhyana, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy, born of solitude.

*Vivicc'eva kāmehi akusalehi dhammehi sa,vitakkaṃ sa,vicāraṃ viveka,jaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ
paṭhama-j,jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* (D 2,75.2/1:73), SD 8.10

INTERLINEAR TRANSLATION OF 1ST-DHYANA PERICOPE

(1) "Quite detached from sense-objects"	<i>vivicc'eva kāmehi</i>
(2) "(quite detached) from unwholesome mental states"	<i>akusalehi dhammehi</i>
(3) "he enters and dwells"	<i>upasampajja viharati</i>
(4) "in the 1st dhyana "	<i>paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ</i>
(5) "accompanied by initial application and sustained application"	<i>sa,vitakkaṃ sa,vicāraṃ</i>
(6) "with zest and joy, born of solitude"	<i>viveka,jaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ</i>

COMMENTS ON THE 1ST-DHYANA PERICOPE

5.1.1.2 This formula both gives a description of the 1st dhyana and lists the dhyana-factors (*jhān'aṅga*) [6].

(1) **Vivicc'eva** = *vivicca* + *eva*. **Vivicca** is the gerundive (verbal adjective, "to be detached") of *viviccati*, "to separate oneself (from), aloof." The noun is *viveka*, "solitude"—found in (5) [5.1.1.2]. The emphatic particle **eva** here suggests "completeness," translated here as "quite," and applies to both (1)+(2).

The two key terms—**kāmehi** (ablative plural) and (2) **akusalehi dhammehi** (plural)—should be clearly understood. The plural **kāma** can only refer to sense-objects—that is, the 5 *cords* of sense-pleasure (*kāma,guṇa*)⁴⁰—and cannot refer to "sense-desire" or "sense-pleasure," which is already included in *akusalā dhammā*, which here refers to the 5 mental hindrances, the first of which is "sense-desire" (*kāma-c, chanda*) (see next).

Furthermore, this also makes good practical sense, since before the 1st dhyana can be attained, we need to at least temporarily let go of all sense-objects—any processing at the sense-levels—so that the

³⁹ On the tr of samādhi, see [6.5.2].

⁴⁰ The singular *kāma* usu refers to sense-desire (*kilesa,kāma*), while the plural *kāmā* to sense-objects (*vatthu,-kāma*):

See SD 32.2 (1.2.2).

mind can fully focus on itself. In the 1st dhyana, then, neither “sense-objects” (*vatthu,kāma*) nor “sense-desires” (*kilesa,kāma*) arise. In short, the 1st-dhyana experience is a “suprasensual,” purely mental, one.⁴¹

(2) While in (1), the mind is detached from physical sense-objects (*kāmehi*, ablative plural), in (2) it is mental aloof from all “unwholesome states” (*akusalā dhammā*), that is, those rooted in greed, hate and delusion (that is, for the duration of the dhyana, in the case of the unawakened).

Together (1)+(2) refers to the meditator’s overcoming of all the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*): sense-desire, ill will, restlessness and worry, sloth and torpor, and doubt. When we are caught up with sense-objects (including thoughts), we turn them into *sensual objects*, and our mind is burdened with greed, hate and delusion. We are so caught up with our body and those of others that our mind is distracted and fragmented by them—hence, the mind is hindered from seeing and knowing itself.

(3) “**He enters and dwells,**” *upasampajja viharati*, literally, “having attained (dhyana), he stays (in it).” This shows that the two verbs work together in a **durative construction** to show duration, that is, working together over time as if as cause and effect.⁴² The indeclinable *upasampajja* (*upa + sam + pajja*) is the absolutive (meaning “while the noun was doing the participle verb”) of *upasampajjati*, “he reaches, attains.”⁴³ *Viharati* (*vi-harati*) means “to stay, stay, abide, dwell,” both literally and figuratively. Here, it is used figuratively in the sense of the mind “dwelling or remaining in dhyana.”⁴⁴

(4) **The 1st dhyana**—with its 5 dhyana-factors [6]—is the basis of the other 3 dhyanas. As the dhyana progresses, the number of factors will lessen—a kind of renunciation on a mental level,⁴⁵ as the basis for the highest level of renunciation, that of craving and ignorance, leading to awakening.

(5) The terms “**initial application**” (*vitakka*) and “**sustained application**” (*vicāra*) here properly refer to our totally speech-free and will-free awareness of the meditation-object. We are simply aware of it and keep our attention there. This is as far as language can go in describing the highly refined directing of our attention and keeping it focused in the 1st dhyana [7.3]. In the later dhyanas, even this form of attention is superseded.⁴⁶

(6) Above all, the mind in dhyana is simply blissful because we are fully free of the limits of our physical body. We may speak of **zest** (*pīti*) as the result of this joyful release from the bodily burden, even prison—by overcoming the 5 hindrances (see above). This is the meaning of “**born of solitude,**” the mind is all blissfully alone looking at itself, as it were.⁴⁷

Hence, “zest” is generally quite exuberant, even ecstatic. “**Joy**” or happiness (*sukha*) is a comfortable feeling of resolved joy, a sense of utter satiation. The two experiences are really aspect of the same sense

⁴¹ Further see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2) Does thinking and knowing occur during dhyana?.

⁴² Technically, “sometimes a verb meaning ‘to be’ or a verb implying duration is used more or less as an auxiliary with a form (usually a participle) of another verb. A construction in which two verb-forms are thus used as equivalent to a single verb is called ‘periphrastic.’” (Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 2nd ed, 1974:233).

⁴³ More often, *upasampajjati* means “to be received into the order, to be ordained (as a monastic)” (V 1:93,4, 2:60,25).

⁴⁴ For other cases of durative verbal construction: (1) absol + fut, see *gahetvā āharissāmi*, “having caught (the arrows) ... I will keep them”: **Dhanu-g,gahā S** (S 20.6,3), SD 52.7; (2) absol *abhisamecca*, “having understood ... “: **(Karaṇīya) Metta S** tr (Khp 8,1b) n, SD 38.3.

⁴⁵ On meditation as renunciation, see **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:9-12), SD 10.12; **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (14.7); **Sexuality**, SD 31.7 (1.6.2).

⁴⁶ See SD 33.1b (6.2.2.2).

⁴⁷ For a study on solitude, see **Viveka,nissita**, SD 20.4 (4.2).

space and lift—like being totally absorbed in a beautiful piece of music: we are uplifted by the power of the beautiful sounds and at the same time, we feel the pervasive peace and oneness with it all.

5.1.1.3 It should be noted that, in this **1st dhyana pericope**, all the 3 kinds of solitude are referred to, thus:

“quite detached from sense-objects” [5.1.1.1]	physical solitude;
“detached from unwholesome mental states”	mental solitude; and
“born of solitude”	solitude from acquisitions. (Vism 4,82)

Physical solitude (*kāya,viveka*) is the removal of our physical body from an uncondusive environment to a conducive one, or, more simply, going into meditative retreat. Mental solitude (*citta,viveka*) generally refers to the keeping the mind to the meditation object so that it lets go of the processing of external sense-data, and specifically refers to dhyana, when all the 5 mental hindrances⁴⁸ have been overcome, and the mind is fully calm and clear. Solitude from acquisitions (*upadhi,viveka*), the utter renunciation of all things and its bliss, is arhathood or nirvana itself.⁴⁹

5.1.1.4 The Vibhaṅga gives a list of 5 dhyana-factors as follows: (1) initial application (*vitakka*), (2) sustained application (*vicāra*), (3) zest [joyful interest] (*pīti*), (4) joy (*sukha*) and (5) one-pointedness [oneness] of mind (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) (Vbh 257). All the ancient Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit traditions agree on these 5 dhyana-factors.⁵⁰ [6]

5.1.1.5 The dvandva *pīti,sukha* is of special significance to the first and 2nd dhyanas. Technically, *pīti* or zest is delight through seeing the object desired, while *sukha* or joy [happiness] refers to actually enjoying the flavour that has been obtained (VA 145,11-12). Clearly, the difference is that while the former is a relatively excited mental state (*cetaso ubbilāvitā*), the latter is more calm and peaceful.⁵¹

5.1.1.6 The fact that the **1st dhyana** has all the 5 dhyana-factors and that, by the diminishing of these factors, the other three dhyanas arise—and, from the 4th dhyana arise the 4 formless attainments, too—we can say that it (the 1st dhyana) is the basis or root for all the other dhyanas and attainments. [12.2]

5.1.2 Dhyana-factors: 5 or 4?

5.1.2.1 The reason that one-pointedness of the mind is not mentioned in the canonical formula is because of the presence of “**initial application and sustained application**” (*vitakka,vicāra*), a kind of subdued or subliminal thinking and pondering—which prevent any real mental stillness.⁵² However, since the mind

⁴⁸ The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) are: sensual desire (*kāma-c,chanda*); ill will (*vyāpāda*); sloth and torpor (*thīna,middha*); restlessness and worry (*uddhacca,kukkucca*); and spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*). See **Nīvaraṇa Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55), SD 3.12, **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1, & **Listening beyond the ear**, SD 2.2(5).

⁴⁹ For further details, see SD 48.13 (1.1).

⁵⁰ For a brief comparative study of dhyanas across the early Buddhist schools, see Rahula 1978:101-109 (ch 10).

⁵¹ See Cousins 1973: 122.

⁵² Asaṅga in his **Abhidharma,samuccaya**, says that both initial and sustained applications are “mental chatter” (*mano,jalpa*): while initial application is “mental chatter that seeks” (*paryeṣaka mano,jalpa*), sustained application is “mental chatter that reviews” (*pratyaveṣaka mano,jalpa*) (Abhds 10). Cf **Visuddhi,magga**: The 1st dhyana is disturbed by initial application and sustained application, like water disturbed by ripples and wavelets (Vism 4.144/-156 f). See Rahula 1978:103 f.

has overcome all the 5 mental hindrances [7.3], that is, it is no more troubled by any physical sense-input, the mind is profoundly still.⁵³

The phrase, “born of solitude [seclusion]” (*viveka,ja*), refers to what is called “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*), mentioned in **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and the *Vibhaṅga*. However, it is not explicitly mentioned in the 1st dhyana pericope [5.1.1.1]. Buddhaghosa, however, argues that it should be a part of the 1st dhyana *because the Vibhaṅga says so* (Vism 147). “One-pointedness of mind” as a factor of the 1st dhyana (the well known “5 dhyana-factors”) is mentioned later works such as the *Abhidhammattha,saṅgaha*, and Sanskrit works, *Abhidharma,samuccaya* and *Abhidharma,kośa*.⁵⁴ [5.2.1]

5.1.2.2 The Mahā Vedalla Sutta (M 43) gives us vital information about the 5 dhyana-factors (*jhān’ān-ga*). It says that “5 factors are abandoned, 5 factors are attained.” The “abandoned factors” are **the 5 mental hindrances** [1.1.1.1]; the “attained factors” are **the 5 dhyana-factors** [6]. This is probably the only sutta that mentions them, and there is no good reason to reject such a teaching.

The Mahā Vedalla may be a “late” sutta, but the fact that it is included in the Pali canon shows that it is ancient and authentic enough for the early elders to accept it as reflective of the Buddha’s teachings. In such a case, we are unjustified to reason that “all late teachings are suspect or wrong”; that the later the teaching, the more suspect or wrong it is likely to be. We are the “latest” to have views: hence, they must be “suspect or wrong”!⁵⁵

5.1.3 Meditative silence

5.1.3.1 Although it is well known that the 2nd dhyana is called the “noble silence” [5.2.3], speech and language, as we know it, completely stops in the 1st dhyana. The initial application and sustained application are subtle rudimentary awareness that *naturally* directs the mind to the meditative object and keeps it there. There is no willing or deliberate action, as we know it, occurring here. This is explained in such texts as **the Cetanā’karaṇīya Suttas** (A 10.2; A 11.2).⁵⁶

An analogy helps here. It is like how we are, as a rule, used to sleeping on our beds, so that we stay on it (the meditation object or samadhi), without falling off. Some mental conditioning is at work here. Deep meditation is not attained by mental willfulness. For, then, thinking is still at work. Only when we are truly able to renounce all thinking, we *naturally* rise to the heights of dhyana.⁵⁷ For, thinking involves some kind of processing of sense-data, including thoughts themselves.⁵⁸

5.1.3.2 The Kaṇṭhaka Sutta (A 10.72)⁵⁹ instructively tells us how “noise is a ‘thorn’ to the 1st dhyana” (*paṭhamassa jhānassa saddo kaṇṭhako*). This clearly suggests that if we are to cultivate dhyana—beginning with the 1st dhyana—both external peace and internal peace are vital conditions for the mind to rise beyond the physical senses to settle on itself to bring of the 5 dhyana-factors [6].

This interesting note implies that—since all dhyanas develop from the 1st dhyana—they are joyfully “silent.” This inner silence grows more profound as the dhyana progresses. However, once we have fully mastered all the dhyanas, we will not be disturbed or distracted by any kind of noise, as attested by **the “Ātumā episode”** recorded in *Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta* (D 16).

⁵³ See (**Navaka**) *Ānanda S* (A 9.37), SD 55.19.

⁵⁴ For a study of the dhyana *parables*, see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1(2.1).

⁵⁵ See Piya Tan, “Dhyana-factors: 4 or 5?” (fb200206).

⁵⁶ (**Dasaka**) *Cetanā’karaṇīya* (A 10.2), SD 41.6; (**Ekā,dasaka**) *Cetanā’karaṇīya* (A 11.2), SD 33.3b.

⁵⁷ See Piya Tan, Reflection, “Truly renouncing,” R226, Singapore, 2012.

⁵⁸ On thoughts ceasing in dhyana, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2.2).

⁵⁹ Its Chin parallel is 無刺經 *wú cì jīng* (MĀ 84 @ T1.26.560b24-561a19).

It is said that once while the Buddha is meditating in a threshing-house near Ātumā, a violent thunder-storm rages, killing two farmers and four oxen. Then (probably after the storm), a great crowd gathers at that place. A certain person from the crowd sees the Buddha and asks him about it. The Buddha replies that he neither saw nor heard anything of the incident!⁶⁰

5.1.3.3 Hence, “**noble silence**” is not a willed silence (or some kind of rule of silence on signs in a temple, which generally go unheeded). This silence is a natural stillness of the dhyanic mind, one that is free of all inner chatter, not even initial application and sustained application. It is “**noble**” (*ariya*) in that it fully arises only in a saint of the path, especially the arhat, who experiences it on a habitual basis. An unawakened meditator who experiences dhyana, too, will be able to feel this silence but only for the duration of the dhyana. However, even the memory of it is inspiring enough to arouse joy when we are mindful of it. [5.2.3]

5.2 THE 2ND DHYANA

5.2.1 One-pointedness of mind

True one-pointedness of mind arises only in the 2nd dhyana, when applied and sustained applications are suppressed. This is clear from the stock formula for **the 2nd dhyana** (*dutiya-j,jhāna*):

With the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he enters and dwells in **the 2nd dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy born of stillness [samadhi].⁶¹

Vitakka,vicāraṇaṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasādanaṃ cetaso ekodi,bhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.

(D 2,77/1:74 f), SD 8.10

“Oneness of mind” (*cetaso ekodi,bhāvaṃ*) and “born of stillness” (*samādhijaṃ*) clearly describe the 2nd dhyana. In place of “born of solitude” (*viveka,jam*) of the 1st dhyana, the 2nd dhyana has “born of stillness,” which clearly shows that *viveka,ja* is used for the 1st dhyana because samādhija does not apply there.

5.2.2 Dhyana-factors of the 2nd dhyana

This formula, too, gives both a description of the 2nd dhyana, and its 4 dhyana-factors, which, according to **the Vibhaṅga** Sutta-analysis are: inner tranquillity (*sampasāda*),⁶² zest (*pīti*), joy (*sukha*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) (Vbh 258, 263). In its Abhidhamma analysis, the Vibhaṅga, however, gives 3 dhyana-factors: zest, joy, one-pointedness of mind (Vbh 263).⁶³ As such, it appears as if we have here *two different kinds of 2nd dhyana*. **The Visuddhi,magga** attempts to clarify this confusion, using the factors of the 1st dhyana as an example:

⁶⁰ D 16,4.28-32/2:131 f (SD 9).

⁶¹ *Vitakka,vicāraṇaṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasādanaṃ cetaso ekodi,bhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijaṃ pīti,sukhaṃ dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

⁶² *Sampasādana* here has 2 connotations: “faith” in the sense of trust or conviction, and “tranquillity” in the sense of inner peace. See Vbh 168 & Vism 4.144 f/156 f; also Gunaratana 1985:83.

⁶³ How the 4 dhyanas become 5 is explained in **Visuddhi,magga**: “What is second in the fourfold method, by splitting them into two, becomes second and third in the fivefold method. The third and fourth here (in the fourfold method) become fourth and fifth there (in the fivefold method). The first is the same in both methods” (Vism 4.202/169). See **Saṅkhitta Dhamma S** (A 8.63), SD 46.5; also Rahula 1978:102.

When these 5 factors (of the 1st dhyana) have arisen, it is said that dhyana has arisen. Hence these are called its 5 constituent factors. Therefore, it should not be considered that there is another thing called “dhyana” which made up of them. (Vism 4.107/146)

5.2.3 Noble silence

In the **Dutiya Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.2)⁶⁴ and the **Kāma,bhū Sutta** (S 41.6),⁶⁵ where “initial application and sustained application” (*vitakka,vicāra*) are called verbal formation (*vacī,saṅkhāra*), the mental factor responsible for speech. In the **Kolita Sutta** (S 21.1), the 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya,tuṇhī,bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (*vitakka,vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech of any kind cannot occur.⁶⁶

What does this mean? In a non-meditative context, *vitakka,vicāra* refers to “thinking and pondering” (that is, discursive thought). Our thoughts or mental states arise moving us to express them in speech. This active aspect of language has actually stopped in the 1st dhyana [5.1.3]. Even the subtle language or linguistic thought-process ends here, calming and clearing our minds ever more profoundly. This is the inner silence that saints (*ariya*) enjoy. Hence, it is called the noble silence.

However, the “noble silence” is often used in a general sense—a synecdoche—to refer to meditation in general. In the **Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), for example, the Buddha exhorts the monks, when assembled, to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (that is, either talk Dharma or meditate).⁶⁷

5.3 THE 3RD DHYANA

5.3.1 The fading away of zest

The 3rd dhyana (*tatiya-jjhāna*) is described in this stock formula:

With the fading away of zest,

he dwells equanimous, mindful and clearly comprehending,
and experiences joy with the body.

He enters and dwells in **the 3rd dhyana,**

of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.”⁶⁸

*Pīṭiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca viharati sato sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṁvedeti,
yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti ‘upekkhako satimā sukha viharīti, tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja
viharati.* (D 2,79/1:75), SD 8.10

The phrase, “with the fading away of zest” (*pīṭiyā ca virāga*), shows that the zest (joyful interest) of the 2nd dhyana is suppressed here. From the remaining words of the passage, we can deduce the following 4 dhyana-factors of the 3rd dhyana: equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), clear comprehension (*sampajāna*), and joy (*sukha*). Although there is no word in the formula indicating “one-pointedness of mind,” we can assume its presence by virtue of its being a factor of the 2nd dhyana. Thus, **the Vibhaṅga** (like the Abhidhar-

⁶⁴ S 40.2/4:263 f (SD 24.12).

⁶⁵ S 41.6,7/4:293 (SD 48,7).

⁶⁶ S 21.1,3-4/2:273 (SD 24.12b).

⁶⁷ M 26,4/1:161 (SD 1.11).

⁶⁸ *Pīṭiyā ca virāgā ca upekkhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṁvedeti yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti, ‘upekkhako satimā sukha, viharīti tatiya-jjhānaṃ.*

ma,samuccaya and Abhidharma,kośa) gives 5 factors of the 3rd dhyana: equanimity, mindfulness, clear comprehension, joy, and one-pointedness of mind (Vbh 260).

5.3.2 Equanimity and joy

Now the question arises here whether “equanimity” (*upekkhā*) and “joy” (*sukha*) can co-exist. **The Abhidharma,kośa** explains that “equanimity” (*upekṣa*) here is the “equanimity of formations” (*saṃskārôpekṣā*) and not “equanimity of feeling” (*vedanôpekṣā*) (Abdhk 8.8b/8:148). **The Visuddhi,magga**, however, says that it is “equanimity of dhyana” (*jhān’upekkhā*) (Vism 4.169 f/162). In **the (Udāyi) Nibbāna Sutta** (A 9.34), this dialogue (abridged) between the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Udāyi is instructive:

- [Sāriputta:] “This nirvana, avuso, is happiness!” (*sukham idaṃ āvuso nibbānaṃ*.)
 [Udāyi:] “What happiness is there, avuso Sāriputta, where nothing is felt?” (*kim pan’ettha āvuso sāriputta sukhaṃ, yad ettha n’atthi vedayitaṃ ti*).
 [Sāriputta:] “Indeed, avuso, it is truly happiness where nothing is felt!” (*etad eva khv ettha āvuso sukhaṃ, yad ettha n’atthi vedayitaṃ*. (A 9.34/4:414 f), SD 55.1

Sāriputta’s reply has the following significance to our discussion:

- (1) Feeling as experienced in the unawakened state is not the same as that in the awakened state, or even in the meditative state, which in the latter is much more refined;
- (2) Spiritual joy is not dependent on the physical senses: true happiness is a direct inner experience of the mind.

5.4 THE 4TH DHYANA

5.4.1 The 4th dhyana: 3 factors or 2?

The stock formula for **the 4th dhyana** (*catuttha-j,jhāna*) is as follows:

With the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain—and
 with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure—
 he attains and dwells in **the 4th dhyana** that is neither painful nor pleasant,
 and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.⁶⁹

Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubb’eva somanassa’domanassānaṃ atthañgamā adukkham asukhaṃ upekkhā,sati,pārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.
 (D 2,81/1:75), SD 8.10

Here, **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) takes the 4th dhyana as having *four* conditions (*paccaya*), defined by each of the four lines above. **The Vibhaṅga**, however, summarizing these conditions, gives three factors of the 4th dhyana—equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’aggatā*)—according to its Sutta analysis (Vbh 261,19), and only two factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to its Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 264,11; Vism 168).

The Sutta analysis of the Vibhaṅga includes “mindfulness” in the dhyana-factors of the 4th dhyana for a clear reason. Dhyana arises when we are truly mindful, our mind fully directed to the meditation-sign,

⁶⁹ *Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbe’va somanassa,domanassānaṃ atthañgamā adukkham asukhaṃ upekkhā,sati,parisuddhiṃ catuttha-j,jhānaṃ.*

freely mindful of the object (eg the breath), free from the mental hindrances [7.3]. Our mindfulness becomes ever sharper as we progress through the dhyanas. Our mindfulness is sharpest in the 4th dhyana.

However, on such a profound level of stillness, our mindfulness is completely thought-free.⁷⁰ A simple analogy helps here. Imagine we are watching a beautiful sunset and the whole ambience is very peaceful. We simply have no words for the sunset: it simply happens and as we watch, we have no words whatsoever for it. We are fully mindful of the sunset, but it is a profound experience beyond language, words and thinking. All that comes later, when we settle back into our conceptual conventional world.⁷¹

5.4.2 Beyond pain and pleasure

From the Pali formula itself, it is clear that the meditator in the 4th dhyana experiences neither pain nor pleasure, neither joy nor displeasure [grief]: he is “neutral” in feeling (physical or mental). The expression *upekkhā,sati,parisuddhi* is a difficult one, and can be interpreted either as a dvandva, as “the purity of equanimity and the purity of mindfulness” (as in the Abhidharma,samuccaya and the Abhidharma,kośa) or as a tatpurusha, as “the mindfulness fully purified by equanimity” (as followed here). If this is the case—taking *upekkhā,sati,parisuddhi* to mean “the mindfulness fully purified by equanimity”⁷²—then the dhyana-factor here is the “purity of mindfulness” and not the purity of equanimity itself.⁷³

5.4.3 The 4th dhyana and psychic powers

Mastery of the 4th dhyana is the basis for our attainment of various psychic powers, the ability to recall past lives, the divine eye or ability to know how beings fare according to their karma, mind-reading, and so on.⁷⁴ However, such interesting powers do not guarantee any kind of right or liberating wisdom, which need to be cultivated on their own, especially by an understanding of impermanence. However, the calm and clarity that such a dhyana produces is profoundly helpful in our cultivating such wisdom, if we direct our minds to it.

These psychic powers do not arise on their own but need to be cultivated by directing our minds to that effect. This is best done when the mind is completely free of the body and is able to freely function on its own in a morally “beautiful” way. Then, the mind is not hindered or distracted by the senses in any way, so that it is able to full focus itself like a laser-light that is able to cut through almost anything.

However, if we are unawakened, but are excellent meditators who have mastered the 4 dhyanas, we would still lose these powers, if we lead immoral lives. Just as they can be master by the power and beauty of the 4th dhyana, such powers are easily lost when we lead immoral lives, or do not keep up our mental cultivation. This is what happened to Devadatta, who is said to have tried to usurp the Buddha’s position at the head of the sangha, and even tried to kill him.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ On thoughts ceasing in dhyana, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2.2).

⁷¹ For a detailed discussion, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2.2).

⁷² “*Adukkham-dukkha* means that mental factor that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, neither-pain-nor-pleasure born of mind-contact that is felt, a neither-painful-nor-pleasurable feeling born of mind-contact—as such, it is called neither-pain-nor-pleasure” (***adukkham-asukhan ti yaṃ cetasikaṃ n’eva sātāṃ nāsataṃ ceto,samphassa,jaṃ adukkham-asukhaṃ vedayitaṃ ceto,samphassa,jā adukkham-asukhā vedanā, tena vuccati adukkham-asukhan’ti***) (Vbh 271).

⁷³ See W Rahula 1978:108 f; H Gunaratana 1985:99.

⁷⁴ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,83+89, etc), SD 8.10.

⁷⁵ See **Devadatta**, SD 71.4. See also Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, Singapore, 2013:ch 7.

6 The 5 dhyana-factors

6.0 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

6.0.1 The dhyana-factors (*jhān'āṅga*),⁷⁶ as the term suggests, must appear all together at the same time to effect a meditation dhyana. As seen from the above table, there are these 5 dhyana-factors:⁷⁷

(1) initial application	<i>vitakka</i>
(2) sustained application	<i>vicāra</i>
(3) zest	<i>pīti</i>
(4) joy [happiness], and	<i>sukha</i>
(5) one-pointedness (of mind)	<i>ek'aggatā</i> [5.1.2; Fig 6.0.2]

6.0.2 Summary of dhyana-factors

In summary, we can tabulate the respective **dhyana-factors** (*jhān'āṅga*) of the 4 dhyanas as follows:

	<u>initial</u> <u>application</u>	<u>sustained</u> <u>application</u>	<u>zest</u>	<u>joy</u>	<u>one-pointedness</u> <u>of mind</u>
1st dhyana	<i>vitakka</i>	<i>vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>(ek'aggatā)</i> ⁷⁸
2nd dhyana	...	...	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ek'aggatā</i>
3rd dhyana	...	...	...	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ek'aggatā</i>
4th dhyana	...	...	... ..		<i>ek'aggatā</i>

Fig 6.0.2. The dhyana-factors

Here it is useful to note that these various sets of dhyana-factors mentioned are not the only mental phenomena present in the dhyanas. In **the Anupada Sutta** (M 111), for example, Sāriputta gives these additional concomitants: contact, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness, desire, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention.⁷⁹

The Abhidhamma gives even longer lists of concomitants. **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī**, for example, lists about 60 mental states for the 1st dhyana. The **Abhidhammattha,saṅgaha**, however, narrows the list down to a set of 33 distinct concomitants (Abhs: BRS 2.2-5/76-88). However, only the 5 mentioned in the above table are the dhyana-factors of the 1st dhyana because “when these have arisen, dhyana is said to have arisen” (Vism 4.107/152).⁸⁰

6.0.3 Essential nature of the dhyanas

As a rule of thumb, the dhyanas have the following essential characteristics:

⁷⁶ *Jhān'āṅga*, also tr as dhyana-factors or constituents of dhyana.

⁷⁷ On how these 5 dhyana-factors relate to the 4 dhyanas, see Brahmavamso, 2003:44-64 (pt 3).

⁷⁸ On “one-pointedness” (*ek'aggatā*) in the 1st dhyana, see (5.1.2).

⁷⁹ M 111,4-11/3:25-27. *Phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittaṃ chando adhimokkho viriyam sati upekkhā manasikaro.*

⁸⁰ See Gunaratana 1985:69 f. On the Abhidhamma system of 5-dhyanas, see SD 46.6 (2.2).

- (1) The 5 senses have fully shut down; only the sixth sense, the mind, operates without distraction.
- (2) Since the 6 senses are not in normal operation, there is no possibility of thought.
- (3) Without any thought, no decision-making occurs.
- (4) Without any sense-input and mental process, there is no perception of time.
- (5) Consciousness is non-dual; here, it is only aware of bliss in a profoundly stable manner.⁸¹

As such, if during meditation, we are wondering whether it is dhyana or not, we can be sure that it is not! These features of dhyana can only be recognized after emerging from it, by mindfully reviewing our practice once the whole mind is on the move again.⁸² We shall examine each the dhyana-factors against the background of this summary.

6.1 INITIAL APPLICATION (*VITAKKA*)

The Pali term *vitakka* (Skt *vitarka*) means thinking or considering (and is an aspect of right thought, Vbh 257), but in meditation practice, it refers to the start of “bare attention”⁸³ of the mind to a single object (such as the breath in breath meditation), that is, non-judgemental awareness. In Abhidhamma, it specifically refers to the mental factor that directs or mounts the mind onto the object,⁸⁴ just as a king’s favourite brings a villager before the king.

This dhyana-factor is unstable during the counting (*gaṇanā*) and connecting stages (*anubandhanā*), but is fully developed during the contact (*phusanā*) or fixing stage (*ṭhapanā*) of the breath meditation.⁸⁵ In the development of dhyana, *vitakka* has the special task of temporarily removing the hindrance of sloth-and-torpor (*thīna, middha*).⁸⁶

Although all dhyanas are states of unmoving bliss, there is, however, some movement discernible in the 1st dhyana, known as “the swing.”⁸⁷ In the 1st dhyana, the mind instinctively grasps at the bliss, as it is so delicious. However, because the bliss here is fuelled by letting go, the mind automatically lets go again, and the bliss grows again. It is this subtle involuntary movement which gives rise to the “initial application” of the 1st dhyana.⁸⁸ In early Buddhism, it is always paired with the 2nd dhyana-factor, sustained application.

6.2 SUSTAINED APPLICATION (*VICĀRA*)

6.2.1 Analogies

The Pali term *vicāra* means “examination or investigation,” but in meditation terminology, it is the mind’s thorough awareness of the object (such as the breath). This factor first appears in the connecting stage of the breath meditation. While *vitakka* directs the mind and its mental factors to the object, *vicāra* is the continued attention of the mind on the object.

⁸¹ See SD 24.15 (1.2). See also Brahmavamso, “The Jhānas,” 2003:43.

⁸² On the practice of review, see **Anāpāna, sati S** (M 118.21/3:83) n, SD 7.13.

⁸³ This expression is borrowed from Nyanaponika, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: a handbook of mental training based on the Buddha’s way of mindfulness*. London: Rider 1962. Repr NY: Samuel Weiser 1971.

⁸⁴ So says Comys, but apparently tranquillity as proximate cause applies only to the pleasant feeling resulting from concentration. A more general proximate cause for feeling would be contact (*phassa*), as it is said, “Dependent on contact, there is feeling” (*phassa, paccayā vedanā*, 12.15/2:16 f, SD 6.13). For a more detailed treatment of feeling, see Abhs 3.2-4 & Abhs:BRS Guide.

⁸⁵ These are the first 4 stages taught in **Visuddhi, magga** (Vism 8.189-197/278-280; cf VA 2:418).

⁸⁶ “Mental hindrances” (*nīvaraṇā*), the 5 are: sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*); ill will (*vyāpāda*); sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*); restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*); and spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*). See **Nīvaraṇa Saṅgā-rava S** (S 46.55), SD 3.12, **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1, & **Listening beyond the ear**, SD 2.2(5).

⁸⁷ For a similar idea of the “wobble,” see Brahmavamso 2006:155 f, 159, 161.

⁸⁸ On *vitakka, vicāra*, see also **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.12(8.5).

Let us consider the famous commentarial parable of the wild calf tied to a post.⁸⁹ The calf represents the mind, the post is the breath, and the rope is mindfulness. The calf's being tied to the post is *vitakka*; its dashing about at the rope is *vicāra*. Or, a bird's outstretched wings are *vitakka*, and its gliding in the air is *vicāra*.

Another well-known parable is that of the striking of a bell or a gong—the striking action represents initial application and the reverberating sound is sustained application (Vism 4.89/142). They both go together. Here we have an analogy of a man polishing a metal pot (Vism 4.91/142). The man holds the pot in his right hand and polishes it with his left. The holding of the pot is analogous of initial application and the polishing is sustained application.

In computer jargon, initial application is like clicking on an icon on the computer monitor, and sustained application is one's attention to what appears on the screen. Another modern example is that of the driver's braking while driving a motor car—the braking is analogous of initial application and the momentum that pushes the car on is sustained application. The two factors, therefore, function closely together.

6.2.2 The swing

Earlier on [6.1], we saw how the mind instinctively grasps at the bliss, and then automatically let go again—by way of initial application—and the bliss grows again. Another way of looking at this “swing” is the back and forth movement between involuntary grasping towards the bliss and automatic letting go of: this is in fact the process of the dhyana factors of initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*). *Vitakka* is, then, the involuntary grasping of the bliss, while *vicāra* is the automatic movement back into the bliss.

In the development of dhyana, *vicāra* has the special task of temporarily removing the hindrance of doubt (*vicikicchā*). In non-meditation contexts, *vitakka* and *vicāra* may refer to “initial application” and “sustained application” respectively,

it is impossible that such a gross activity as thinking can exist in such a refined state as *Jhāna*. In fact, thinking ceases a long time prior to *Jhāna*. In *Jhāna*, *Vitakka* and *Vicāra* are both sub-verbal and so don't qualify as thought. (Brahmavamso, 2003:43)

6.3 ZEST (PĪTI).

In meditation language, *pīti* is joy “dissociated from sensual desire” or “joyful interest.” It is an exhilarating sense of relief⁹⁰ that one has overcome sensual desire with such positive thoughts as “I've attained what was to be done!” It is an energizing joyful interest in the pleasant meditative state that arises. Zest, then, is the result of “letting go” or the renunciation of negative mental states. **The Visuddhi, magga** speaks of 5 kinds of zest:

- (1) “Minor zest” (*khuddaka.pīti*) which often causes horripilation (hair-raising or “goose pimples”).
- (2) “Momentary zest” (*khaṇika.pīti*) because it lasts only a brief moment like lightning flashes at different times.
- (3) “Flooding zest” (*okkantika.pīti*) because it showers and flows repeatedly throughout the body as like waves breaking on the sea-shore.

⁸⁹ DA 3:762 f = MA 1:247 = PmA 2:488 f = VA 2:405 f = Vism 268 f; cf MA 2:82, 4:198. This analogy is discussed in detail in “The training of the bull” (SD 8.2).

⁹⁰ *Pīti* is derived from *pīnāyati* or *pīneti*, “to refresh” in the sense of delighting with pleasurable interest in the object.

- (4) “Uplifting zest” (*ubbega* or *ubbeṅga.pīti*), makes one feel so light that one might actually levitate into the air!
- (5) “Pervading zest” (*pharaṇa,pīti*), because it floods one’s being like a torrent that fills a mountain cave. (Vism 4.94-99/143 f)⁹¹

It is the last one that is the zest present in dhyana such as described in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2): “There is no part of his entire body unpervaded by zest and joy born of solitude” [8]. Only the 5th type of zest applies to a dhyana state, while the earlier four types are only weak, momentary, or preliminary experiences of zest. As a mental factor in dhyana, it temporarily removes the hindrance of ill will (*vyāpāda*).

Many non-Buddhists, too, experience these forms of zest or “rapture” in their own prayers and rites. All these are only by-products of the 1st dhyana—mind-made, temporary and ultimately unsatisfactory, and cannot be owned by anyone. For Buddhist practitioner, such intense joy is not the aim of religion or meditation, but only a side-effect, albeit a pleasant one, of the spiritual quest. A Buddhist practitioner strives even beyond such joys for the higher joy of spiritual liberation!

6.4 JOY (SUKHA)

Joy or happiness (*sukha*) arises because the mind is free from the mental hindrance of restlessness (*uddhacca*) and is filled with zest. While zest is like a parched and thirsty delighting in coming to a pool of cool water, joy is the pleasure of bathing and drinking in it. While zest is the delight at getting a desirable object (like winning a contest, or getting a windfall), joy [happiness] (*sukha*) is the actual pleasurable satiation of that joy (Vism 145), but the latter is usually short-lived. Joy (also called bliss) arises from the detachment from sensual pleasures, which means that it is “spiritual happiness” (*nirāmisa,sukha*).

Like initial application and sustained application, zest and joy, too, go together. However, there are two important points to note between the two. While zest must co-exist with joy, only joy (*sukha*) can occur by itself in meditation. Zest is a mental formation (*saṅkhāra*), that is, a conative experience, while joy is a feeling (*vedanā*), that is, an affective experience. Zest, being karmically potential, is the *cause* of joy.

6.5 ONE-POINTEDNESS OF THE MIND (CITTASSA EKAGGATĀ)

6.5.1 Essential functions

6.5.1.1 FIXING THE MIND. *Ek’aggatā*, or more fully, *cittassa ek’aggatā*⁹² [5.1.2], occurs when the mind fully focuses on only one mental object (such as the breath). It follows after we have gained the fixing (*īhapanā*) of the mind on the counterpart-sign or counter-image (*paṭibhāga,nimitta*).⁹³ One-pointedness is the

⁹¹ On the stages of zest, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (9.6).

⁹² Two spellings are found in the Canon (these are the only occurrences): the split cpd *cittassa ekaggatā* (D 2:217; M 1:301, 3:71; S 5:21; Pm 148) or *cittass’ekaggatā* (A 4:40; Pm 1:9716; Dhs 187; Vbh 141), and *citt’ekaggatā* (M 1:294 f, 3:25, 2612, 2713, 28; Pm 16). These terms are noticeably rare in the suttas, but more common in the Abhidhamma texts.

⁹³ **Counterpart-sign** (*paṭibhāga nimitta*). The term **nimitta** (mental image or reflex) [SD 19.17] is the image of our mind while we are deeply engrossed in meditation, appearing so vividly as if we were seeing it with our own eyes. The Commentaries speak of 3 levels of mental images: (1) the preparatory image (*parikamma nimitta*) or the meditation object perceived at the start of one’s meditation. (2) When this image has reached some degree of focus, albeit still unsteady and unclear, it is called the acquired image (*uggaha nimitta*). (3) On greater mental focus, an entirely clear and immovable image arises, and becomes the counter-image (*paṭibhāga nimitta*). As soon as this image arises, the meditator has attained access (or neighbourhood) concentration (*upacāra samādhi*). It is also by means of the counter-image that we gain full concentration (*appanā samādhi*). In the **Abhidhamm’attha Saṅgaha**, the

primary mental factor present in all the dhyanas and is the essence of stillness (*samādhi*). It removes sensual pleasure, a necessary condition for dhyana.

The mind does not waver or flutter, but is fixed and still. One-pointedness of the mind, sometimes called the “fixedness,” focusing, or resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*) of the mind, is mental stillness (*samādhi*) in the true sense of the word. It is important to note that true one-pointedness of the mind only occurs in the 2nd dhyana onwards. [5.1]

Although *ek’aggatā* functions to closely contemplate or mentally fix on the object, the key characteristic of dhyana, it cannot do this by itself. It must work together with the other 4 dhyana-factors, each performing their respective tasks: *vitakka* directing the mind to the object, *vicāra* sustaining it there, *pīti* feeling delight in the object, and *sukha* happily satisfied in the dhyana.

6.5.1.2 EK’AGGATĀ AND SAMĀDHI. Let us examine the connection between *ek’aggatā* and *samādhi*. Since there is *sammā,samādhi*, theoretically then *micchā,samādhi* is possible, this term never occurs in the suttas, but only in the Commentaries and later works. In other words, in the suttas, *samādhi* is always used in a wholesome sense.

As for *cittassa ek’aggatā*, although it sometimes serves as a synonym of *samādhi* (eg M 1:301,13), the former applies to both wholesome and unwholesome states, but not the latter. One-pointedness of the mind (but not samadhi) is always present in our every conscious action. In practical terms, *samādhi*, however, only has a good sense of “mental stillness.”⁹⁴ Samadhi, in other words, when properly sustained, leads on to dhyana.

6.5.2 Analyses of terms

6.5.2.1 MEDITATION AND LANGUAGE. Here we will briefly examine the meanings of the phrase *cittassa ek’aggatā* and some related terms, such as *ekodi,bhūta* and *samādhi*. This exercise is not so much to work towards any final definition of such terms, but to show the flexibility, yet facility, of language.

If we see the purpose of language is to convey to the world, especially the unconverted, the joy and goodness of meditation, then we should not be merely Abhidhammically accurate for the sake of a high-level or closed-circle specialist parley. Surely if *ek’aggatā*—resolved as *eka* (“one”) + *agga* (“point”) + *tā* (“-ness”)—were to mean anything other than “one-pointedness,” it would be clear from the suttas, and we need not split hairs over it. Surely, it suffices to clearly explain the process it refers to. A good explanation helps to define the issues, or even refine the definitions.

Of special interest is the word “meditation” itself, which has caught on today so that, if we know Pali, we at once see it as a, or even *the*, translation for *bhāvanā*. Actually, *bhāvanā* means “cultivation, development,” but somehow these “exact translations” are only word-correct but misses the spirit of opening the hearts of others to the Dharma. We are reminded by the Buddha to use the language of the people, and go from there—at least, we should be non-conflicting (*araṇa*) when speaking of the peace and bliss of meditation.⁹⁵ [112]

meditation methods, in terms of these 3 images, are called cultivation (*bhāvanā*), ie as *parikamma bhāvanā* (preparatory cultivation), *upavacāra bhāvanā* (access cultivation) and *appanā bhāvanā* (full cultivation) respectively. (Vism 3/84-117, 4.27-31/125 f; Abhs:BRS 9.16-18/340-342; Abhs:SR 203). See SD 33.1a (3.1) & SD 15.1 (9.3); BDict: *bhāvana*; also Nyanatiloka, *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, Tokyo, 1920: IV “Mental culture”:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanatiloka/wheel394.html>.

⁹⁴ On the tr of *samādhi* as “mental stillness,” see SD 33.1a (2.1.3.4).

⁹⁵ See **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139/3:230-236), SD 7.8.

6.5.2.2 CITTASSA EK'AGGATĀ. The key phrase *cittassa ek'aggatā* or *citt'ek'aggatā* is resolved as *cittassa* (“of the mind”)⁹⁶ + *eka* (“one”) + *agga*¹ (“foremost; point, tip”) + *-tā* (an abstract noun ending), commonly translated as “**one-pointedness of the mind**,” which is technically not a satisfactory one, but it is still helpful if we appreciate the expedience of words and the difficulty of talking about meditation.⁹⁷

Our discussions here would have served their purpose if we are inspired to be curious enough to investigate meditation terminology for ourselves through personal practice. In that spirit, let us begin by looking at a lexical definition of *ek'aggatā*:⁹⁸

ek'agga-tā (f) one-pointedness, agreement; stillness, concentration; tranquillity of mind, inner calm:⁹⁹ *yā ... cittassa ~ā ayam samādhi*, one-pointedness of the mind: this is stillness [samadhi], M 1:301,13; *labhati samādhim labhatii cittassa ~am*, he gains stillness, he gains one-pointedness of mind, S 5:197,16 = 198,25 = 268,7; Vbh 216,12 = 217,25 = 218,20 = 219,14; *eko samādhi cittassa ~ā*, one kind of samadhi: the one-pointedness of mind, Pm 1:48,17; S 5:21, 197, *cittassa ~* 269; A 2:36, 4:40; Dhs 11; Vism 84. As ifc¹⁰⁰ **citt'**~ M 1:27,24 = 28,4; DhsA 118,16.

The translation, “one-pointedness of mind,” seems to reflect that the mental focus following the temporary suppression of all the mental hindrances [7.3], has reached a “still point,” a popular notion in non-Buddhist meditation or mind-methods. The reality is that there is no point at all on which the mind focuses, as it is more of a blissful state of having completely “let go.” A still and well freed mind in dhyana does not settle anywhere, so to speak.

6.5.2.3 EK'AGGA. Now let us examine another component of the term *cittassa ek'aggatā*, that is, the phrase **ek'agga** (Skt *aikāgrya*)—resolved as *eka* (“one, oneness”) + *agga*¹ (“foremost; point, tip”)—and which means “peace of mind, internal tranquillity, stillness on one object, intentness.” Here is a lexical analysis for further examination and discussion:

ek'agga (m & mfn, *eka* (“one, oneness”) + *agga*¹ (“foremost; point tip”); Skt *ekāgra*) (mfn).

(1) (m) [Skt *aikāgrya*] peace of mind, internal tranquillity, concentration on one object, intentness.

(2) (adj mfn):¹⁰¹ (a) single-pointed, agreed, closely attentive, *devā tāvatimsā ~ā*¹⁰² *samāpajjimṣu*, “the gods of the 33 were of one mind (reached a consensus),” D 2:210,2 = 226,6. (b) calm, tranquil (of persons just converted), collected [BHS *ekāgra* Jtkm 31.10] S 4:125; A 1:70, 266,2:14, 29, 3:175, ~*citta*, “one-pointed mind” 3:391; Sn 341; Tha 406; J 1:88; Nett 28; cf Miln 139. (c) having one point, (with attention) fixed on one point or object, closely attentive, intent, esp concentrated in samadhi, *cittam bhāvehi ~am*, “cultivate the mind to one-pointedness,” S 1:188,21 = Sn 341 = Tha 1125 = Thī 18 = 82 = Ap 549,3 = 609,13; ~**citta** (mfn) having a concentra-

⁹⁶ Although *citta* is often tr as “thought,” here thoughts as we know them subside with the stilling of the mind. Hence, a more neutral term—“mind”—reflects the situation better, esp since this is what needs to be worked on for mental training and spiritual liberation. **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61), SD 20.2 (2.4) & SID: “*citta*, mano, viññāṇa.”

⁹⁷ On the absence of language in dhyana, see §8.2. On the problem of religious language, see SID: Language.

⁹⁸ This def and the rest in this section have been culled (with some minor revisions and additions) from the Pali dictionaries currently: Dictionary of the Pali Language 1875 (DPL); [Pali-English Dictionary](#) 1921-1925 (PED), [Critical Pali Dictionary](#) 1924-1992 (CPD); A Dictionary of Pali 2001, 2010 (DP).

⁹⁹ See Abhs:SR 16, 178,5, 237, 240.

¹⁰⁰ “ifc” = in fine compositi, ie, as a final component or suffix to a word.

¹⁰¹ “mfn” = *masculine, feminine, and neuter* genders of the adjective (adj) apply here.

¹⁰² The tilde ~ here is a headword marker, meaning that the headword *ek'agga* should be inserted here; the ~ā means it should be read *ek'aggā* (pl).

ted mind, *te kula, puttā ... samāhitā ~ā* M 1:32,22 = 3:6,25 = S 5:144,22 = A 1:70,13; = *ekodi, bhūta* (qv) Sn 975 (Nm 509,7 = SnA 574,25).

We have two components here: *eka* and *agga*. The word ***eka*** means “one,” but we can also include related senses or connotations, such as “being unified.” In other words, *eka* has both a literal sense as a number, as well as a figurative sense, meaning “unified.” This helps us in understanding that the phrase “one-pointedness” should not, at least, need not, be taken literally, but in the sense that the dhyanic mind is “unified, integrated.” Contextually, here *eka* (instead of the more philosophical *ekatta*, “oneness”) has the sense of “mental oneness,” “mental stillness,” or “mental concentration.” It has a broad sense ranging from samadhi to dhyana. Due to its non-technicality, it is clearly an ancient term in the suttas.¹⁰³

6.5.2.4 AGGA. The word ***agga*** has quite a number of senses, as evident from this lexical list. Note its two main senses of (1) as an adjective (mfn = masculine, feminine, neuter), meaning “foremost, top, etc,” and (2) as a neuter noun meaning a kind of dwelling.

agga¹ [Vedic *agra*]

(1) (mfn) (a) of time: the first, foremost, *~m akāmsu saṅgham*, “the first collection,” Dīpv 4.18; (b) of space: the highest, topmost, *~sākhā*, “the highest branch,” J 1:52; (c) of quality: illustrious, excellent, the best, highest, chief, *aggam*~; “the best of the best,” V 4:232; D 2:4; S 1:29; A 2:17 = Pv 4.3.41; It 88, 89; Sn 875; *ek*~ [6.5.2.3]; often combined with *seṭṭha*, “best,” eg, D 2:15; S 3:83. 264.

(2) (neut) top, point. (a) lit. the top or tip (nearly always ifc), eg *ār*~ “point of an awl” Sn 265, 631; Dh 401, *dhaj*~ top (crest) of a banner”; (b) fig. the best part, the ideal, excellence, prominence, first place (often to be tr as “the highest, the best of all, etc,”) *aggena aggassa patti hoti*, “the best is attained by the best,” S 2:29; often ifc, eg *bhav*~, “the best of existence,” S 3:83.

agga² (neut) only ifc [a contracted form of *agāra*, PED, DPL] a (small) house, housing, accommodation; shelter, hut; hall. Geiger & Norman: *agga* “house” (in *uposath*~, *khur*~, *bhatt*~ etc) from *agāra* through *ag^ora*, *agāra*¹⁰⁴ (A Pali Grammar, 1994 §20). However, in the suttas, it is *never* used in the sense of “place”: cf *agāra* [6.5.2.5].

From this lexical analysis, it is clear that the first word, *agga*¹, meaning “foremost,” whose connotations range from “first” to “topmost.” The 2nd word, ***agga***² refers to various kinds of living, working or storage spaces. However, *none* of them are used in any terms relating to meditation or meditative states.

6.5.2.5 AGĀRA. The Pali dictionaries (PED, DPL, sv *agga*²) have noted that *agga* “is a contracted form of *agāra*. Does this allow us to interpret the embedded element *agga* in *ek’aggatā* to mean “place”? Can *ek’aggatā* then mean “a place of oneness,” or figuratively, the mind “all in one place”? Of course, we can, but to what purpose? At best, this is a wordplay, an unhelpful one. Moreover, although *agāra* refers to a place, as in *suññāgāra*, “an empty place” suitable for meditation,¹⁰⁵ *agga* is never used in the sense of “place” (especially for meditation) in the suttas or their commentaries.

¹⁰³ On a sutta’s earliness and non-technicality, see **Notion of *ditṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (1.3), on the 2 periods of the Buddha’s ministry. See also Reflection, “Buddhism for real,” R343, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ This may, however, be an example of the suffix *ra* replacing *āra*, ie “Pali *agga* ‘house’ is to be derived from **ag-ra*, as opposed to the more common *ag-āra*” (Norman 1986:394 f).

¹⁰⁵ *suññāgāra*. found in this stock phrase on places suitable for meditation, “... gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place” (D 2:29; M 1:56, 297, 398, 425, 2:263, 3:82, 89, 3:82, 4:297; S 5:311, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 323, 329, 336; A 1:147, 148, 149, 3:92 100, 4:437, 5:109, 110, 111; Pm 1:175 2:36).

agāra (neut, ts, “prob with the *a-* of communion,” PED)¹⁰⁶

(1) (neut) house or hut, usually implying the comforts of living at home. As ifc (also as – *āgāra*): *kūṭ-*~, a house with a pointed roof, gabled house, S 2:103, 263, 3:156, 4:186, 5:43; A 1:230, 3:10, 364, 4:231, 5:21; *koṭṭh-*~, storehouse, granary, D 1:134; S 1:89; *tiṇ-*~, a grass hut (S 4:185; A 1:10; *bhus-*~ threshing shed, barn, A 1:241; *santh-*~, a council hall, mote hall, D 1:91, 2:147; S 4:182, 5:453; A 2:207, 4:179 f; *suññā-*~, an uninhabited shed, empty place or abode, solitude, S 5:89, 157, 310 f, 329 f; A 1:241, 3:353, 4:139, 392, 437, 5:88, 109, 323 f. Often contracted as *agga*² (qv).

(2) (neut) household life: *~am āvasati* live a household life Sn 805. As opposed to *anagāra*, homelessness, the state of a homeless wanderer or mendicant: *~asmā anagāriyam pabbajati*, goes forth from the household life for homelessness, D 1:18,26; M 1:161,30, 451,25, 2:55,31; Tha 46; Sn 274; sv *anagāriya*.

agārika (n) householder, one living a worldly life; (adj) of a householder’s life. [While Pali has both *āgārika* and *agārika*, BHSD only has *āgārika*.]

6.5.2.6 EKODI, BHŪTA ETC. Lastly, let us look at an important set of synonyms of *ek’aggatā* and its related forms, that is, *ekodi*, *bhūta*, *ekodi*, *bhāva* and *ekodi*, *hoti*. First, have a look at these lexical analyses of these terms:

ekodi (m & mfn) [*eka* + **ūti*,¹⁰⁷ web or effort; BHS *ekoti*, *oketi*].

(1) (m) “singleness (of mind),” concentration (of mind); a calm, concentrated state of mind associated with *jhāna* = *samādhi* or *ek’agga(tā)* (only in Comys).

(2) (mfn) unified, single, concentrated, in connection with *jhāna*: *jhānena ~i, nipako sato*, through dhyana one is mentally unified, discreet, mindful, D 2:267,5*; *jhānāni upasampajja | ekodi, nipakā satāti*, “who having attained dhyanas, are unified, discreet, mindful,” S 1:52,6* ≈ A 3:354,22* ≈ Sn 962; *cittam ~im karoti*, “he unifies his mind,” S 2:273,27 (*~im karohīti ek’aggam karohi*, SA 2:233,33).

ekodi, bhāva (m) [BHS *ekotī, bhāva*] (1) singleness, unity (of mind), concentration: (in *jhāna* stock phrase) ... *ajjhattam sampasādanam cetaso ... ~am*, internally filled with faith and mental oneness, V 3:4,10 = D 1:37,33 = 3 78,8 = 131,24 = 222,8 = M 1:21,37 = 117,10 = 3:14,26 = S 2:273,-15-31 = 3:236,14 = 4:264,2-17 = A 2:127,2 = 4:66,25 = 112,4 = Nm 39,24 = Vbh 245,8.

ekodi, bhūta (past participle of *ekodi, hoti*: see below) (mfn) become single(-minded), concentrated; = *ek’agga, bhūta*, *-samādhihi samāhita: ātāpino sampajānā ~ā vipprasanna, cittā samāhitā ek’agga, citta*, “ardent, clearly comprehending, unified, with limpid mind, concentrated, with one-pointed mind,” S 5:144,21-145,13.

ekodi, hoti (pres 2 sg) to become single(-minded), concentrated: *cittam...ajjhattam eva santiṭṭhati sannisīdati ~ samādhiyati*, “the mind truly becomes inwardly settled, unified, concentrated,” S 4:196,24 ≈ A 1:254,32 = 2:157,22 = Pm 2:93,5 = 101,7.

That *ekodi* and its various forms have to do with “one-pointedness” and used as synonyms of *ek’aggatā* [6.5.2.2] and *ek’agga* [6.5.2.3] is significant. It reflects the idea of “oneness, unity,” which is a linguistic equivalent or expedience for expressing the unified and total bliss and clarity of a dhyanic mind. This is perhaps the best that such an “out-of-body,” extrasensory, transcendental state can be described

¹⁰⁶ BHSD has only *āgārika*, while P has both *āgārika* and *agārika*, CPD.

¹⁰⁷ Corresponding to the Magadhism *ūdi*. For voicing t > d, see Geiger, *A Pali Grammar*, 1994 §38.3; possible variant reading *ekodhi*, see CPD sv.

or referred to in words and concepts. These are merely signposts pointing towards the real event, which we need to experience, each for ourselves. The highest and truest language of meditation is that of inner silence.¹⁰⁸

7 What happens when we attain dhyana?

7.1 What happens when we attain dhyana, that is, when **the 1st dhyana** arises? First, we need to understand the nature of the dhyana-factors. The dhyana-factors do not act singly but work together. They are merely constituents that make up meditation dhyana like a rope with 5 strands or the ingredients of “five-spice powder” (popular local ingredient in cooking). When the mind experiences the 1st dhyana, the first 4 dhyana-factors are present, plus mental stillness “born of solitude” [5.1.2]. They are all firm in themselves, but are interdependent like 5 poles firmly sunk together into the ground. They are made firmer by securing the top ends together.

7.2 When **the counter-image** [6.5.1.1] appears, both initial application and sustained application are no longer present. They are transformed into mental concentration on the breath “at one point.” They have not really disappeared but have progressively become more subtle right up to the stage of fixing on the counter-image of the breath (usually in the form of a steady and clear bright light)—the mind has gained attainment or full concentration. Thus, when all the 5 dhyana-factors are present, the meditator experiences dhyana.

7.3 Although **the dhyana-factors** arise simultaneously, each of them has a special function, that is, in overcoming the 5 mental hindrances. **Initial application**, that is, the mind’s initial anchoring on a single object, has a contrary character to sloth and torpor. Sensual desire, and restlessness and worry, too, cannot arise when the mind is *concentrated*. The same is true of **sustained application**: it is especially incompatible with spiritual doubt. For as long as sustained application is present, the mind dwells watchful of the meditation object.

Zest and joy are incompatible with ill will, and restlessness and worry respectively. When people are zestful and happy, they do not harbour these negative thoughts. Though **the one-pointedness of the mind** is the special enemy of sensual desire, it effectively dispels all the hindrances. These incompatibilities (*paṭipakkhā*) can be summarized in this table:¹⁰⁹

initial application	is incompatible with	sloth and torpor;
sustained application	is incompatible with	spiritual doubt;
zest and joy	are incompatible with	ill will, restlessness & worry respectively;
one-pointedness of the mind	is incompatible with	sensual desire.

That is to say, the dhyana factors are incompatible with the mental hindrances: they cannot co-exist. Conversely, when the hindrances are overcome, dhyana arises.

¹⁰⁸ On silence and spiritual liberation, see **Silence and the Buddha**, SD 44.1. On the limitation of language, see **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11 esp (2).

¹⁰⁹ **Visuddhi,magga** actually uses the term “incompatible” (*paṭipakkha*) and lists “concentration” first: *samādhi kāma-c, chandassa paṭipakkho, pīti vyāpādassa, vitakko thīna, middhassa, sukha uddhacca, kukkuccassa, vicāro vicikicchāyā ti [] peṭake vuttā* (Vism 114).

he overcoming of these 5 hindrances by dhyana is merely a temporary suspension, called “overcoming by suppression” (*vikkhambhana, pahāna*). However, they disappear forever on one’s entering the supra-mundane path, thus:¹¹⁰

spiritual doubt is uprooted on attaining streamwinning;
 [once-returning only destroys part of the 3 unwholesome roots: greed, hate, delusion.]
 sensual desire, ill will and worry are uprooted on attaining non-returning;
 sloth and torpor, and restlessness are uprooted on attaining arhathood.

8 Parables for the 4 dhyanas

8.1 THE 1ST-DHYANA PARABLE

The Sāmañña, phala Sutta (D 2), recounting a spiritually intense dialogue between the Buddha and the young king and parricide, Ajāta, sattu, gives a set of graphic and progressive parables for the 4 dhyanas (D 2:74-76). The parable for the 1st dhyana is given thus:¹¹¹

THE 1ST DHYANA: THE SKILLED BATHMAN. Maharajah, just as if a skilled bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath lather—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated with in and without—would not drip;
 even so, the monk permeates—this very body with the zest and joy born of solitude. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by zest and joy born of solitude. (D 2,76/1:74)

The two main items in the parable are water and dry bath powder (which represents respectively the mind and its meditation object). The two are kneaded together (clearing away the hindrances) in a brass basin (meditation) until they become a ball of bath lather (mental concentration). In short, this is an analogy of how the meditating mind becomes unified on a simple level.

8.2 THE 2ND-DHYANA PARABLE

The parable for the 2nd dhyana, too, employs water in an extended and natural way:

THE 2ND DHYANA: THE CLOSED LAKE.¹¹² Maharajah, just as a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having *no* inflow from the east, *no* inflow from the west, *no* inflow from the north, or *no* inflow from the south, **and the skies *not* pouring frequent and timely torrents.**¹¹³ Yet the

¹¹⁰ See A 1.2, 6.21; S 46.51.

¹¹¹ For the sake of brevity, only the parables are listed here: the “fact” passage (which precedes each parable) is nevertheless *essentially* repeated after each parable. Also omitted is the refrain, “This, too, maharajah, is a fruit of recluship, visible here and now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime.”

¹¹² This is a lake without any tributaries. Technically known as *endorheic* lakes, they are bodies of water that do not flow into the sea. This class of water bodies, located in closed or endorheic watersheds where the topography prevents their drainage to the oceans, form a balance of surface inflows, evaporation and seepage, are often called terminal lakes or sink lakes.

¹¹³ Be Ce, M 39/1:277,4 = M:Be devo ca na kālena kālaṃ sammā dhāraṃ anupaveccheyya, M:Ce devo ca kālena kālaṃ sammā dhāraṃ nānupaveccheyya. Ee Se omit na: devo ca kālena kālaṃ sammā dhāraṃ anupaveccheyya. See D 1:74 n6.

cool spring welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, flood and fill it with cool waters—there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters.

Even so, the monk permeates this very body with the zest and joy born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by zest and joy born of concentration.

(D 2,78/1:75)

The theme of this parable is clearly that of solitude with the ceasing of applied and sustained applications, that is, the shutting down of the brain's language centre.

The phrase in bold—“**and the skies not pouring frequent and timely torrents**” (*devo ca na kālena kālarāṃ sammā dhāraṃ anupaveccheyya*)¹¹⁴—needs comment. Here I have followed the majority of the traditional manuscripts, which have the *na* reading. Only the PTS and Siamese (which probably follows the Khmer text) readings omit *na*. That the negative particle *na* makes good sense here is clear. The 4 directions and the zenith represent *the 5 senses*. There is no inflow at any of the four channels and no rainfall from above. The figures here allude to the 5 physical senses: there is no more input from them. By the 2nd dhyana, all the 5 senses (as we know them) cease to function; only the mind is beginning to be fully experienced.

With the complete shutting down of the physical senses and language, we become purely *mental* beings. The physical body has, as it were, ceased to exist, at least for the duration of the dhyana. We are sustained by our mental energies (the spring from the depths) and enjoying only profound bliss. This is the most artistic of experiences we can ever imagine, where calm and clarity are our constant and real sources of inspiration. We are fully thought-free, thoroughly blissful, like the lake pervaded by the cool water. So real and blissful is such beauty that we can only look on, as it were, in “noble silence,” by which this state is also known. [5.2.3]

8.3 THE 3RD-DHYANA PARABLE

The 3rd dhyana continues with the water imagery, adding in the lotus, the most sacred flower in Buddhism:

THE 3RD DHYANA: THE LOTUS POND. Maharajah, just as in a pond of the blue lotuses, red and white lotuses, or white lotuses,¹¹⁵ 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 and pervaded, flooded 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 joy free from zest, so that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded with this joy free from zest. (D 2,82/1:75)

The lotus roots grow in the mud below the waters but it blooms in the bright sunshine, and the lotus flower has seeds even while growing and in bloom. The meditator is like a lotus: no matter what defilements he has, they can be removed through mental cultivation since he is able to uproot their causes. That is to say, the problems are treated not only symptomatically but radically, removed at their roots.

With the joy of meditation, the meditator breaks old negative habits and cultivates new wholesome ones. The lotuses here are submerged totally in water (the mind), since at this level, there is only the men-

¹¹⁴ M 39 (Ce) similarly has *devo ca kālena kālarāṃ sammā dhāraṃ nānupaveccheyya*.

¹¹⁵ *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.

tal experience of transcendental joy with the shutdown of the 5 physical senses (beginning in the 2nd dhyana).

8.4 THE 4TH DHYANA PARABLE

The parable for the 4th dhyana is the shortest but the most dramatic:

THE 4TH DHYANA: THE WHITE-SHROUDED MAN. Maharajah, just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth does not extend;

even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright mind. There is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by pure, bright mind. (D 2,82/1:75 f)

The parable uses a totally different image than the previous parables: a man sitting enveloped head to foot in a clean white cloth that glows with its own light, as it were. At this point, we are truly in touch with our real self, our individuality: we really know our mind or ourself. We are in direct contact with the radiant mind (*pabhassara, citta*)—we *are* the radiant mind—completely free from mental impurities and in profound spiritual peace. It is in this connection that the Buddha declares:

Monks, this mind is radiant, and it is freed from adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].

The instructed [wise] noble disciple understands things as they really are.

Therefore there is mental development for the instructed noble disciple, I say!¹¹⁶

(A 1.6.2/1:10; also 1.5.10/1:10)

9 Using dhyana as basis for wisdom

9.1 Dhyana is very useful even on a very mundane level: that of the unawakened meditator. There are some passages in **the Majjhima** that show how dhyana can lead to liberating insight. The method comprises two stages: first, one gets into dhyana; then, one emerges and reflects on the 3 characteristics—that the state is impermanent, suffering and non-self—or something similar. Of the two stages, **the Aṭṭhaka, nagara Sutta** (M 52) says:

Here, householder, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in the 1st dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of solitude.

He considers this and understands it thus: “This 1st dhyana is conditioned and willfully formed.¹¹⁷ Whatever is conditioned and willfully formed is impermanent, subject to ending.”

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the influxes.¹¹⁸ If he does not reach the destruction of influxes because of the desire for the Dharma, the delight in the Dharma,¹¹⁹ then

¹¹⁶ *Pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vipamuttam. Tam sutavā ariya, sāvako yathā, bhūtam pajānati. Tasmā sutavato ariya, sāvakassa citta, bhāvanā atthi ti vadāmi ti.*

¹¹⁷ *Abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcetayitaṃ.* These two terms are stock indicating a conditioned state in which volition (*cetanā*) is the most important conditioning factor.

¹¹⁸ “With mental influxes,” *s’āsava = sa + āsava*, The term *āsava* (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

with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters,¹²⁰ he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the pure abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world.

(M 52,4/1:351), SD 41.2

9.2 The Mahā Mālunkyā,putta Sutta (M 64), using almost the same words as the Aṭṭhaka,nagara Sutta, shows a slightly different manner of self-liberation (in this case, leading to non-returning):

And what, Ānanda, is the path, the way to the abandoning of the 5 lower fetters?

Here, with the solitude [seclusion] from the acquisitions,¹²¹ with the abandoning of unwholesome states, with the complete tranquillization of bodily inertia,¹²² *quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in the 1st dhyana, that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of solitude.*

Whatever exists by way of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, he sees those states as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as void, as non-self.¹²³ He turns his mind away from those states¹²⁴ and directs it to the deathless element [nirvana] thus:

“This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions [attachments], the destruction of craving, dispassion [letting go of craving], cessation (of suffering), nirvana.”¹²⁵

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the influxes. If he does not reach the destruction of influxes because of the desire for the Dharma, the delight in the Dharma, then with the

Abhidhamma lists 4 āsava: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*ditṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) 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: āsava.

¹¹⁹ “The desire ... the delight for the Dharma,” *dhmma,rāgena dhmma,nandiyā*. Comy says that these two terms signify strong desire (*chanda,rāga*) towards calm and insight (*samatha,vipassanā*). If one were to let go of this desire, one becomes an arhat; otherwise, one becomes a non-returner reborn in the pure abodes (MA 3:13).

¹²⁰ **The 10 fetters** are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*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 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*).

¹²¹ “The solitude from acquisitions” (*upadhi,viveka*) (Nm 26, 140, 157, 341). Comy glosses *upadhi* here as the 5 cords of sense-pleasures (MA 3:145). See M:ÑB 1268 n654.

¹²² “Bodily inertia,” (*kāya,duṭṭhulla*). Comys gloss it as “bodily idleness” (*kāyālasīya*) (MA 3:145, 4:202) or “bodily unwieldiness due to food” (*bhattam nissāya kāyassa akammaññatā*) (VbhA 479). See M 3:151, 159.

¹²³ Like the prec **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** passage, this one shows the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*) on the basis of calm (*samatha*), using dhyana on which the insight-practice is based as the object of insight. The terms “impermanent” (*aniccato*) and “disintegrating” (*palokato*) here show the characteristic of impermanence; 3 terms—“alien” (*parato*), “void” (*suññato*), and “non-self” (*anattato*)—show the characteristic of non-self; the remaining 6 terms—*dukkhato, rogato, gaṇḍato, sallato, aghato, ābādhatto*—show the characteristic of suffering (MA 3:146).

¹²⁴ Comy: “He turns his mind away from those states” (*so tehi dhammehi cittam paṭivāpeti*) from the 5 aggregates included in the dhyana, which he has seen to be marked with the 3 characteristics” (MA 3:146).

¹²⁵ The “deathless element” (*nibbāna,dhātu*) is nirvana. First, “he directs his mind to it” with the insight consciousness, having heard it praised and described as being “peaceful, sublime,” etc. Then, with the supramundane path, “he directs his mind to it” by making it an object and penetrating it as the peaceful, the sublime, etc. (MA 3:146)

destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the pure abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world.

This is the path, the way to the abandoning of the 5 lower fetters.

(M 64,9/1:435 f), SD 21.10¹²⁶

Such passages show how to cultivate “insight preceded by calm” (*samatha, pubbaṅgamā vipassanā*). Having first attained a dhyana, the meditator emerges from it and reflects on that state as having been created by conditions, especially volition. Then he notes its impermanence, and then reflects on the dhyana with insight into the 3 characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self.

10 Types of practitioners

10.1 Using the various teachings of the Suttas, the Commentaries introduce the idea of 3 kinds of practitioners and their respective vehicles, namely,¹²⁷

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (1) the calm [tranquillity] practitioner | (<i>samatha, yānika</i>), | “one whose vehicle is calmness”, |
| (2) the insight practitioner | (<i>vipassanā, yānika</i>), | “one whose vehicle is insight”, and |
| (3) the dry-insight practitioner | (<i>sukkhā, vipassaka</i>), | “one who practises only insight.” |

This commentarial threefold system is based on such canonical texts as the three (**Samatha, vipassanā Samādhi Suttas** (A 4.92-94).

10.2 The Samādhi Sutta 1 (A 4.92), the shortest of the three texts, apparently describes the 3 kinds of practitioners (without naming them), thus:¹²⁸

Monks, there are these 4 persons to be found in the world. What are the four?

(1) Here, monks, a certain person is *one who gains inner mental calm* but does not gain the higher wisdom of insight into things.

(2) Here, monks, a certain person is *one who gains the higher wisdom of insight into things* but does not gain inner mental calm.

(3) Here, monks, a certain person is one who *neither* gains inner mental calm nor does he gain the higher wisdom of insight into things.

(4) Here, monks, a certain person is one who *both* gains inner mental calm and gains the higher wisdom of insight into things.

These, monks, are the 4 persons to be found in the world. (A 4.92/2:92), SD 95.7

10.3 In the (Samatha, vipassanā) Samādhi Suttas 2-3 (A 4.93-94), the Buddha encourages the first practitioner—the one who gains inner mental calm but does not gain the higher wisdom of insight into things—that is, the calm practitioner (*samatha, yānika*)—to strive for “the higher wisdom of insight into things”

¹²⁶ The italicized texts are as in **Aṭṭhaka, nagara S** (M 52), SD 41.2.

¹²⁷ Eg DA 3:754; MA 1:239; AA 3:142; KhpA 182; SnA 1:277, 2:547; NmA 2:313; NcA 102; PmA 3:696; VbA 215.

¹²⁸ *Cattāro’me bhikkhave puggalā santo saṁvijjamānā lokasmim̐. Katame cattāro?*

Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo lābhī hoti ajjhatarā ceto, samathassa na lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya. Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya na lābhī ajjhatarā ceto, samathassa.

Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo na c’eva lābhī hoti ajjhatarā ceto, samathassa na lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya.

Idha bhikkhave ekacco puggalo c’eva lābhī hoti ajjhatarā ceto, samathassa lābhī adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanāya. Ime kho bhikkhave cattāro puggalā santo saṁvijjamānā lokasmin’ti.

(*adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanā*). The second practitioner—the one who gains the higher wisdom of insight into things but does not gain inner mental calm—is exhorted to strive for mental calm.

The **Aṅguttara Commentary** explains “mental calm” (*ceto, samatha*) as the attainment concentration, or full concentration, of mind (*appanā, citta, samādhi*)¹²⁹ and “higher wisdom of insight into things” as the insight knowledge that discerns formations (*saṅkhāra, pariggaha, vipassanā, ñāṇa*), that is, insight into the 5 aggregates (AA 2:325).

The fact that individuals are capable of one attainment in the absence of the other provides a starting point for a differentiation of vehicles adapted to their differing capacities. In the end, however, all meditators have to enter upon the development of insight in order to reach the liberating path. (Gunaratana 1985:148)

10.4 The Yuganaddha Sutta (A 4.170) makes a very clear reference to the 4 vehicles for mental cultivation leading to arhathood, as follows:

- (1) Insight preceded by calm.¹³⁰ When the path arises in him, he pursues it, so that the mental fetters¹³¹ are abandoned and the latent tendencies¹³² are destroyed.
- (2) Calm preceded by insight.¹³³ When the path arises in him, he pursues it, so that the mental fetters are abandoned and the latent tendencies are destroyed.
- (3) Calm and insight coupled together.¹³⁴ When the path arises in him, he pursues it, so that the mental fetters are abandoned and the latent tendencies are destroyed.

¹²⁹ Cf A 1:93.

¹³⁰ *Samatha, pubb'āṅgamāṃ vipassanāṃ*. This refers to the calmness practitioner (*samatha, yānika*), ie one who first cultivates access concentration (*upacāra, samādhi*), the dhyanas or the formless attainments, and then takes up insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. “Access concentration” is the concentration gained just before attaining dhyana. See MA 1:112.

¹³¹ Mental fetters, see (9)n at M 52.4 quote above.

¹³² **Latent tendencies** (*anusayā*), alt trs “underlying tendencies,” “latent dispositions.” There are 7 of them: (1) sensual desire (*kāma-rāga*); (2) aversion (*paṭigha*); (3) wrong view (*diṭṭhi*); (4) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*); (5) conceit (*māna*); (6) desire for existence (*bhava, rāga*); (7) ignorance (*avijjā*). They are also listed in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.3(12)-/3:254, 282), **Cha, chakka S** (M 148,28/3:285), **Anusaya S** (A 7.11 & 12/4:8 f) and **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). They are deeply embedded in one’s mind through past habitual acts and can only be uprooted on attaining the Path. Wrong view and spiritual doubt are eliminated at streamwinning; sensual desire and aversion, at non-returning; conceit, attachment to existence and ignorance, only at arhathood.. See Abhs 7.9: “The latent dispositions (*anusayā*) are defilements which ‘lie along with’ (*anusenti*) the mental process to which they belong, rising to the surface as obsessions whenever they meet with suitable conditions. The term ‘latent dispositions’ highlights the fact that the defilements are liable to arise so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane paths. Though all defilements are, in a sense, *anusayas*, the seven mentioned here are the most prominent.” (Abhs:B 268). See also Abhs:SR 172. The first 3 latent tendencies are mentioned in **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5. See **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 16.3 (5).

¹³³ *Vipassanā, pubb'āṅgamāṃ samathāṃ*. Here the practitioner first enters access concentration (*upacāra, samādhi*) or full concentration (*appanā, samādhi*), and then takes up insight by regarding those states as impermanent, etc (MA 1:108 f). “This refers to one who by his nature first attains to insight and then, based on insight, produces concentration” (AA 3:143), ie the insight practitioner (*vipassanā, yānika*). See MA 1:112.

¹³⁴ *Samatha, vipassanā, yuganaddhāṃ*. Here, one enters the 1st dhyana and emerging from it, one applies insight to that experience, ie one sees the 5 aggregates within the dhyana (form, feeling, perceptions, formations, consciousness) as impermanent, subject to suffering and non-self. Then one enters the 2nd dhyana, emerges and applies insight to it. One applies the twofold reflection to the other dhyanas as well in the same manner until the path of streamwinning, or higher, is realized.

(4) A monk's mind is seized by agitation caused by higher states of mind,¹³⁵ but there comes a time when his mind becomes internally steadied, composed, unified and concentrated. Then the path arises in him, and while he does so, the fetters are abandoned and the latent tendencies are destroyed. (A 4.170/2:156 f), SD 41.5

11 The insight meditator

11.1 Concentration is necessary for seeing things as they really are. However, in the case of the insight meditator (*vipassanā, yānika*), there is neither access concentration nor dhyana—what concentration then can the insight meditator use? The answer is found in a type of concentration that is different from access concentration or dhyana but pertains to calm vehicle, that is, the “**momentary concentration**” (*khaṇika samāधि*). Despite its name, momentary concentration does not refer to a single moment of concentration nestling in the midst of a distracted mind.

Rather, it denotes a dynamic concentration which flows from object to object in the ever-changing flux of phenomena, retaining a constant degree of intensity and collectedness sufficient to purify the mind of the hindrances. Momentary concentration arises in the *samathayānika* yogin simultaneously with his post-*jhānic* attainment of insight, but for the *vipassanāyānika* it develops naturally and spontaneously in the course of his insight practice without his having to fix the mind upon a single exclusive object. (Gunaratana 1985:152)

11.2 The Pali Commentaries often attest to the importance of momentary concentration in the insight vehicle. **The Visuddhi, magga**, in its discussion of the breath meditation, for example, says:

At the actual time of insight, momentary unification of the mind arises through the penetration of the characteristics (of impermanence, and so on). (Vism 8.232/289)

The Paramattha, mañjūsā (Visuddhi, magga Commentary) defines “momentary unification of mind” (*khaṇika citt'ek'aggatā*) as concentration lasting only for a moment:

For that, too, when it occurs interruptedly on its object in a single mode and is not overcome by opposition, fixes the mind immovably, as if in absorption. (VismṬ 278 = VismṬ:Be 1:342; see Vism:Ñ 311 n63)

This momentary concentration is essential for insight practice, “for there is no insight without momentary concentration”¹³⁶ (VismMṬ:Be 1:11; see Vism:Ñ 3 n4).

¹³⁵ *Dhamm'uddhacca, viggahitaṃ mānasam hoti*. Comy says that the “agitation” (*uddhacca*) here refers to a reaction of the 10 “impurities of insight” (*vipassanā'nupakkilesa*) when they are wrongly taken as indicating path-attainment (AA 3:143). That is, he is distracted by any of these 10 impurities: evil conduct of body, speech and mind; sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill will, violent thoughts; thoughts about relatives, home country and reputation; thoughts about higher mental states (*dhamma, vitakka*) (**Paṃsu, dhovaka S**, A 3.100a.4.1/1:254), SD 19.11. **Visuddhi, magga** uses *dhamma, vitakka* (“thoughts about higher states”) to refer to the same 10 impurities (Vism 20.105-128/ 633-638). Bodhi: “It is plausible, however, that the ‘agitation caused by higher states of mind’ is mental distress brought on by eagerness to instantaneous enlightenment experience” (A:ÑB 294 n69). See the story of Bāhiya Dārūcīriya in (**Arahatta**) **Bāhiya S** (U 1.10/6-9), SD 33.7 & also the story of Anuruddha in (**Anuruddha**) **Upakkilesa S** (M 128/-3:152-162), SD 5.18.

¹³⁶ *Na hi khaṇika, samāधिṃ vinā vipassanā sambhavati* (VismMṬ:Be 1:11).

Momentary concentration is a fluid mental focus consisting in the continuity of mind that is uninterruptedly noticing the sequence of objects as though fixed in absorption, keeping out the mental hindrances and cultivating mental purification. “For this reason momentary concentration can be understood as implicitly included in access concentration in the standard definition of purification of mind as consisting in access and absorption” (Gunaratana 1985:154).

12 Conclusion

12.1 Dhyana is clearly an important part of spiritual training in early Buddhism, as evident from its comprising right concentration at the end of the noble eightfold path [1, 4]. Of the two main approaches to Buddhist meditation—calm meditation (*samatha, bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā, bhāvanā*)—dhyana belongs to the category of calm meditation, but it is also a helpful tool in the cultivation of insight.

12.2 In terms of practice, the dhyanas have to be cultivated progressively beginning with the 1st dhyana, progressing into the second and so on. The 4 dhyanas are like **Russian dolls**, with each dhyana within the other. In the first set of 4 dolls, the outermost doll is the 1st dhyana, and within it the 2nd dhyana, then the 3rd, finally by the 4th dhyana. And within the inner 4th doll is a set of 4 more “concentric” dolls representing the formless attainments.¹³⁷

Another analogy is that of **a pyramid with 4 levels**, one above the other. We can only enter the pyramid by the 1st floor by putting together 4 right kind of stones in its door. Then, on the next door with a flight of stairs leading up to the 2nd floor, we need to remove 2 of the stones in its door. Doing this rightly, this door opens with stairs leading to the 3rd floor, from which we must remove one stone correctly. Finally, the 4th door, from which we must remove one stone, the right one, and it opens leading up to the 4th floor.¹³⁸

12.3 The ascent through the dhyanas consists in the successive elimination of the coarser dhyana-factors. Once we have mastered the 4 dhyanas (the form absorptions) [7-8], we may continue, if we wish, to refine our concentration towards attaining the 4 formless attainments,¹³⁹ and so mastering the 8 attainments (*aṭṭha, samāpatti*).¹⁴⁰ These 4 formless attainments are, in fact, ever more refined forms of the 4th dhyana, as the mind lets go of ever more of itself, until it is able to nearly transcend even itself.¹⁴¹

12.4 However, the dhyanas in themselves do not destroy the mental hindrances, the mental impurities and the latent tendencies [7-8]. The defilements are only temporarily suppressed (*vikkhambhana pahāna*) in the course of dhyana experience—this is because they are merely the mundane dhyanas.

Only the supramundane dhyanas of the paths and fruits are truly liberating. The practitioners of both vehicles—the calm practitioner and the insight practitioner—experience this. The paths and fruits always occur at a level of dhyana and are thus considered as forms of dhyana. This is the dhyana of **the right concentration** factor of the noble eightfold path [4].

¹³⁷ See **Danta, bhūmi S** (M 125,24) + SD 46.3 (3).

¹³⁸ See Brahmavamso, 2003:59.

¹³⁹ On the formless dhyanas, see SD 24.11 (5).

¹⁴⁰ Cf the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*, **D 15**,35/2:70 f, **16**,3.33/2:111 f, **34**,2.1(10)/3:288; **A 8.66**/4:306 f): see SD 5.17 (10); details, SD 49.5b (3).

¹⁴¹ See SD 24.11 (5.4) & SD 49.5b (4.5.7).

12.5 No dhyana, however, is necessary for the attainment of streamwinning or once-returning.¹⁴² The formula for right concentration apparently only implies that they must eventually attain dhyana in the course of developing the path culminating in arhathood. As non-returners have already eliminated desire and ill will, they should have no problem in entering dhyana.¹⁴³

12.6 Is dhyana necessary for the attainment of nirvana?

It should be understood that mundane dhyana is helpful but not necessary in spiritual practice. Supramundane dhyana is essential for liberation, and it results from insight either alone or in combination with mundane dhyana. Although the Commentaries speak of the possibility of the “dry-insight” arhats who reach their goal by “pure insight,” the early saints beginning with the Buddha himself regard that attaining dhyana is necessary for attaining arhathood and that this is a valuable asset, especially by way of mastering the 8 deliverances¹⁴⁴ and the 6 superknowledges.¹⁴⁵ Such qualities are very helpful in the preservation and propagation of the Dharma, too.

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¹⁴² See **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5.

¹⁴³ On the need of dhyana for attaining arhathood, see **Samatha & vipassana**, SD 41.1 (2.2.2.4). See also **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (13); **Samadhi**, SD 33.1a (2.2-2.5); **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5 (9).

¹⁴⁴ *Aṭṭha vimokkha* (D 15,35/2:70 f, 16,3.33/2:111 f, 34,2.1(10)/3:288; A 8.66/4:306 f). See **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15,35/2:70 f), SD 5.17.

¹⁴⁵ *Cha-ḷ-abhiññā*. See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,87-98/2:87-98), SD 8.10.

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